

Project acronym: RESISTIRÉ

Project title: “RESponding to outbreaks through co-creaTive sustainable inclusive equality stRatEgies”

Grant agreement number: 101015990

Start date of project: 1 April 2021, Duration: 30 months



**RESISTIRÉ**

Reducing gendered inequalities  
caused by COVID-19 policies

## RESISTIRÉ Dataset: Narratives on inequalities caused by policy and societal responses to Covid-19 in Europe – second cycle

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Cite as: Strid, S., Sandström, L., Aglietti, C., & Callerstig, A-C. (2023). RESISTIRÉ Dataset: Narratives on inequalities caused by policy and societal responses to Covid-19 in Europe – second cycle. RESISTIRÉ dataset. Zenodo <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8345018>

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Yellow Window (YW)
Oxford Brookes University (OBU)
Knowledge and Innovation (K&I)
Technichal University Dublin (TUD)
Sabancı University (SU)
University of Deusto (UDEUSTO)
The Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (ISAS)
Sciensano
University of Gothenburg (UGOT)

## Acknowledgement and Disclaimer



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 101015990.

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## Summary

The aim of RESISTIRÉ is to understand the unequal impacts of the Covid-19 outbreak and its policy and societal responses on behavioural, social and economic inequalities and to work towards individual and societal resilience. RESISTIRÉ does so by collecting and analysing policy data, quantitative data and qualitative data in the EU27 (except Malta), Iceland, Serbia, Turkey and the UK, and translating these into insights to be used for designing, devising and piloting solutions for improved policies and social innovations, which in turn can be deployed by policymakers, stakeholders and actors in the field across different policy domains. The project relies on an eleven-partner multidisciplinary and multisectoral European consortium and a well-established network of researchers in 30 countries.<sup>1</sup>

This dataset contains 295 narratives, including keywords and specifically telling quotes. It is the second of three sets of narratives collected and analysed in RESISTIRÉ. The narrative interviews were conducted in national languages by the consortium partners and a network of national researchers covering the EU27 (except Malta), and Iceland, Serbia, and the UK in December 2021-February 2022.<sup>2</sup> Narrative interviewing is a qualitative research method that involves inviting participants to tell their own stories and experiences in their own words. The technique is used to collect and share a person's story which entails both a research methodology and a mechanism for storytelling i.e. both a way of telling a story, and a way of knowing. Narratives as a technique can make visible how multiple sources of inequalities intersect, as well as the situational and contextual nature of inequalities from a single person's perspective.

The informants were recruited and interviewed by native language researchers. The data collection, training sessions and monitoring were coordinated by Knowledge and Innovation, Italy. All researchers were provided with guidelines and templates for reporting, developed by Örebro University and University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Informants were recruited using strategic sampling. Each researcher was asked to recruit ten informants with diverse lived experiences through a sample of diverse inequalities and identities, thus reflecting the gender+ approach of RESISTIRÉ, including women, men, and non-binary persons.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the RESISTIRÉ community on Zenodo for project deliverables and reports: <https://zenodo.org/communities/resistire/?page=1&size=20>

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the narratives, see Sandström, L., Axelsson, T., Callerstig, A-C., Strid, S., & Bobek, A. (2022). RESISTIRE D4.2 Building back better? Qualitative indications of inequalities produced by Covid-19 and its policy and societal responses. Second cycle summary report. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6517795>

<sup>3</sup> For a full methodological description, see Sandström et al., 2022..

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# Narratives by country

## Austria

### AT01

**Title:** Seila, 45, sex worker and founder of an association for sex workers, found the pandemic uncertain and stressful, as it further exacerbated already existing problems of sex workers

**Narrative:** My name is Seila, I am 45 years old and work as a dominatrix. I have my own studio, I am self-employed.

Due to the lockdowns, I had to close my studio temporarily and my daily structure was completely lost. The first lockdown was a shock for me. I noticed the psychological strain; I could no longer feel joy. In particular, the uncertainty about how long this phase would last, how to cope financially and whether there is any support available, was getting to me. In the second lockdown, I tried to cope with this uncertainty by determining the closing time of my studio myself. It was still an emotional rollercoaster. Only in the last lockdown was I able to use the free time constructively, perhaps also because 3 weeks were manageable, it was clear that it is only going to be three weeks, so I could use it as a break.

Financially, I was able to make ends meet because I had some savings to fall back on. At one point, home visits were allowed, so I visited an elderly customer once a week. That was great for me. I know that many of my colleagues have financial problems. Especially because we must register as new self-employed and insure ourselves. But this has a few weak points. For example, when brothels tax their women at a flat rate, they don't have a tax number. But they needed one now to get the hardship fund. In addition, they needed an Austrian bank account, which many sex workers do not have because they come from abroad. They had to open an account first, which meant that they received the money much later. It took a year until the regulations on the hardship fund were adapted accordingly. The need for a mobile phone signature also led to problems, and a Counselling Centre then offered extra courses for women. Many continued to work illegally because of the financial pressure. However, this leads to difficult situations, the women can be blackmailed and cannot turn to the police in dangerous situations. I also got offers to work illegally during the lockdowns. I had the impression that some people exploited this situation. I received dogy phone calls where I was offered a place to work from, and I got the impression they were doing this until the found a woman who took the offer. I also know that the during the long lockdowns some of my colleagues piled up debts. Especially migrant sex workers, who formally were not allowed to earn money but also couldn't return to their home countries as the borders were closed, experienced

a lot of strain. And then, they were able to work for four months, could reduce their debts but not really save up money for the next lockdown, and so, the situation got worse and worse. Some sex workers were really in a hard place, “they did not even have money to buy winter clothes for their kids”, some lost their homes, while a few others received some social benefits and did not struggle so much.

Even when the brothels were able to reopen, fewer visitors came because of contact tracing. Anonymity is a very important factor in sex work. In addition, many brothels closed during the pandemic and many women have not yet returned from illegality. As sex workers, we go for a health check every 6 weeks. Before the pandemic, there were about 3000 women who went to this check-up as sex workers. Now there are not even 2000. This means that many have reduced or cancelled their self-insurance and are now working illegally or have taken another job to make ends meet.

The vaccination was very important for me - it was kind of a gift for me. When the number of infections went so high last year, I didn't want to work anymore either. This is mainly due to hygiene measures. As a sex worker, it is not possible to comply with all hygiene measures. For example, neither I nor my colleagues are wearing FFP2 masks, that is simply not possible. Clients think the sex worker is sick, if they are wearing a FFP2 mask. It is also difficult to keep a distance because, for example, I have to check my client's breathing during certain BDSM practices. But testing is very important for me, in addition to vaccination. I test myself daily because I don't want to infect myself or the client. I also clean and ventilate even more thoroughly.

During the pandemic, I founded an association, a kind of lobbying group. I was annoyed that sex work is always left out of press conferences. In particular, the lack of or unclear categorisation of sex work meant that I could not plan ahead and was very uncertain. While body-related service providers such as hairdressers were represented in the media and clearly categorised, sex work was excluded. There was no protest or outcry among us sex workers because so many did not speak German. Through the association we could support each other and share information. We wrote letters to the ministries and went public. We also collected donations and bought shopping vouchers that were distributed. Corona has exacerbated the situation of sex workers or made the problems of women even more visible.”

**Specifically telling quotes:** “When brothel operators register the sex workers at a flat rate for taxes, then these women don't have their own tax number. And that was a big problem because it was needed for the hardship fund. It took a year to make adjustments here. Or that you needed an Austrian account to get the money, while 80% of the sex workers are from abroad and sometimes only there for weeks. They opened Austrian accounts and received the money much later. And of course, many colleagues had to work anyway, because anyone would do that before they could no longer buy food for their children. But it is also dangerous because the women make themselves vulnerable to blackmail. For example, if they are in danger or have problems with a customer, they cannot call the police because they are not allowed to work.”

“Corona has exacerbated the situation of sex workers or made the problems of women even more visible.”

“Politicians, especially male politicians, don't want to talk about sex work. Because then the public immediately says that he stands up for these women because he goes there himself. The best example is our Viennese mayor Ludwig. He was asked at a press conference - and it was the first time the subject of sex work was ever raised at a press conference - whether brothels would soon be allowed to open again. And he starts to grin and says, yes, if that is also part of the body-related services, then they will probably be allowed to open. But he doesn't know that much about it. There are 300 prostitution shops in Vienna and a lot of jobs depend on them. That was a normal, objective question and one could have answered it in an objective way. You simply noticed that he didn't dare to say anything about it, although it was a question without ulterior motives. And that annoyed me a lot. But at least it was possible that this question was asked at all. In the meantime, I already have the feeling that more politicians are dealing with it, mostly women, and that something is developing in the right direction.”

**Keywords:** Sex work, illicitly work, migration, vaccination, taboo topics, hardship funds

## AT02

**Title:** Milena, a migrant live-in caregiver, experienced severe social isolation during the pandemic

**Narrative:** “My name is Milena. I am 50 years old, and I work as a full-time caregiver in rural Austria. Originally, I am from Slovakia but I spend most of my time working in Austria. My patient uses a wheelchair and can hardly communicate anymore. I am working with this client for 3,5 years. Working as a live-in caregiver is hard.

Thinking about the pandemic, I predominantly think about social isolation. At the beginning of the pandemic, I could not go home. I stayed for a long time with my client which came with a massive physical and mental burden. At first, I didn't recognize the signs and could not name social isolation as the main issue. During that time, I was constantly under pressure. Even when my mother passed away, I did not take the time to mourn. Recently I started to process what has happened. Living with my client feels like “a prison to me”. My client feels the same way, he often misses his family.

At first, I did not mind staying longer with my client, because it just did not make sense to go back to Slovakia where I would have to stay in quarantine until getting back to my work. I tried to negotiate with the family of my client whether they cover my additional expenses. I did not receive any concrete answers. Without my knowing, the placement agency suggested to all families to pay every care giver an additional 20 EUR per day for motivation and compensation. My client's family refused to pay such bonus and instead suggested that I work for them privately, without the agency. I refused because I have to think about my future. Without an agency it is not possible to find new clients (because

there is no trust in foreign caregivers).

A big factor that concerns me is the behaviour of my client's (adult) children. I agreed on a new rotation rhythm (staying for 4 weeks in a row, instead of 2) with my colleague. This was only possible because we both own a car. Otherwise, crossing the border would hardly have been possible. The client's family assured me and my colleague of their support, but in the end, they didn't do it. They never showed up. However, the longer rotation entitled us for the 500 euro "stay here" ("bleib da Wohnen") bonus. In retrospect, I do not think that these 500 euros were worth the effort, it is too little money for the burden.

The children underestimate how much work I have with my client. At the same time, they are rarely around. I find this particularly difficult because all the things that need to be done around the house are put on my shoulders, though they are not covered by my contract. I earn 800 euros net, "no man would do this job for so little money". For example, when it is snowing, I must clear the 100-150 m<sup>2</sup> driveway so I can drive my client to the doctor. These are also physically demanding tasks that put additional strain on me and my colleague (who is 61 years old). The fact that the client's children don't think about the different chores irritates me a lot. I see cultural differences here; in Austria it is assumed that you just ask when you need something. So, I address everything directly, but there are no consequences. For example, when I brought up the problem with the housekeeping, that I don't have time to clean and iron because the client can't be left alone and I can hardly keep to my breaks, the children suggested that they come for coffee, and I could clean the windows or iron the cloth in the meantime. I found that insulting, because when visitors come, I would like to have a chat with them and tell them how things are going. This just shows you, they do not realise what is going on and how social isolation affects people.

My client shows me that he knows how I feel and how exhausted I am. Sometimes he says, I should go home. But I cannot leave him alone. In the meantime, I tried to raise awareness with my client's family. I was thinking about taking a break. But in the end the break is not going to solve the underlying problems. Furthermore, I need the money because I must cover my expenses like social insurance, which I would have to pay even if I do not earn income. I am only entitled to sickness pay after six weeks.

I am vaccinated, but I think that I don't really need it because I have a strong immune system. When I realised that vaccination is necessary for crossing borders or easier that constant testing, I got the vaccination at the first opportunity in spring. Now I am also boosted, as are my colleague, the client and the client's family. Then again, my agent from the agency does not advocate for the vaccination. She has strongly opposed any kind of mandatory vaccination for 24-hour caregivers and does not comply with any safety measures herself (such as wearing a mask during monitoring visits or showing 2G proof). Legally, I have a right to work in an 2G environment. But I didn't dare ask my agent for a 2G certificate. I think I'm just lucky that everyone around me and the client are vaccinated and get tested before they come visit. Otherwise, I would have to quit

because I can't force anyone. In addition, my workplace is the client's home. I find it difficult to take on such a role in someone's home. I don't wear a mask while working, I estimate the risk of infecting my client as very low. I test myself before and after every trip.

I have noticed that many 24-hour caregivers are not vaccinated. Especially Romanian caregivers are very critical, but they are becoming the largest group of caregivers from abroad. This is because wages in Austria are not getting any higher, but the exchange rate between Austria and Slovakia, for example, is converging. This means that the incentive for Slovakian women to come to Austria is decreasing. This is not yet the case in Romania.

I see the fact that many are vaccine skeptical as a kind of defiant reaction against the government. Live-in caregivers have been waiting for years now that their working conditions improve, but the government does not do anything; now they are asking the caregivers something and caregivers can say no. I find this childish, but I can understand it to some extent. Our job is simply not appreciated. The work we do now was unpaid for a long time and was done by women. Now it is still done by women, the work is paid but poorly and receives no financial or "moral" appreciation. I see the state as responsible for this, as it creates the frame of the working conditions. People, like my client's family, act accordingly and use the leeway they are given. As a 24-hour caregiver, I can't even negotiate my working conditions myself, it's all done through agencies that may be pursuing completely different interests."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Social isolation hurts. Not at first, but with time. The burden we carry is not normal."

"Being such a long time in my clients house socially isolated felt to me like I was in prison."

"No man would do this job for so little money."

"Lots of people only have their own misery in mind, but in fact we all suffer"

"I have heard from old people that they would rather infect themselves with covid and die instead of experience isolation like this once more"

**Keywords:** live-in caregiver, social isolation, gender care gap, migration, vaccination

**AT03**

**Title:** Anne, 43, sex worker, had financial problems during the pandemic and was confronted with a lot of uncertainty

**Narrative:** My name is Anne, I am 43 years old and work as a self-employed sex worker and sexual companion. I was an accountant for years before I decided to become a sex worker.

The pandemic meant a rather unfortunate start to my new profession, as I finished my training in sex counselling in October 2020, just before the lockdown began. This had financial consequences; I was longer unemployed than I anticipated. I had to fall back on my savings. In addition, I registered as marginally self-employed, so I can work in between, but not illicitly. This turned out to be disadvantageous, because although I did not generate any income during the lock down, the rest of the time I was above the marginal earnings threshold. Now, it looks like I'll have to make repayments of some social benefits which are disproportionate to what I have earned. "The pandemic is taking its toll on me financially". Fortunately, I still have some savings.

In general, everything seemed very slowed down by the pandemic, nothing was predictable during this time. This also has psychological consequences, thoughts revolve more around oneself, fears arise. I noticed that I reacted much more emotionally and was very listless at times.

Sexual counselling was not prioritised in the pandemic, just as people perhaps went to the hairdresser less, sexual counselling was also given lower priority. Also, in order not to put people at additional risk. "Everyone is a bit reserved." During a pandemic, inviting a stranger to one's home certainly is an overcoming. The fear that others might find out also plays a role. Nevertheless, there was pressure from clients to work illicitly. Several unpleasant requests came by phone and email from people who I think would normally go to a brothel. "I've just had really unpleasant enquiries." So, there is definitely a demand, but the implementation is simply not possible. This costs a lot of time but does not bring in any revenue.

Even while we were allowed to work, there is no certainty in planning. Even when appointments are made, because the demand has not diminished, they are cancelled due to quarantine cases in the facility. This is all at the expense of my time capacities. Making appointments costs time, possible travel time and costs, which were sometimes not appreciated by my clients. Appointments were cancelled at short notice.

Due to an immune disease, I was vaccinated early on and only work with people who are vaccinated. Sometimes I bring antigen tests if they don't have a current PCR test. I also communicate this very clearly on my website and do not discuss it. I can't keep the mask on and I know that my colleagues don't work with masks on either. If I worked with a mask, I would not be booked. I also find some of the suggested hygiene measures simply not sensible. Sex work is very close and very intimate, neither a mask nor gloves will protect me. That's why I minimise the risk by focusing on vaccination and testing. Of course, there is still a residual risk, but I don't think the mask will change that much. But that doesn't mean I'm careless. Before I have seen the valid test result, I wear a mask and greet at a distance. It is not only me who worries about this, but also my clients.

Sometimes we also talk about pandemic issues.

As an active part of an association for sex workers, I have talked a lot with colleagues. We also went to the street prostitutes and talked to the women, collected donations and tried to help. We also did a lot of public relations work. In particular, we tried to make it clear that sex work was not clearly classified. Do we count it as a service or as leisure? In addition, there were different regulations in the different federal states. It was left to us to gather all the necessary information. We as an association have tried to collect this information and publish it on our homepage.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “The pandemic is taking its toll on me financially.”

“It's a rollercoaster of emotions. Sometimes it's going great for a week, or even whenever everything calms down, the order situation is totally good because everyone is happy that visits are possible. And then suddenly everything collapses again.”

“Everyone has learned to adjust a little during the pandemic. You learn that things slow down or are unpredictable. You have more time to think about yourself when you're sitting at home alone. It also does something to people on a psychological level.”

“Sex work is very close and very intimate, so neither the mask nor gloves will do me any good. That's why I minimise the risk by focusing on vaccination and testing”.

**Keywords:** Sex work, sexual counseling, uncertainty, financial burden, mental burden

#### AT04

**Title:** Sonja, 65, found it challenging to organise the live-in care of her mother who was diagnosed with cancer during the pandemic

**Narrative:** My name is Sonja and I am 65 years old. I am currently a lecturer at the University, although I am already retired. I am an independent scientist, science coach, and board member of a feminist association. I experienced the pandemic as the daughter of a mother who was ill with cancer and needed care as well as an adjunct teacher at university (see AT09).

At the beginning of the pandemic, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. We live very close to each other, almost flat to flat. Due to the advanced stage of her illness, she needed a live-in caregiver. Her live-in caregiver came from Hungary and decided to stay with my mother during the first peak phase of the pandemic, which lasted 9 weeks. The government bonus of 500 euros for live-in caregivers certainly played a role, but it was not easy to get it. For example, she had to have an Austrian bank account. I helped her with this and was also very busy with the organisational side of things. So, I looked after the caregiver, who in turn looked after my mother. Again and again problems arose,

sometimes it went well for a week, then it didn't. My mother wasn't very easy either, I often had to calm the caregiver down. It was also difficult for me at times, my mother did not speak to me. The doctor said that everything was still going well compared to other families. Nevertheless, I would not want to experience something like this again. My daily routine was that I worked in my home office and went over to my mother's 4-5 times a day, and I was permanently on call.

Medical care seemed to be difficult during that time; for example, the general practitioner stopped coming. The hospital discharge management didn't make it easy for us either. The diagnosis, as well as the medication, was not passed on to the treating doctors, we had to do that ourselves. There was a clear communication gap between hospital and home medical care. The attending doctors, such as our general practitioner and a palliative care doctor communicated with each other, but that took time. The palliative doctor continued to come about once a week. With the help of a local association, we were able to arrange the care well. This association is private, and we could only afford it because my mother was well off financially with her widow's pension. I could not afford it with my pension. I am wondering why this type of care is not better supported by the government, considering it would be cheaper and more decent than a place in a retirement home. Anyway, they work in small teams, caregivers and shopping helpers come in turns. It's a great model, much more humane than others. The care staff has more leeway in terms of time, now, for example, compared to other providers.

The live-in caregiver and I didn't wear masks because my mother could no longer really understand what was happening pandemically due to her illness. And the constant wearing of masks by the people around her also meant an additional psychological burden. But that also had the consequence that I no longer met anyone. I only went shopping during this time to minimise the risk of infection.

Collecting medicines from the pharmacy worked well. Since the pandemic, prescriptions are now sent directly from the practice to the pharmacies by email, so you don't have to sit in the waiting room at a time like this. Nevertheless, I have the impression that there was little exchange between the different health providers, and there is also a lack of data on the pandemic.

My mother then passed away, so we also had to organise the funeral in Corona time. At the funeral there were also Corona cases, and my brother was positive afterwards. I'm not sure if I had it too. There were a few signs.

So the topic of care work has already been very present in my life, both at home and as a researcher. I have dealt with it in the form of interviews and events. For me, it is one of the central issues that were neglected during the pandemic, although the situation has become more acute. Kindergartens have also been pretty much left out, in my opinion. Parents who are exposed to Covid through their children and have problems managing work life on the side with home office arrangements, etc. There was no discernible policy

approach in this area. In many areas, people's own responsibility was relied upon or pushed upon. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "The diagnoses and prescribed medicines are not passed on by the hospital to the attending doctors. We handed that over to them ourselves. And then the doctors sat there and spent an hour trying to understand what that meant. So, there is a big communication gap or a gap between the hospital and the doctors' care at home. And because of that, time was also lost."

"I looked after the live-in caregiver, who in turn looked after my mother. The rhythm we had there went well for a week and then it got out of hand and then you had to get a grip on it again. So, it was a constant up and down. My mother wasn't easy either and I kept trying to calm the caregiver down."

**Keywords:** live-in caregiver, care work, hospital, communication, illness

**AT05**

**Title:** Daniela, 37 years old and sociologist developed coping strategies to deal with the crisis

**Narrative:** My name is Daniela, I am 37 years old and a sociologist. I live with my family, my husband and two children, on the outskirts of Vienna. My children go to kindergarten and school, we are doing well so far. We have adapted to the new pandemic situation and found a way to deal with it well. So, we are happy that we have coped well.

My live has several layers. For my family it had actually some good sites, as we had less pressure to do something, meet people, but could slow down a bit. We moved to the outskirts of Vienna. The different lockdowns and short work and later home office helped my husband and me to balance work and family really well. "Therefore, for us, some lockdowns had been really advantageous, as we managed to realise personal plans."

Then again, the pandemic is challenging, if we want to meet friends and acquaintances, who have different opinions than us. My family and I see that the pandemic is one aspect of our ecosystem and we have to manage it so all goes well. We did not shut ourselves off, we did not simply pause our social life for two years. That would have had unbearable consequences for us. Rather, we tried to weigh up the measures to see what made sense for us and what made less sense "But there is a life after the pandemic and if we destroy all our social foundation, one would not expect that after two or three years things would work again, like before." I - like my husband - want to be a role model for our kids. We want to show them that it is possible to deal with a crisis. So we use the pandemic to do that. . In doing so, we were guided by our common sense.

My extended family does not live in Austria, and this has been difficult during the pandemic. Not so much because it was more difficult to meet - because with testing and vaccination we could overcome that. But, on an emotional level. Knowing that you are in

another country, where the rules differ - I did not want to confront myself with another set of rules. For me, it was difficult to overcome this or to motivate others to point out that it is not as bad as it is portrayed in the media.

For me, having a balance is important to build up resilience and manage a crisis such as the pandemic. It was important for us to develop a new daily structure. Our daily structure included a fixed routine with fixed programme points that were followed without interruptions. This helped us to balance home office, the different chores in the household and child care. I see that as a big point in overcoming crises, to look at oneself and motivate each other to stick to the structure. Also, because we know the risks if we don't stick to it. For sure, I experienced several moments of desperation, when I was not sure on how to deal with the next lockdown, or when we were insecure on whether or not to visit our relatives. But I then made my own assessment of the situation and found a way on how to make it work. Part of it was also adapting our diet to the new situation. For me, it is important to see what I can contribute to cope with a crisis.

My daughter started school in September 2021, so the closures of schools at the beginning of the pandemic did not concern us much. The main effect I experienced was a change in the school's admissions process; for example, I was not able to visit the schools on site. But generally speaking, it worked okay. In my opinion, school is very important for students. My daughter always goes there, regardless of whether wearing masks or other measures are in place. Children perceive crises differently, they adapt to situations very quickly. For example, if they only know school with a mask, they don't question it.

When I compare the situation in our family, my daughter is probably suffering the most from the pandemic. She feels the effects the most, but without knowing it herself. She doesn't have regular sports lessons, wears a mask all day and can't meet friends, she experiences a shock when a friend is tested positive. My son feels none of this in kindergarten. There is no distance, no masks. I may know the parents of the other children less, but that is also almost the only difference to my daughter's kindergarten time. I'm especially glad that we live on the outskirts of town and have a garden. So, the children could go out even while they were in quarantine.

I wasn't quite sure about the vaccination at the beginning, so I watched how it went. For us as a healthy family, I didn't think the vaccine was necessary, an infection wouldn't be dramatic for us. My husband and I finally got vaccinated in the summer, mainly for reasons of social inclusion and because I didn't want to be constantly confronted with the topic. I still have concerns about long-term consequences of vaccination, but when weighed against the harmfulness of Covid, I prefer vaccination. After all, the vaccination has been scientifically proven. I only did the third vaccination recently because I felt social pressure. Personally, I would not have considered it necessary. But then my certificate would have expired and I don't want to be harassed by the state or experience social exclusion. The majority of my environment is also vaccinated, but there are also a few vaccination opponents. However, I don't get involved in conversations about the

vaccines; I don't want this topic to cause a rift in my friendships.

I think this pandemic will be just one of many. The climate crisis in particular will play its part.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "But there is a life after the pandemic and if we destroy all our social foundation, one would not expect that after two or three years things would work again, like before."

"As parents we are role models for our children, so also in dealing with crises"

"A balance in life helps to overcome crises. If work is right, family is right, everyone is healthy. Then you have a good breeding ground for overcoming crises. And that was fortunately the case with us."

**Keywords:** Coping strategies, daily structure, vaccination, school, children, migrant family

## AT06

**Title:** Kerstin, 58, head of an integration association, sees that the gap between privileged and disadvantaged people gets bigger

**Narrative:** My name is Kerstin, I am 58 years old and a cardiologist. Five years ago, I sold my practice and developed a project for migrants. I experienced the pandemic from a privileged situation, but through my association work I got insights into the life of migrant families in Vienna and tried to intervene. The project focusses on women from migrant communities. The aim is to gain access to "women who are perceived as unfree" through other women from their community. The latter are trained counsellors, who build 'bridges' to their community. Guided by the idea of a self-determined life, there is a strong focus on the labour market integration of migrant women. The counsellors are themselves an active part of their community.

My life situation differs of the situation of women in our organisation. I consider myself to be in a privileged situation. My husband and I moved to our second residence during the pandemic, because at that time I was considered a high-risk patient after an operation. Since then, we have been living there very happily and will continue to do so after the pandemic. We have been vaccinated three times and are not at risk, we can regulate our contact with people ourselves. We do not have to work. On the other end of the spectrum are the women who receive support from my association. They live in Vienna with small children in a very confined space and are therefore more at risk of infection.

So, in the context of the pandemic, we started providing our association's services online. I think the result of this has been very positive. We were able to develop a daily

structure with families, and all family members were involved. In most of these families, there are very strict gender-specific divisions of labour. The wife or mother takes over all the household tasks. This became very clear during the pandemic when everyone was at home. It also became clear that it doesn't work like that. And since everyone was at home now and that was also difficult to bear, we were able to organise family conferences. In these conferences, we divided tasks fairly among all family members and it was gladly accepted. We were able to break down traditional role models to some extent. The pandemic also allowed us to implement some ideas - like coaching while walking - which we always wanted to do, but did not manage before. We also developed new formats, such as learning groups in the park, but I am not sure if this is indeed an advantage.

However, the switch to digital also brought some problems. Many families only have one device. And if, for example, three children live together in one household and all have home schooling online, then at least one child misses out. Usually the youngest, because he or she is least able to assert him or herself. Teachers have a hard time including everyone, no matter how committed they are. The privileged families simply have an advantage, and the gap continues to widen. As an association, we have tried to react to this by collecting donations in the form of money, terminals and providing families with devices. But in the end, that was just a drop in the ocean. We also set up a Corona Chat on our homepage. Twice a week, we hosted a chat for 3 hours, where people could ask questions in their own mother tongue.

Even before the pandemic, part of our project was a sewing workshop where women could be trained as seamstresses. In this way, they were supposed to encounter western ideas of work and be integrated into life outside their own homes. We offer this training with the prospect of employment. Women pay 500 Euros and if they work for half a year after the training, they get the money back. At the beginning, the husbands strictly refused, but finally some of them agreed, simply to get the 500 Euros back. All of them have been employed for 6 years now and they like it very much. During the pandemic, they were put on short-time work. Very soon, some of our seamstresses contacted us and proposed we produce face masks. This went so well that we hired 2 more women.

Our association also had to struggle with the fact that donations from investors decreased, but this was then compensated by other funds. But I found it laughable when expenses are increased everywhere and salaries rise, but the Ministry of Social Affairs refuses slight increases because they can't afford it. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Because of my privileged situation - I can only say something that is difficult now, so to speak, because it sounds very haughty, it is not meant haughtily at all - because of my privileged situation I actually have to be really happy about Corona, because it has created completely new living situations for me. But of course I have the privilege of sitting alone in a house in the [countryside]."

"We only take women as counsellors who have access to the families we would not reach

otherwise. And that is why it is so difficult to work with them, because they are still like that. They still have one foot in the community, so to speak, but their minds are already much freer in terms of what they can do here. That's what I meant earlier, what it means to work with someone like that and get them to understand what Corona is and how it transmits and so on, because they're also in these groups and exposed to all these myths."

"There has been one positive aspect in our work. We have developed a daily structure for families. It worked really well, better than before the pandemic. We made plans and included the children, gave them creative tasks. All family members agreed to their tasks. Even in the younger generations there are still very traditional views, where the mother takes the child to kindergarten, etc. And that has now changed because of the pandemic. And now, because of the pandemic and because everyone was sitting at home with seven children and it was simply not bearable that the mother does everything, it didn't work that way anymore."

**Keywords:** migration, integration, vaccination, gender-specific division of labor, home schooling, widening of social inequality gap, funding issues for NPOs

## AT07

**Title:** As a disabled person the pandemic caused a lot of uncertainty and I had to adapt my life significantly

**Narrative:** My name is Karola, I am 39 years old and have a condition as a result of which I am using a wheelchair and have a team of personal assistants. I work as a counsellor for disabled people and am an artist. The pandemic caused a lot of insecurities as I am part of a high-risk group.

I have lung problems due to my disability and need a ventilator as well as heavy medication. So, at the very beginning of the pandemic I quickly realised that an infection would be problematic for me as I am part of a risk group. But I had very little information at that time and could only vaguely estimate to which extent I have to protect myself or what could happen if I needed to go to the hospital.

Before the pandemic I had regular appointments at the hospital to check my ventilator. Due to the pandemic and the prioritisations of Covid patients I could not go to the hospital anymore. They told me to only come if it is an emergency. I had been there for years, knew the people. The fact that this was taken away has unsettled me. I had to take care of the check-ups for my ventilator myself.

My assistant was in contact with someone who tested positive for covid. So, I decided to stay with my parents for a while. I stayed for 2,5 month and worked from there. My assistants then came to my parent's place, and we established a weekly shift. Before the

shift, my assistants isolated themselves for one week so they wouldn't cause a risk of infection. Unfortunately, my assistants work as freelancers, which I am sorry for but cannot change due to funding issues. Because of their work status they did not have the option for entering the short-time work scheme [see POLAT07]. My parents were part of this rhythm, which was quite difficult due to their age and limited abilities. I was also scared that my parents would catch the virus. During this time, we did not go to the supermarket but had everything delivered to minimise the risk of infection.

I communicated with friends via phone or internet, but we did not meet in person. It was a pity not being able to meet new people, because I am an outgoing person. But the contact I had with my friends was quite nice. Now, after getting the vaccinations, I meet friends in person. I see the situation as less serious now. Mostly we go for a walk, but only if both have a valid negative covid test.

The distribution of vaccination was a very difficult topic for me at the beginning due to prioritisation of different groups, which was not always comprehensible to me. I was in contact with several organisations, which focus on disability, and gave a media-interview. But it was an uphill battle until changes were made. Each province had its own regulations on how they assessed and prioritised people with disabilities. Questions arose as to whether all people with disabilities should get vaccinated, considering that there was a vaccine shortage. A distinction was made between physical disabilities, mental issues or learning disabilities. If I remember correctly, in Salzburg people with learning disabilities were vaccinated before people with physical disabilities. Vienna was - generally speaking - a latecomer compared to the other provinces.

In March, I was finally vaccinated, and in the meantime, I am triple-vaccinated. My environment has also been vaccinated, fortunately I didn't have to have any discussions. However, there was one person in my team of assistants, who did not want to get vaccinated. At first, this could be solved with getting tested before work shifts, but sometimes there were problems with the timing of tests. Also, my coordination efforts increased enormously. For instance, when 2G (vaccinated, recovered) rules were in place, I always had to check who was working, to be able to go to a restaurant. In the end, I had to employ another assistant. It just didn't work out in the long run. It was not an easy decision as the person had worked for me for 6 years. I was very unsure, wondering if I can handle the situation that way. Now the rules are changing again so, the dismissal might not have been necessary.

I had the feeling that people with privately organized care work were completely forgotten by the administration, the government, and the media. For example, it was difficult to supply my assistants with PPE (masks, gloves, etc.). There was also a lack of information. For example, I wondered who I should contact if one of my assistants became ill. I felt very much left alone with these issues. I had to take care of a lot of things myself. The fact that many test stations and vaccination boxes were not barrier-free was another issue for me. For my last vaccination, for example, I drove to a vaccination box that was marked as barrier-free. But since the kerb was not lowered, the doctor had to

vaccinate me on the street.”

**Specifically telling quotes:** “In relation to the vaccination, people with disabilities were valued differently. People with learning disabilities were evaluated differently than people with physical disabilities. Mistakes have definitely been made. Also, in terms of providing my assistants with materials, like gloves and masks.”

“People who do not live in care institutions have really been forgotten. If my assistant has Corona, for instance, who do I turn to? There are a few contact points, but not everyone feels responsible for it. I feel a bit left alone.”

**Keywords:** disability, vaccination, care work, social isolation, uncertainty, accessibility

## AT08

**Title:** Kordula, 50, is self-employed and in financial distress. She criticises the system, the public discourse on Corona and the increasing digitalisation

**Narrative:** My name is Kordula, I am 50 years old, and I am currently self-employed, working in the education sector focusing on training people so they can use technology in a self-determined way.

During the pandemic, I lost all my clients, as they were either severely affected by the pandemic themselves or stopped their activities. This put me in a financial emergency, I had to draw on my savings right at the beginning. I also applied for different financial benefits provided by the state. After two years of the pandemic, I am massively at risk economically, especially because the support for one-person enterprises does not suffice. But it is also difficult to get out of self-employment because I am not eligible for social benefits which other groups such as unemployed people or artist, can rely upon. I am currently in the process of organising my exit from self-employment. I have therefore also put my voluntary activities on hold. I am trying to find a regular job, which also provides for my social security.

Nevertheless, I still consider myself privileged and have made it my task to support people in my environment. Here I see many problems in connection with the pandemic. Neighbours who do not have German as their mother tongue and who are also old have great problems in dealing with digital technology. But that is exactly what is increasingly expected. In the context of the pandemic, almost everything has been transferred to the digital realm. Testing, vaccination, and even other affairs with the city have been digitised. For me, this is forced digitalisation. Older people had big problems with it, some of them don't even own a mobile phone and have no prior technical knowledge. But without a mobile phone signature, nothing was possible. In my eyes, a false standard has been established and this data collection makes me uncomfortable. I then started documenting all the digitalization measures in order to have evidence.

In my opinion, the problem with this pandemic is not the virus, but the system. Problems are becoming visible that were there before and were simply never addressed. Neither before nor now during the pandemic. I see Austria's handling of the pandemic as not very efficient. Trust became less and less, also due to the way how the topic was covered by Austrian media. I have noticed an increasing scientification of the public discourse, whereby these figures only serve to legitimise the politicians' statements. The advertising campaigns or posters regarding measures of the pandemic were too flawless and far from reality. For me, none of this adds up.

What is needed is a system change, not a system maintenance. However, this system maintenance was clearly evident. Selfishness persists. For instance, when companies imported FFP2 masks, repacked them and increased the prices for it. I simply could not comprehend some of the measures, such as the closure of the Federal Gardens at the beginning of the pandemic. I didn't understand why I could no longer go for a walk there. Or when young people got fined 100-150 EUR just because they were standing next to each other outside, holding their phones - "this has very much fueled aggression and refusal against authorities and authoritarian measures". Generally speaking, I have the impression that the aggressions and tensions have increased.

I was also affected by the way the discourse of the pandemic took place. I refused to become part of this systems, by avoiding to engage in media. I feel that very often they only use buzz words, but do not really tackle the issues. It was more like a propaganda, showing styled nurses in shiny places, but not reality. This created bubbles, which are floating around but don't have any basis in reality. Now, you don't see any faces any more - that's the same way how political campaigns worked in the 1990s: first you see faces, then topics and in the end only where to tick the box.

I think there should have been many more opportunities, real opportunities, for people to be self-responsible. Because people want to protect themselves and their relatives. But instead, they opted to collect plenty of data. Also, the tools that have been developed, like the app for testing, is designed badly, so it is not comprehensible for people how to use it, and you could not use them on small displays.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I am massively economically at risk after two years of pandemic because business subsidies for one-person businesses do not cover living costs. At the same time, I can't get out of it because I wouldn't get social benefits which unemployed people or artists are entitled to."

"All over my house, people come to me with requirements of forced digitisation."

" The pandemic is not over. Before the interview, I thought about where the problem actually is, and I don't see the problem in the virus. This phase now has actually only shown where the problems were already before and that these problems were never addressed, not even during the pandemic."

"It's no longer about system preservation, in my opinion. It really needs a system change with a new goal and probably also new actors."

[Talking about young people getting fined for standing together outside] "this has very much fueled aggression and refusal against authorities and authoritarian measures"."

**Keywords:** System change, financial burden, (forced) digitalization, elderly, self-employment, precarity, self-determination

## AT09

**Title:** Sonja, 65, an adjunct lecturer at university, tried to counteract the negative effects for her students on her own suspense

**Narrative:** My name is Sonja, and I am 65 years old. I am currently an adjunct lecturer at the University, although I am already retired. I am a freelance scientist, a science coach and board member of a feminist association. I experienced the pandemic from the perspective of a teacher as well as a daughter of a mother diagnosed with cancer who needs live-in care (see C2AT04).

I see that the pandemic makes things more difficult for students. My daughter, for example, dropped out of her programme. She started a new programme just before the pandemic. But then, she needed some surgery which was constantly postponed due to the pandemic. But also, because she said, she just she does not give a damn about studying because its not what she expected. She was not able to meet other students and exchange thoughts with them, so this was quite unsatisfying for her. Also my own students, as well as myself, suffer from everything being online. Many have completed the entire master's programme online and really struggled. This might be easier for master students, compared to bachelor students, as they have their goal in front of them. But to some extent, they had a really bad time. I also supervise several master's theses and have seen that many students have taken breaks due to the pandemic. To counteract this, I offered my students coaching outside while we went for a walk in the vineyards for an hour. I offered this in addition to my regular lessons because I noticed that more coaching was needed. Students made use of this offer a lot. But this meant much more work for me as a teacher - and my colleagues have had similar experiences. "it just takes so much more." Also, the manifold variety of new digital tools did not always make things easier for me.

A more positive experience was the implementation of more online meetings. As adjunct lecturer, with only term-based contracts, I was hardly able to join the conversations. But with these online meetings I was able to join the meetings and get to know the different teams better. So I also gained more insights to the contexts of the study programmes. Before that, I often only visited the university for my lectures, and couldn't take part in other meetings because of the spatial and temporal factors, which

I found very unfortunate.

Regarding vaccination, I had the feeling that university lecturers were forgotten. I signed up for a vaccination appointment right at the first opportunity, checked the box for the “education sector” group. At first I got an appointment, but in the course of the day it turned out that the group “education” referred to teachers in schools, not to university teachers. But since many people had interpreted it that way, the original appointments could be kept after all. So, I received my first vaccination at the beginning of March. The vaccination was important to me because as a university teacher I have contact with many different people and I felt safer that way. I also received the second and third vaccination, each time with strong (mental) side effects. But I didn't care because I wanted to protect myself and others. I also tried to report my side effects, with research in mind, as I thought that would surely be helpful. I realise that this is also a question of capacity, but really no one was interested in my information. Neither in hospitals nor in pharmacies.”

**Specifically telling quotes:** “ It simply takes a lot more to be able to implement what you normally do in teaching. So the support. I think that is very difficult, and not just for me. ”

“They forgot about us as teachers at university while focusing on school staff. I registered for the vaccination as working in ‘education’ and I already had a guilty conscience because they probably meant something else by ‘education’. When I had my vaccination appointment, they said that it didn't apply and only meant the school system. But because a lot of people at university registered for the vaccination the Viennese Health Councillor found a way to accommodate the university staff as well. But at the beginning, the university wasn't even considered as part of the education sector. ”

**Keywords:** distance learning, education sector, students, counselling, precarious work

**AT10**

**Title:** Andrea, a 42 years old physician and mother of two toddlers thinks more attention needed to be put on educating people to mitigate inequalities

**Narrative:** “My name is Andrea, I am 42 years old and work part-time in a covid-free hospital as gynecologist. I have two small kids; one was born during the pandemic. My husband is from Asia. In addition to my work in the hospital, I have a private practice and volunteer for in the public Covid-screening and vaccination programme. In the past I worked in several countries of the global South.

I was pregnant at the beginning of the pandemic. At that time there was a lack of knowledge. The lax approach of the public to issues related with sickness stood out to me. For instance, there have been pregnant women who brought their sick kids to their doctor's appointment which is a risk for other patients, not just during the pandemic. For me it was clear even before the pandemic - something I picked up in my work in the

global South – that whenever I catch a cold, I am wearing a mask. This is the best way to protect myself and my patients. Consequently, the mask mandate in the public transport came as a relief for me, as now none was wondering why I wear a mask.

The first lockdown was very stressful for me. So many things have been uncertain. I did not know, for instance, whether my husband would be able to accompany me when I gave birth, or whether my parents were able to stay with us and help us out. In the end, both were possible, but still there was a lot of insecurity.

I felt quite conflicted as well. As a physician, I wanted to help and fill in when help is needed. Especially, because I became a physician because I wanted to help people. As a mother, though, I was afraid of Covid. Not so much for getting sick myself, but that I would pass it on to my loved ones and that they would have a severe disease progression. Also, the issue of Long Covid came to my mind, which is especially prevalent amongst women of my age group. I have the impression we do not get enough information on Long Covid. For instance, we never learn about how many people are actually in rehab, due to Long Covid. They should communicate this better.

Luckily, childcare was not an issue for me. I was on maternity leave, when the kindergartens were closed due to the high numbers of infection. As soon as the numbers went down I sent my kid to the kindergarten again. I had to fight, though, with the kindergarten's director, insisting that the risk is low and therefore my kid should not be denied this opportunity. I am afraid that less educated and less privileged families did not get the same support. Especially the migrants' kids, who would benefit from the pre-school year. The motto was kids should stay at home as much as possible. I think that as a consequence of this motto, those most in need of support did not receive it.

Generally speaking, I think much more education is needed. I reached out to the health ministry several times urging them to provide better information on how to protect oneself, e.g. how to wear a mask, as a lot of people don't seem to understand that the mask should cover mouth and nose, especially when you come close to each other and speak. I saw people remove their mask when they are speaking to someone else. Also, I got the impression that better educated people are more open to getting vaccinated. Normally, I vaccinate people in a predominantly working class and migrant area, but once I was in a more affluent area. And there, to my surprise, people thanked me for the vaccination, which was a first for me.

I get annoyed when people who do not know what they are talking about provide guidance. I am working with a lot of pregnant women and I know that getting covid while you are pregnant can be really risky, while the vaccination is rather safe for most pregnant women. Once a neurologist told one of my high risks patients not to get vaccinated during the pregnancy, even though for her the vaccine would be really important. This annoyed me.

I got vaccinated rather soon, as I interrupted my maternity leave in winter 2021. Luckily, this was the time when health care professionals received the vaccine. I was also happy

that by then the hospitals had enough PPE (personal protective equipment), like FFP2 masks. This was not the case in the first lockdown, when I bought my own masks.

I hope that people receive more education so they better understand that it is not just about their own, individual progress but that they also have a responsibility for the community. This includes to question mountebanks and to be able to change one's mind if one comes to the conclusion that what one thought was perhaps not right after all. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "If you are too far away from the people and they don't understand what it is all about, then you have lost a lot." (referring to the government's information campaigns)

"We met parents at the playground and unfortunately there were a lot of migrant children, whose both parents are non-Austrian, who have not been in the kindergarten, though it was their pre-school year. One just did not realise that when the numbers are low, that these are children who are, let's say, disadvantaged in terms of language and who simply couldn't do much of the pre-school training because of the lockdown. And no effort was made to ensure that these children could come back to the kindergarten. This brings us again to the ability of understanding an issue: I saw that the number of infections was low at the moment, and I decided that it was in the best interests of the child and the family that they go there. I would have liked people to be a bit more aware of this and let the children who really needed it go to kindergarten as well. Parents also told me about day-night reversal, their children slept for ages in the afternoon, were up until 1 a.m. - that is simply not good for the kids."

**Keywords:** Access to information, education gap, health provision, recognition of expertise, lack of knowledge, lack of information, privilege

## AT11

**Title:** Bastian, a 41-year-old queer, gay, drag queen, social worker and student, who migrated from Germany to Austria 10 years ago, experienced a lot of isolation

**Narrative:** "For me the pandemic has been really challenging, especially during lockdowns and in the winter time. All my artistic work as drag queen came to a halt; online shows have not been as satisfying. I miss the possibility to go and study in the coffee house or library. Also, the psychological barrier to meeting is much higher, and many people retreat into the private sphere. Moreover, at the beginning of the pandemic, there was a strong focus on the patriarchal nuclear family; other family concepts and other reference people were hardly mentioned in the discussion about measures and who is allowed to meet. This increased my feeling of isolation.

Luckily, I was not able to work from home. I work as a social worker in a shelter during the night. So, I had a reason to change my location, which was good for me. Then again, I rarely met anyone at work either, as there have not been any team meetings. Which was a shame.

I am enrolled in a study program for social work, which started in autumn 2019. I was able to start with in-person classes, so I had the chance to meet my colleagues in real life back then. However, then came the pandemic and we all switched to distance learning, which sometimes did not work very well. Eight hours a day, five days a week in a video call is really exhausting. Imagine, doing group dynamics in a video call with 50 people! This was strenuous. Through distance learning, the laptop, a tool I used for your entertainment and pleasure, became my working tool. And, I didn't have the chance to process the things we discussed in class. The topics we are learning are really tough, such as child abuse and psychiatry. And then these topics stay with you, as you don't change the scenery and cannot chat with anyone about it. The university offers too little in the way of support for us students.

Overall, the experience is one of isolation. Going for a walk is nice, but you don't get to talk to people you don't know yet. In private life, people are withdrawing more, and more, and online dating apps are mainly about sex, so friendly, social exchange also falls by the wayside. So, I am not surprised that around me I see a lot of dysfunctional dynamics. Drug consumption really increased, as did the number of people with depression and mental health issues in my surroundings.

As a German citizen, I have quite some privileges compared to other migrants, considering my first language is German and that people from North-West Europe are often treated better than other migrants. Still, I experienced discrimination though I have lived here for 10 years now. When I am working, I hardly get any homophobic insults. But I am regularly insulted due to being perceived as a migrant. As a migrant, you always have to work harder, because you don't know the unwritten rules. Moreover, I miss the structures, the institutions such as queer youth centers where you can go. So, in total, I experienced my share of exclusion.

To be honest, I think as a queer person I am well prepared. When I grew up, I had to come to grips with AIDS as this was always a topic. So being seen as a virus spreader and having to get tested is nothing new to me. I learnt back then, by learning about AIDS, that it is important to communicate clearly. This helps me right now as well. My usual coping strategies to deal with stress don't work in the pandemic, as I am not able to go and work in the coffee house. So, currently I am thinking about going somewhere else, where I can sit outdoors and meet people. Because I don't want to live another winter like the last one. "I need more, other input!"

As a social worker I got vaccinated rather early. Here again, the examination of what to do about AIDS helped me to assess the risk. To me it was clear, I want to get the vaccine. The first meds against AIDS had a lot of severe side effects - compared to them, the vaccine is harmless. Also, a few years back I had to fight cancer, and compared to the chemotherapy - it was out of question that I get vaccinated. We actually talked about the vaccines in my study program. And we said that a lot went wrong in politics in the way this was communicated. They should not have said that the pandemic is over, this raised wrong expectations.

I want to stress that more queer structures are needed. You could see during the pandemic how fatal this lack of structures is, because people did not know where to turn to for help. There hardly have been any self-support groups or contact point for trans people. There is no place where you, as a queer person, can go to and don't have to explain yourself. This is something the majority society fails to understand."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I was very happy that the university kept it [the classes] going, which was also reassuring for me because there were constants I could stick to. However, these long blocks on Zoom were just too much for me, in the sense that many topics in social work can be very difficult and have also affected me very much in my personal life. And to experience this alone, isolated in my flat - I found this very, very challenging."

"Racism is also a big issue here in this country, which I don't think is reflected on much. I was positively surprised at work that when I work with formerly homeless people, I got very little homophobic abuse. But the go-to of name-calling is actually racist. Which I don't feel hit by because of my biography, but after 10 years it does stand out."

"I would also compare this with the AIDS pandemic. As a queer person, I regularly get tested for HIV and other STIs (sexual transmitted infections). I'm in a programme where if I have an STI, I can communicate that to my partners. I think, for many heterosexuals it was the first time that they were suspected of being a virus spreader. Or so. And they had to ask themselves How do I deal with it? How do I do that? So that wasn't such a big problem for me."

**Keywords:** Queer, LGTBQ+, racism, social work, isolation, lack of support, AIDS

## AT12

**Title:** Gerlinde, 61-year-old, managing director of a care facility for people with disabilities, wished she would have had more tangible guidance and recognition for their work by the government.

**Narrative:** "My name is Gerlinde, I am 61-years old, married and have grown up daughter who started her study programme abroad at the beginning of the pandemic. I live on the countryside, in a house with a garden, and have to commute for work. I am the managing director of a care facility for people with disabilities.

To me the pandemic was "demanding on all levels", even though I try to see the positive. In my job, the demands increased drastically. Managing the pandemic didn't make work for people with disabilities easier. As managing director, I am responsible for my co-workers and the people they care for. I myself do not provide care for the clients, but I see that this has become much harder for my staff. They are at the limit of their powers

and need a lot of energy to stay positive and not despair. Constantly, people had to cancel their shifts, either because their kids or themselves have been in quarantine, or because the school or kindergarten closed. Also, the mask mandate made work more difficult. You have to know, normally the caregivers would sit at the same table with their clients, having a joint meal. But due to the mask mandate, the caregivers were not allowed to join the people they support. This makes things harder, because in our work such informal settings are very crucial. Or, when there was the 2G+ rule in place (only vaccinated, recovered or PCR-tested people were allowed to meet) - we had a lot of troubles, because we did not get access to the required tests. Before that the government would provide us with Anti-Gen tests, also for our clients. But then, suddenly, we had to make a lot of appointments in testing facilities. And also get to the testing facilities. Something the caregivers had to manage aside from their normal work. They had to register every single client and go to a pharmacy with every single unvaccinated person on a regular basis. "No one sees, what we have to accomplish."

At the beginning of the pandemic, we had to keep our facilities open. But no one could tell us, how we should do that - there was no guidance. As a managing director, I had to decide by myself on how we manage the risks of the pandemic. All public policies and measures were announced on such short notice. So it was up to me how to deal with that. I had to carry this responsibility by myself. It would have been helpful if we had had some clear rules and guidance. Also, it happened rather often - especially when Covid infections numbers were high - that the people in quarantine did not get their official 'notification for isolation'. This is hard for me, because then I don't know if I am able to get the funding for a replacement person, or if I need to ask the staff member to go on annual leave, though they are in quarantine.

My staff got some small bonus from the region for their care work and the extra strain the pandemic put on them. However, they were rather unhappy about that, because it was a really small amount and did not make up for all the troubles they had to deal with. It felt more like a mockery than real recognition for all our accomplishments.

To deal with the shortage of skilled workers, I asked retired personnel whether they could join us and help us out. I was pleasantly surprised that almost all said yes and volunteered. This was a big luck and relief for me, because they knew how the job goes. And it showed me that they actually liked working in my organisation and still feel connected to it. Nevertheless, I had to figure out how I can compensate them for their work.

A lot of external support disappeared, and the caregivers had to rescue the situation. They had to provide much more relationship building, as people with disabilities have been really isolated. All the support structures, such as youth coaching or support from the job centre, just broke off. "It will probably be years before we really see all the effects of this. In any case, many young people have fallen into the void because the structures have collapsed."

As for vaccination, I am vaccinated, so is the vast majority of my staff. As a line manager,

I have to seek a dialogue with the unvaccinated staff. I have they feeling they are under immense pressure and experience this situation as very exhausting as well. Because, it is hard for them, if someone else has to fill in for them when they have to go into quarantine. Still, I try to convince them to talk to a physician so they can get some well-founded information. But I try not to put more pressure on them. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It will probably be years before we really see all the effects of this. In any case, many young people have fallen into the void because the structures have collapsed."

"No one sees, what we have to accomplish."

**Keywords:** Social work, care work, people with disability, lack of guidance, lack of support, undervaluation of care work.



## Belgium

BE01

**Title:** Lena's Social Isolation and Difficulties Getting Around as an Elderly Woman

**Narrative:** "I am an 86-year-old retired woman from a small town in Belgium. I have been a widow for a few decades, and I have no children, so apart from a (now ex-) partner whom I did not live with, I have mostly been living on my own. I do have a lot of friends and acquaintances that I saw frequently, at least before the pandemic, mostly from my own age group (65+), but also younger people and relatives. I still live on my own, but I do receive help from a local care organisation called 'Familiehulp' ('Family Assistance') and from a volunteer carer who I've known personally for years, as she also used to take care of my mother. Besides the fact that my age somewhat affects my ability to do the chores and tasks of daily life, I also have a hearing impairment for which I use a hearing aid.

When the pandemic had just started, the people from Familiehulp and the personal volunteer kept helping me, while being a lot more careful. They went out grocery shopping for me and also served as my main social contacts during the pandemic, as I wasn't able to go out with my friends anymore. Shopping is very useful, but sometimes you forget to ask for certain items and then you have to wait a few days before you can actually get them. I also haven't been able to buy any new clothes since March 2020. I can't complain about the general quality of the personnel from Familiehulp, but because they have staff shortages due to Covid infections, they're often sending different people from one week to the next, which means that I don't know them very well and I can't get to know them either. Before Covid-19, they also used to come at more predictable hours, but now it has become quite irregular. That being said, I'm very happy that this organisation exists. You do have to pay for it, of course, but it is tied to your income or pension level, so I pay a fair price.

There is no vaccination centre in my town, so I had to go to the nearest city to get my shots. Luckily, my health insurance organises safe transport (a car with plastic dividers inside) to and from the centre. You do have to pay for the driver's expenses, which is doable for me, but might not be for others with a lower income. A doctor checks up on my health every month, but I don't go see any other medical professionals anymore unless it is absolutely necessary: for instance, I want to go to a dermatologist for a minor procedure, but it can be postponed until after the Covid wave.

The most difficult part about the pandemic is the social impact: I rarely see friends in person anymore, not only because there are risks involved, but also because finding good transport has become more difficult and because the cultural sector has dried up, so there is little to do. You do get more phone calls, but there have been a lot of lonely evenings. I encounter more difficulties when talking to people in person as well, because

they are usually wearing masks which make it harder for me to hear what they are actually saying.

I think that, in general, people who are older than 80 years old are not heard enough. This applies to all of the politics around Covid, but also to more general trends as well (banks closing their physical locations, for instance). We do not have a powerful voice and we aren't making ourselves heard enough. Instead, we usually get younger people protesting the Covid measures, but they don't seem used to anything. I know you can't convey this to a younger person, but if they had experienced the war they would have a different perspective.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Because they have a staff shortage, people from my local care organisation stop by at very irregular times and there is a lot of turnover. (...) I have had two different [care workers] in two consecutive weeks."

"You have less contact [with other people], also because everything, like cultural trips, has been cancelled. (...) It's primarily in the evenings that you're alone, that you're just sitting in front of the TV."

**Keywords:** Elderly woman, care at home, social isolation, hearing impairment, voiceless in decision-making

**BE02**

**Title:** Covid difficulties and advantages for a trans man

**Narrative:** My name is Jan, I'm currently 19 years old and I study in university and live in student housing. I'm also a trans man. When Covid started, I was in my fifth year in high school. In March, most of the school classes were given online, while the students were following from home. This was actually good for me, because I did not feel like I could be myself in school because I'm trans. So even though it was difficult to have remote education, on a social level it was better for me. People in school didn't understand me, and I had no friends. People in school and the direction knew about my identity, but it was never discussed openly. And I felt that there wouldn't be proper support for me. Maybe they would be by saying nice words, but it would be seen as something that is my choice and that I have to deal with the consequences. The remote education was quite bad, because teachers were not at all used to teaching online. They wouldn't know how to organize it, and sometimes just ended giving up a very large amount of task, too much really. We tried to talk to the school director, but ultimately it was up to the teacher to decide. There was an initiative to support students that had issues in accessing and using digital platforms, but I don't think much happened there. Afterwards, I decided to finish my exams before the school commission (note from researcher: this is a way to do exams without following classes). At first, this was closed because of Covid, but soon they realised it was important and it was opened. I finished my exams and graduated in

this way, and it was okay. There wasn't a lot of social contact needed because it is self-study. A few months ago, I moved to student housing and started studying at university. It is a big change and I tried to meet people through student organizations. Right when things were better, there was another lockdown, which broke off all social life. This was very difficult, for a week I struggled to even get out of bed. The University also says nice words about knowing that it is a difficult situation, but they refuse meaningful changes or measures that could help students to deal with this. As a trans person, I've had to deal with a lot of issues mentally, for which I have been going to the psychologist. I was very lucky because I was already undergoing my transition before Covid and was already receiving mental health support. The waiting list increased enormously during Covid, and my psychologist had very much work. Online counselling was not helpful for me, so I asked to do it in person. So, luckily, I was already getting these services, otherwise I would probably be waiting until now. On a social level, there has been an LGBTQI+ organisation in my hometown, that helped me a lot. I met some really good friends there. I also have such an organisation here in my university, and it really helps a lot. The difficult thing is when you can't meet physically, especially if you're not relaly friends yet. But we were lucky to be allowed by the univeristy to keep meeting.

**Specifically telling quotes:** When the lockdown in November happened, it was extremely difficult. Finally I was getting to know people and getting some social life, and then it all stopped. After that, I couldn't get out of bed for over a week.' 'The teachers don't know how to teach online at all, and instead most of them just gave us extreme amounts of work to do on our own.'

**Keywords:** Trans, education, lockdown, isolated, lonely, mental health, transition.

**BE03**

**Title:** Standing firm despite Covid

**Narrative:** Ray is a male radiotherapy nurse technologist in an hospital. I am 40 years old and I have been working there for seven years in the same unit. I did three years of nursing and one year of specialisation in medical imaging and I have just finished a master's degree in medical sciences. I'm not Belgian, I'm Burundian by origin and I've been in Belgium for 14 years. I have started like other by being to a reception centre, then got my papers and started studying. At the beginning of the crisis, working conditions were very difficult in the hospitals: no masks were given and if you had one, you had to put your name on it, keep it on all day, or write down how many you had taken. "We were sent to the battlefield without ammunition, we had no equipment. We had to treat all patients even if they had covid. We work with immunocompromised patients so it is also dangerous for them, but we had no protection. We were sent to the floors to help without knowing the patient's information. We had colleagues who caught the covid and contaminated the others. As we were short-staffed, we were obliged to work even if we had Covid, unless we didn't really standing anymore on our legs. We

depended on the authorities, and when you love what you do you “sacrifice” yourself a little. It was really hard. Today, the situation remains complicated, we can't afford to be tested every day. There is nothing organised by the hospital. A fortnight ago, I went to the pharmacy to buy a self test myself, I had to pay for it myself, I was not reimbursed. As the test was positive, I was prescribed a PCR test and this confirmed that I had caught Covid. I had caught it in hospital, but still I had to pay for the test myself. I find that the hospital could have reimbursed me the 8 euros for the test. The hospital's policy is to make you work, you have to have really bad symptoms to stop working. Otherwise, the hospital would have to close down due to lack of caregivers. They need us. Nobody dares to complain to the management because they are afraid of the consequences too. We have heard about extra money from the authorities for nurses, but where is it? We don't see anything. It's given to the hospitals and we don't see anyone coming to reinforce the teams, nothing has changed. What has this money been used for? we are given less and less time to care for patients. Before we had 15 minutes, now we are given 10 minutes, it means that we don't know how to take care of patients properly, we do a minimum of cleaning, we don't have time to give them all the information on the services available outside the hospital. I don't understand how patients don't rebel, they pay a lot for a bad service. There are aspects that are totally illogical in this crisis because we hear that we have to be careful, to protect ourselves and others and in particular to be vaccinated. But when you go home by public transport, we are all on top of each other, there is no way to respect the distances. Today they want to impose vaccination on nurses, but we have been exposed to the virus for months without any weapon, without protection. I am vaccinated, but I have a colleague who is not and who told me that she would leave the profession if vaccination became compulsory for us. I also work in a private testing centre (in a chemistry), and the test costs 32 euros. It's impossible for many people to pay that every time he or she wants to do an activity, like going to a restaurant. If you have money, you take your car, you pay for the test, but for the others who have to take public transport, who have to pay again and again for tests if they want to travel, have hobbies or visit a person in hospital.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “At the beginning we were sent to the battlefield without ammunition. Today we have masks, we can change, that's good, but for the rest nothing has changed, we must continue to work unless we have really important symptoms. We have to go to work, it's hard but we don't have enough staff. There has been talk (at policy level) of extra funds for “white coats” (Fonds blouses blanches), but we haven't seen anything.”

**Keywords:** Nurse, Vaccination, protection, infection, hospital, costs, public transport, support, working conditions, patient, class.

**BE04**

**Title:** Increased socio-economic difficulties due to the crisis.

**Narrative:** "I am 34 years old, married and have two children, a 12-year-old girl and a 4-year-old boy.

I live in Belgium since 2003, I didn't study much and I don't speak French very well, but I get by. My husband works and we are lucky because during the crisis the company he worked for went bankrupt and he was unemployed for almost a year. It was very difficult, the rent is quite expensive, it's increasing, the bills are increasing but the salary is the same. It's very difficult for us because if we get 1200-1300 euros and the rent is 1000 euros, what do we have left? Nothing at all. If I have to shop, I always go to the cheapest shops (Aldi, Lidl). Some people can go to the other shops, but we can't.

Normally, children's studies are free but sometimes we have to pay for homework support, school trips. We haven't moved since 2018 because we don't have the money to do so and then there were difficulties (her husband is not vaccinated) but anyway we don't have the money.

I'm looking for work, if I could find it easily, but I didn't study for it and I have back problems, but if I could do some shopping and be useful to people, that would be good. At the moment I am stuck with the children at home. I signed up for sewing classes and paid for it and then finally it stopped because of covid and for me now it's not possible because I'm focused on the children and finding accommodation. When I get one, I can go back to training. As we have everything in a box to be able to move, I don't even have the space to use my sewing machine (she shows me later that it is stuck on a table).

Children don't have much space here. We were with them all the time, locked in the flat, we didn't know what to do with them, they were always watching TV. We can't leave them alone because they are still too small, and the neighbourhood is not safe. My children share the same room, and my daughter was attending classes in her room, the little one wanted to play, and she needed silence. It was not easy at all. I hope she finishes primary school well, that she will succeed. They say she's doing well. The teachers were available to answer questions, I think it went well for her. It was quite difficult with the little one who wanted to play but there is no one there, his sister has to study, there is a big difference in age, we mustn't make noise and he plays a little with us but it's not enough, so he cries. he likes to play with the others but there is no activity, it's difficult. I know no one here, even with my sister's kids, everyone stays at home.

At the moment we are looking for another place to live, because this one has been sold. We have to leave in 4 months. We're looking everywhere and we can't find anything with three bedrooms and a rent we can afford. I have been registered for social housing since 2013 and I am still waiting. They tell me "we're doing work in the houses", "we're making progress" but I don't know when I'll have a new place to live and that makes me anxious. I don't want to be in the street with my children. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It's hard for everyone. The rent goes up, the bills go up, but the salary stays. If you get through the month, that's good enough. I see young

Belgian people, begging in the street, with no place to sleep, so I say nothing. It is hard for everyone, not harder for us, at least I have a roof. This crisis changed everything.”

**Keywords:** Housing, cost of living, unemployment, children, work, pay.

**BE05**

**Title:** Betty's Desire to See Her Family More Regularly Again

**Narrative:** “I am Betty and I am an 89-year-old woman living with my 89-year-old husband in an apartment in a big Belgian city. I have three children, each with their own kids, and I also have one great grandchild, who was born in January 2021. Because I have always done the domestic and child-rearing work, I have never been employed and, as a result, I rely on my husband's pension, which is sufficient for us. I still do most of the chores around the home, doing the laundry and ironing clothes, cooking dinner, etc. But I do get help cleaning the apartment from a nice woman (sent by a cleaning service) every two weeks. We have always really liked to travel and to have dinner in local restaurants, but we started doing this less and less due to our advanced age. The onset of the pandemic has caused us to stop doing these activities completely. While it is disappointing, it was starting to become a fact of life that we wouldn't be able to keep this up, in any case.

The biggest impact I've felt from the pandemic was not being able to see my newly born great grandchild nearly as much as I would have liked. Whereas before the pandemic, there were regular family gatherings at our apartment or at one of my children's homes for birthdays or Christmas, now we barely see each other. I've only been able to see the little one three times so far, so I'm missing him growing up and that saddens me.

When the pandemic had just started, the woman who cleans our apartment kept coming over at her regular pace, so there was no trouble on that front. For a few years now, we are also visited by a physiotherapist every week who helps me with my severe back pains. He kept visiting during the early stages of the pandemic (and beyond) as well, so luckily my pain has not become worse. My husband used to swim regularly at the pool before Covid, but the only exercise he gets now is going to the grocery store. About a year ago, he was diagnosed with arteriosclerosis, which makes him tired pretty quickly and causes him to forget things, so that has made Covid somewhat harder and more frustrating on me.

I am, however, very grateful that they managed to develop and provide vaccines so quickly, so that we could have people visit more often again. For our first two shots, we had to go to a vaccination centre that isn't so close by, but they did provide us with a taxi service that cost us only 10 euros to go there and back. Guidance inside the centre was very good as well. For the booster shot, however, we had to provide for our own taxi: we had to pay 40 euros, which is fine, but I did have to think about all those elderly people

who wouldn't be able to afford something like that. I'll gladly get my fourth shot whenever I will have to do so, which I suspect is soon. One thing I don't understand is why some young people seem so intensely opposed to the vaccine: back when I was younger, we didn't have nearly the amount of information available about medicine and vaccines as we do now, but we still got our injection without really complaining.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I really like it when the children visit, especially the great grandchild. (...) But now, I had to wait five months after the birth to be able to see him. That was a real letdown for me." "The vaccination went really well, although I have to say that the booster vaccine cost us more than the first two (...) Forty euros for a taxi instead of ten."

**Keywords:** Elderly woman, mental health, misses family

**BE06**

**Title:** Working without papers during a pandemic

**Narrative:** "My name is Charlotte. I'm a 33-year-old woman from the Philippines, living in Belgium. I became undocumented around the time that the pandemic started. I had come to Belgium as a student and finished my Advanced Master with high distinction. I received an offer from a professor to do a PhD, so I stayed. Legally, students have the right to stay in the country they graduated in for 9 months to look for a profession in their domain. However, this EU law had not yet been implemented in Belgium, and the Belgian bureaucracy was not replying to me. I therefore remained in a legal gray zone. It later turned out that my degree was not eligible to be recognized for PhD funding. It was when this happened that the pandemic also happened. Suddenly, I was undocumented during a global health crisis. This was very scary, and I lived in a precarious situation because I did not have any income, and I had to pay rent. I did not have any support system here. I had been finding student jobs in manual labor and cleaning, but in my position, I couldn't do it anymore during the pandemic.

I did an internship in an NGO, but they paid me the volunteer rate, even though the work I was doing was at the level of a staff member. I demanded higher pay, which they did for 2 out of 6 months. I had to combine this with other freelance opportunities, that I received from my network back home. But there was a lot of uncertainty about my income, and a very high workload. Because of the constant anxiety and pressure, I had a burnout, and fell into a depression. This worsened when my landlord wanted me to move out, and in Belgium it's difficult to get housing if you don't have papers. Luckily, he allowed me to stay, but this took a heavy toll on me. And there is no break, and you constantly fear to be without income or to be 'found out', even though I didn't do anything wrong. I was applying for jobs, but got rejected a lot, because the skills I had from home were not recognized here. This was very bad for me, and the whole context gave me suicidal thoughts. I had some support here in Belgium from my partner and

others, but I needed improvements in my personal situation. But you can't get papers without working, and you can't work without papers, that doesn't make sense. Around January of 2021, I found job with an international organization. I like the work, and it makes me feel valued. But I have to send my wage to the Philippines, and then let my family send me the money, and we pay a lot of fees for that transfer. So, it's still difficult, as long as I don't get my papers."

**Specifically telling quotes:** Work is good now, but the anxiety is always there, you're always waiting to be found out, and to be told you can't do this, or you are not allowed to this or that'. 'I stopped being close to trains, because I was in a state where I could throw myself in front of the tracks'.

**Keywords:** Undocumented, migrant, depression, anxiety, burnout, exclusion, injustice, work, exploitation, lack of access

**BE07**

**Title:** Healthcare access as an undocumented person

**Narrative:** "My name is Charlotte. I'm a 33 year old woman living in Belgium from the Philippines. After I finished my studies in Belgium, I became undocumented, around the time that the pandemic started. I feared that I wouldn't be able to access healthcare because of my status, or that I would die alone in a hospital in a country that is foreign to me. In this time period, I tried to be a student again, but because I didn't have a legal residence status, this was denied and I was told to go home, even though it is a global pandemic, and the situation was horrible in the Philippines. However, because I already known in the system, and because I told the insurance I was going to be a student (which I still believed at that point), they gave me insurance. This was good, but I was scared that somehow it would not be given anyway if they found out I had no legal status anymore. I got a very bad toothache at some point, and I waited 10 days to not go to the doctor, until it was too bad.

Later on I found out that you can go to a municipality and ask for a health card that gives you basic access to healthcare, even if you are undocumented. But this information is not easily available, and it feels like they don't talk about this on purpose. As an undocumented person, you constantly feel scared to go to any official authorities, because you fear negative consequences. You need to show your ID when you want to access healthcare, and if you don't have, you don't know what will happen, and this creates a lot of stress and anxiety. And it was difficult to see people have access to such good healthcare, but be excluded from it, not be able to get help for burnout, depression, and other health issues.

When the government sent masks to every citizen, I didn't get anything. I was afraid I was going to miss out on the vaccine. Luckily, my partner and his mother called the

vaccination center, and because I was already in the system somehow, they allowed me to get vaccinated, despite my status. But in Belgium you needed to have a certificate to prove your vaccination if you wanted to do things. But because of my status, I couldn't use the digital services to get it. So my partner called and through my old ID number, they sent a paper certification. Government services don't speak English usually, and they often can't help you if you don't fit in the right box. So, I was lucky to have people help me. I hope that your project can think what it means to be undocumented and help undocumented people."

**Specifically telling quotes:** When you go ask for services like healthcare, you always have to show your ID. And if you don't have one, this is very stressful and is a powerful deterrent.' 'In a country where healthcare is so good, I felt I was being the only one that wasn't allowed to have it, that I was being excluded from receiving the same care'

**Keywords:** lack of access, undocumented, anxiety, exclusion, fear, healthcare, care

**BE08**

**Title:** The Influence of Covid on My Education as a Medical Student and Personal Life

**Narrative:** "I am Felix and I am a 25-year-old male medical student and general practitioner in training. I am currently living with my partner, who is also in the medical field, in a (rented) house in a big Belgian city. In 2020, before the pandemic, I was in my sixth year of studying medicine at the local university and I was pretty busy going to lectures, keeping up my social life, and interning at various medical institutions. I'm lucky I still got to experience those practical experiences without any of the difficulties we have now, as the last month of my internships ended just before the outbreak of the pandemic.

Right when Covid was becoming a serious issue, I had to choose what specific field I would be going into, and I was wavering between becoming a general practitioner (GP) on the one hand and going for a career in physical medicine and rehabilitation on the other. I was set to intern in physical medicine first to get a better perspective on it, but that discipline is practiced in the local hospital and was not considered an 'essential' discipline during Covid. As a result, the department was temporarily closed and I had to move on to other options. That meant interning as a GP, which might have influenced my later decision to go for GP, though it's difficult to say that was the reason in retrospect.

In the meantime, I was wrapping up my formal education, but most of our remaining lectures moved to an online format and some lessons were ultimately scrapped because they couldn't continue in person. We had a subdued 'drive-in' graduation ceremony around September 2020. While the graduation was obviously not the same as other years, with no parties or excursions, we still appreciated that the university made an effort to have it proceed. Afterwards, I started the specialised education track for GPs, where

we mostly had digital lessons again. It's a shame that this had to be the case, because you start with a smaller group of (mostly) new people, and you can get to know them and share your worries or difficulties if you're in the same classroom. That kind of fell away. In terms of actually learning, I do think that you retain less of what is covered in the lectures if they happen online. That isn't immediately a problem for me, as we don't have exams for these courses and I can't be 'graded' on them, but it's important to not miss out on crucial information. Ultimately, however, GPs-in-training are expected to be able to do their own research on the job, so if there is something that's unfamiliar, there are definitely ways to find the right answers.

Covid has had its influences on my personal life as well. For instance, I was still living with my parents in their house in 2020, but their relationship had become rocky sometime before the pandemic. When we were all forced to isolate, they had to spend a lot of time cooped up with each other and that probably helped cause a breaking point. They have since separated and are living in different places now. That has been a pretty big strain on my emotions."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "My lessons [as a GP] are now online (...) which is a shame, because you can normally go to each other and talk about what's going right, what's a bit more difficult, etc. You can't have that over the computer." "During corona, it didn't go very well between my parents, and then all of a sudden, they were locked up inside together. That resulted in some uncomfortable situations at home."

**Keywords:** General practitioner, medical student, digital education, little social life, parents separated

**BE09**

**Title:** Starting My First Medical Job in the Middle of Covid-19

**Narrative:** "I am Felix and I am a 25-year-old male medical student and general practitioner in training. I am currently living with my partner, who is also in the medical field, in a (rented) house in a big Belgian city. I started to work/intern as a general practitioner as part of my education just before the beginning of the pandemic. While this work is formally still part of my education, I do get paid for it, I am able to build up my social rights (i.e., pension, unemployment benefits, ...) and I am treated like a normal colleague, so it can be considered my first real job.

When Covid started to gain ground in Belgium, a lot of people (temporarily) stopped coming to the practice I worked at and, because my supervisor was also responsible for the general health situation in a care home for the elderly, I basically started my 'GP' job taking care of Covid-19-infected people living in a care home. I did this for about a month and it was hard, but I was in good hands luckily; my supervisor was always there to support me, and I could ask for assistance if there was something I was uncertain

about. I also wasn't responsible for specific patients, but I helped wherever it was needed. It was very impressive how quickly they managed to overhaul the care home: the cafeteria was turned into a sick bay and the hairdresser's area was transformed into a makeshift intensive care unit.

Back then, however, we had a very limited supply of face masks and only used the most protective ones when around Covid patients. When in other settings, we used the masks that were sewn by volunteers in the local area. Because I am young, I wasn't too concerned about catching the virus, but it still was something that was in the back of your mind. Ultimately, I haven't contracted it to this day. Another problem we dealt with was a lack of oxygen, so we had to call around very frequently to ensure that we had enough of a supply. It was difficult to see or hear of people passing away: sometimes after the weekend was over, you returned to find that some people you had gotten to know a little had succumbed to the illness. But in the moment, you don't have time to dwell on that and you just keep going.

A few months later, I graduated and started an actual GP job/internship at a practice not too far from where I live. However, I did start when the second Covid wave was beginning to take off and I immediately had to adapt to those circumstances. I got my first real responsibilities, but this was then combined with, for example, ensuring that there is always enough ventilation, wearing a mask and face shield, ensuring that the patients are allowed to be there (Covid tests were done in dedicated testing centres at that time), etc. Those are all small things, but they add up and give a very different dynamic to a normal GP consultation. That's what I imagine at least, as I haven't worked in a 'normal' setting yet.

At some point in the fourth wave (fall-winter 2021), the responsibility for Covid testing largely fell on GP practices. It became extremely busy then, and it was frustrating to have lots of people with very mild symptoms come over and take up a spot that could've otherwise been reserved for people with other issues. Moreover, it has led to a huge administrative burden (which was already sizeable before), as we had to provide signed certificates to employers stating that people had to isolate themselves and couldn't make it to work. Right now, in the spring of 2022, the testing responsibility has been shifted away again and cases are dropping, so we're approaching some semblance of normalcy, which I haven't been able to experience yet."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "When I returned after the weekend on Monday, there were always one or two people that I had been following up before and gotten to know a bit that had passed away. That's pretty tough to experience." "There were times that it was very busy in terms of testing [at the GP practice] (...) It was unfortunate that people with only mild symptoms took up a spot that could've been taken by someone else, especially because you only need to swab the inside of their nose quickly and that can be done by anyone, so to speak."

**Keywords:** General practitioner, care home, material limitations, administrative burden,

young

**BE10**

**Title:** Mother of at-risk son during covid

**Narrative:** “My name is Donna, I am 61 and come from Southern Europe, but I’ve lived in Belgium for 30 years now. In the beginning of Covid, the uncertainty to what this virus is was stressful. No good information was available, no idea what could happen. My son, who has a disability, was studying in a big city abroad. My first concern when Covid started spreading was to see him and to have a plan B if it is serious. When I visited him, I saw that it was serious. My son didn’t want to come back to Belgium with me, but I didn’t want to leave him. In the end, we came home together. It was sad to see that big city so quiet.

We managed to come back; it was a relief but stressful because every small symptom could be Covid. This uncertainty was bad. And the idea that I could infect my son was horrible, a nightmare. There was a lot of information, and I didn’t know what to believe; for example, whether to wear a mask or not. The government said masks don’t help, and I followed this advice. And it turned out masks do help. Politicians acted clueless and the caretaker government was communicating badly. I felt that we relaxed and became complacent after WW2. No morality or responsibility from our leaders.

At work, I was working with a bad boss, she just didn’t like me. She wasn’t talking to me, and cut meetings short with me. And the colleagues were unmotivated and unskilled. I had to carry the load for them. This lasted two years, and this ended with a burnout during Covid. Covid enhanced this dynamic, because of teleworking and style of working and communication. I stayed in burnout for a year and a few months. Contact with the medical insurance was exclusively via phone. They put me in a reintegration scheme, without telling me that it could mean that I could get fired easily without compensation. This was a nightmare, I had to look for a job at 61, with fear of losing everything. It's horrible to be sick, but to experience this. In the end, I got a job offer. Starting this new job is not easy, but people are nicer. It is more social, with more teamwork. I got used to teleworking, and I like the combination. I got used to the new circumstance and use the advantages of teleworking. I don’t feel bad if I work less to relax, because I have given so much already.

During Covid, I was happy to be in a country with good healthcare and social security. Even taxes felt fair. But since my son is in a risk group, I tried to ask for help to get vaccines early or get some guarantee that son would get a spot in hospital if necessary, and this was not possible. And that was disappointing, because it was medically necessary. But this Covid was so bad, that I understand that there was some chaos in medical services. The new government was better and had more active policies.

Despite hardship, I am glad to have spent time together, experienced new connection with nature, with my son. Hard that my older son was not next to me, very morbid that you show love by not touching your family. Small signs of friendship continued in a different form, but there was also lack of community in my neighborhood, which is sad.

**Specifically telling quotes:** It was morbid that you show love to your loved ones by not being with them, not touching them'. 'During this time, I explored a new world, I connected more with nature and with my son, and for this I'm grateful'.

**Keywords:** Disability, age, risk group, burnout, work, anxiety, access to care, bad government



## Bulgaria

### BG01

**Title:** A young female student faces hardships with distant learning and suffers psychological difficulties with socialization long after the lockdown.

**Narrative:** "I am a 15-year-old female high school student from Pernik, Bulgaria. I live with my mother and my brother. I also spend weekends with my father who lives in the capital Sofia. My grandparents live in the nearby block in my hometown, so I see them almost every day when I go to have lunch with them. In my everyday life, I go to school. I like to go out with friends, hang around town, and listen to music, and in summer, I like to take walks with my dog.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown that we had because of it in 2020 was tough for me. The biggest change for me was that for three months, between March and June 2020, I spent my time only with my family. I like them, but I missed going to school and being with my friends. I really missed socializing with people in school and being outside. I kept contact with my friends online, and we also sometimes talked on the phone, but it wasn't the same. I had the feeling the world is in a big crisis and all my family and friends too.

After this strict lockdown in 2020 passed, we started meeting with my friends again. But I felt strange to be outside with many people. This still makes me feel very uncomfortable. Now in school, when the teacher wants me to examine me in front of the class, I get very nervous. I don't like having so many people looking at me. I often can't talk, or my voice trembles because I feel like I'm going to say something stupid in front of all these people.

School is very difficult when we're online. In 2020/2021, we studied half online, half in person. The same is now in the winter of 2021/2022. Distant learning for me is not nice. At first, in March 2020, it was impossible. Our teachers had no idea how to use all these digital tools because they are older and haven't worked with computers so much. Many of the teachers just sent us written presentations. We had to read and learn from them without having online live lessons because they didn't know how to do this, or didn't want to do it. This was in Biology, Geography, and History. In Math it was also difficult even though we had online lessons. The teacher didn't have a blackboard to write the math problems, so she was only telling them verbally and it was really complicated to grasp anything. In Physical Education, the teacher was sending us presentations about different sports and also some exercises to do at home, but I don't think any of us did any of them. I almost didn't move or go out for months. When we had long periods of online learning, I was getting very tired from being at the computer and on my phone the whole day. My head was hurting, and I felt dizzy. Also in 2020 was my last year with my previous class and it was very sad we couldn't be together. I think this got us quite

distanced from each other afterwards. I know that some of the boys in my class enjoy studying at home because they can play video games during the classes and their parents won't know. But I get very distracted at home, and now I also get more easily distracted when we are in school too.

I was very happy when we could go back to school in person. But they keep changing this because when there are many sick people in the hospitals, they close the schools again and we go online. When we have periods in school, some of the parents still want to keep their children at home, so even when we have live classes in school, some kids are online. The parents are either worried from the virus or they are afraid that if the kid gets sick, they will have to stay in quarantine with them too and won't be able to go to work and so on.

My family had some troubles during this period too. My mother kept her job, but my father couldn't work during the lockdown and sometime afterwards, so he had problems with money and couldn't give so much to me. They were both worried and seemed not very happy. Also, at one point my grandparents got ill with Covid. My grandfather was very sick for a long time and even had to go to the hospital for two weeks. At some point I was really scared for him. My mom told me there was no oxygen in the hospital and that this was not nice for him. I got sick with Covid in August 2021 also. We were at the seaside with my school class and most of us got ill. The rest of the people were fine, but I had a difficult time because I got pneumonia and had to go to the hospital. I was scared at first, but then not so much, but spending time in the hospital was horrible. The conditions were bad, and I couldn't talk with my friends so much, and the doctors kept giving me antibiotics."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I still feel self-conscious when I'm around many people outside."

"For me the worst is having to study from home. There are so many distractions at home!"

"I felt like the whole world was in a crisis, and my family too."

**Keywords:** difficulties in education; stress; social isolation; long-lasting psychological effects; family problems and worries

## BG02

**Title:** A Polish lesbian who ran away to Bulgaria because of homophobia suffers for her country's stance on LGBT issues while locked away during the pandemic.

**Narrative:** "I am a 30-year-old woman from Poland. I've been living in Sofia, Bulgaria for three years now. I am a lesbian and I moved here because the situation with the LGBT community in my home country was bad, and here I feel safer. I work as a support provider in game development. I live with a flatmate, but during the lockdowns in 2020 I was living alone.

The start of the Covid-19 pandemic was very stressful and difficult for me not only because of the social isolation and the fear from the virus. I was also very worried about the things that were happening in Poland. Around the same time, the president said that LGBT are not people, but that it's an ideology. As it's well-known, the government is very anti-gay and there are these LGBT-free zones in the country. For the first time in my life, during the lockdown, I felt as an LGBT person - before I just knew I'm a lesbian, but my social circle accepted me as I am. I was locked away in Sofia, lonely, and feeling that someone back home thinks I'm not a human being - that I'm some sort of freak who is not wanted and liked. This was particularly heavy for me exactly because it was happening at the start of the pandemic. There was so much fear and insecurity in the air about our health and lives and on top of this, all this hatred at home against LGBT. Those two things merged, and I felt guilty I'm not in Poland to take part in the protests. At the same time, I also felt blessed I'm in Bulgaria and not there where things are getting crazier and crazier.

The sudden loneliness from the lockdown was stressful at first. I was locked alone and cried because I was also angry and sad about all the news from Poland. But actually, here in Bulgaria it wasn't so bad for me. It was confusing but I took something from it. One day you're socializing and partying, and the next day you need to stay at home. At first everything was very strict - we were just sitting locked at home. But gradually, I felt that finally I had time for myself - I started doing yoga and painting. Actually, after a few months when we could start socialising again, I felt the pressure of meeting people again. Somehow during the lockdown, no one wanted anything from me, and I could stay with myself for some time. When you're around people, you're not so connected with yourself, but when you're alone - you just have to connect with yourself, and that can be very useful. I also started doing psychotherapy at last, so I would say my overall self-care grew a lot. This doesn't mean that I found this period to be easy - I was lonely and I did suffer from this.

Because of the lockdown, our office closed, and we all had to work from home. Technically, this wasn't too difficult, and we could do it, so I didn't lose my job or anything. But working from home requires a lot of discipline because otherwise you end up sitting in front of the computer all day long. At first, I enjoyed it because I could wake up five minutes before my workday started and just go for it. But after one month, I felt that my body was sore, everything hurt. I went outside very rarely and that wasn't so good. Some of my friends gained a lot of weight during this time. For sure, my work-life balance suffered a lot, and the physical and psychological effects were not so good. When you go to the office, you go out to work and come back from it, so there's this space to leave and arrive. And your home remains your home only. With work from home, my apartment had to become everything - my living room, dining space, and working station. There is no 'safe space' from work obligations somehow. But in terms of actual work, my productivity actually grew because I had a lot of flexibility. I think I did become a better employee. At the same time, it's more difficult now to get noticed and promoted because we're not in the office environment and our work is not so 'exposed'

to the eyes of the managers and so on.

Regarding my family back in Poland, I had a huge issue because my mother didn't want to be vaccinated. I have a brother who is 11 years older than me, but I am the one among us who is 'responsible' for my aging mom. I was very distressed and worried about her getting sick with Covid. I was calling her every day to ask her to get vaccinated. I literally begged her. I told her, "I'm so far away, do it for me, please. If something happens to you, I have to live with this until the end of my life. I felt that once she is vaccinated, I cannot do anything more to protect her. So she finally did it after weeks and months of my persuasion, and I could get calmer, at least a bit. In general, I like Bulgaria a lot and I don't feel discriminated because I'm a foreigner or because I'm a lesbian. I like the country and the people, and they reflect that back to me."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I felt guilty I'm not in Poland to join my LGBT friends in fighting against the government's position - and especially during the lockdowns."

"I couldn't sleep at night because my mother didn't want to get vaccinated, and I felt that if something happens to her, it's going to be my fault."

**Keywords:** foreigner, lesbian, LGBT discrimination, family responsibilities, work-life balance, loneliness, self-care

### BG03

**Title:** A pensioner woman struggles with the loss of half of her income and with taking care of her elderly parents.

**Narrative:** "I'm a 68-year-old woman and I live in Sofia in my own small flat. My husband worked in Romania for many years, so I almost always lived alone. My son is grown up and he lives away with his family. When my husband had to come home from Romania six years ago, just 10 days before his birthday, he had a heart attack and passed away. Since then, I was left completely alone.

When the pandemic started, there was an immediate effect on my life. The international travel company I was working at fully stopped its activities because of the lockdowns and the closed borders. Even though I'm a pensioner for a few years now, I was working there for extra income and to be around people. I really wanted to keep working because this makes me feel alive. But for almost two years now, they can't revive the company, so I can't go back to that job.

In general, I wasn't that scared in the pandemic situation. I didn't isolate myself fully as some people did. One of my cousins didn't go out for three months and she went crazy. I went out every day – I always found some tasks to take care of. I still wanted to be around people. During the first lockdown, there was a stupid measure that said people

couldn't take walks in the park. You could only go there if you're walking your dog (but you couldn't take a walk in the park with your child, for example). So I was taking the neighbor's dog, just so I could take a walk outside.

The biggest worry during the pandemic was about my elderly parents – they were both above 85 years old. They lived in a village near Sofia and me and my sister, we had to find ways to bring them food and medicine almost every day. We were scared not to infect them with the virus. They never got sick from this though. They turned out to be more resistant than we thought. They died one by one in the next months, but from other causes.

Losing my job was bad because it meant that I lost half of my income – my salary was as much as my pension is. Since then, I've been trying to find a new job, but it's very difficult. On the one hand, I'm a pensioner and not everyone wants to hire elderly people. On the other hand, many businesses in the service sector just closed and sacked employees, or if they haven't, the salaries are miserable. So it's very difficult. I would be very happy to find a job that's, say, half a day, so I can better support myself financially.

Even though I think I'm quite tough and I'm dealing well with all the challenges, I lost half of my teeth during this period. I don't know if it was the pandemic, the stress from having to take care of my parents in these conditions or from their death, or just my age. But also, it feels really bad to be thought of as old – like this measure that the government introduced that 65+ year-old people can go to the shops only at certain hours during the day. That makes you feel really bad – that you're thought of as that old.

I'm really worried about the separation in society today. There is so much hatred, social frustration and anger. Society got split already at the start of the pandemic, and at that time also, the measures were completely stupid. For example, tourist buses from Italy were arriving and nobody was checking them – if people who were arriving were sick. Everything was so chaotic. At the same time, politicians and the media were creating panic about how serious the virus is and how the body bags won't be enough for all the people who are about to die. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "When the pandemic started, me and my sister, we were really worried: how are we going to take care of our old parents without getting them infected?"

"I've seen so many difficulties in my life that this virus couldn't scare me. But losing half of my income and my social contacts was very tough."

**Keywords:** job loss, poverty, care for elderly parents, social isolation, frustration with inadequate measures, stress

**BG04**

**Title:** A Yemeni female refugee faces increased discrimination and difficulties in the everyday life

**Narrative:** "I'm a 31-year-old woman from Yemen. My father escaped first from the war in Yemen and came to Bulgaria to start a new life. The rest of the family – we came through Jordan and Turkey to Bulgaria, with my mother, two brothers and two sisters. This was in July 2015. We eventually got the status of refugees. In 2017, I married here in Bulgaria to a Yemeni man. We now have two children, and we live in Sofia. I work as a customer support agent in an international company because I speak a couple of languages. My husband and brothers also work there. I am currently on maternity leave because my second child is three months old. I plan to return to work in three months.

In terms of work and finances, my family was very lucky. When the pandemic started, our company moved its operations online, so we could all work remotely. We were fortunate not to lose our jobs. In fact, the company kept hiring more people to work online. But I have many friends, especially refugees, who used to work at restaurants and hotels. They lost their jobs and their situation was really difficult because of the conditions in the pandemic.

For my family, the start of the pandemic was very scary in practical and psychological terms. There was a big panic about how we would manage. We had to buy new cleaning materials, to keep everything tidy and to isolate ourselves socially. We didn't use the public transport because of the virus, so we had to take care of chores by walking around.

Because of the pandemic, I was scared to give my elder child to kindergarten, so I kept him at home. So I take care of both children at home while my husband works. This is often quite tiring, but this is how it is now.

Something I noticed after the start of the pandemic is that people in Bulgaria became more suspicious towards me. When I take my kids to the playground, they play with the other children there. But when the parents see me – that I'm not a Bulgarian and I'm wearing a hijab – they take their children away. This is very painful for my kids because they love playing with others. It's difficult to explain to them why the locals started being afraid of us, like we will carry the virus more.

My father got sick with Covid while he was traveling, so I couldn't take care of him. But my mother got sick here, and this was very scary. I felt very bad because I couldn't take care of her since I was pregnant, I couldn't stay with her. But because she lives nearby, I could cook and shop for her and then I would put everything in front of the door. Among my siblings – I have two brothers and two sisters – I am the eldest girl. So I have a big responsibility to take care of my parents. Luckily, she got better. But then when she got the vaccine, she also got very sick. For three days I was taking care of her because she felt very bad.

My whole family is fully vaccinated, also with boosters. I am not vaccinated yet because I was pregnant recently and now I'm breastfeeding, so the doctors told me to wait a bit. Also, one of my friends who got vaccinated – her baby didn't want to breastfeed anymore. So I'm afraid of that and I'll wait. I plan to get vaccinated after the sixth month of breastfeeding. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It was very scary when my mother got sick with Covid because I couldn't be with her in her flat. I was very worried and as the eldest child, I have a responsibility to take care of my parents."

**Keywords:** refugee, woman, religious discrimination, responsibility towards parents, difficulties in daily activities, child caring

## BG05

**Title:** An elderly owner of a small publishing house suffers the loss of cultural and social life and is disturbed by the strong focus in the public space on 'protecting the elderly'.

**Narrative:** "I'm a 65-year-old woman and I live in Sofia with my husband in our own apartment. We are both pensioners, but we still work because we are quite active. I have three children who are grown up and live away from us. My profession is a literary translator, editor and publisher. I've been running a small independent publishing house for many years now. My parents died a long time ago, as did my husband's, so we are the eldest members of our family.

My everyday work situation did not change that much with the Covid-19 pandemic. My work is quite sedentary – it involves sitting at the computer during the whole day because I'm either translating or editing, or preparing funding applications for my publishing house. So in this sense, my day-to-day life didn't change so much. But before, when I would go out to get some chores done around town, I always tried to walk as much as possible. Now I go out less often because of the pandemic and I have less contact with bookstores and book sellers. The long hours at home have a negative psychological effect, and I miss both the physical movement and the live socialization with colleagues and partners.

I never had a big financial return from my publishing house, so it was always my husband who was supporting the family. The sales have always been small, but now there is an additional decrease also. The biggest negative impact from the pandemic on my industry is that many small bookstores closed. For publishing houses like mine – small and more boutique – this is a big deal because this type of bookstores was a big partner for publishing houses like mine. So this is a big change, and it has both a negative financial effect and a negative impact on how I can distribute my books.

In addition, less literary readings are held and less and less publishers make book premieres. I couldn't go to Frankfurt for one such big event last year, which is a pity. I got the news that more than half of the publishers didn't go at all. The big literary festival here in Bulgaria was held online. But I don't feel like virtual reality will be able to steal me. I think it's a very big issue for the world, this virtual world – but I think us elderly people are less susceptible to that.

I haven't been to a theater play, cinema or a concert for two years because I'm afraid I may get sick, even though I've been vaccinated. This makes me very sad. I really miss this cultural life because it's very important for me. Also, I usually buy books at the book market because I get discounts from other publishers. I always buy more books than I can read and more than I can afford actually. I love spending hours walking around the market to choose books. Now, I don't spend so much time there because it's in a closed space where a lot of people go, and I'm afraid I may get ill.

Isolating elderly people during the lockdown and in general during this pandemic is truly unpleasant. History shows that isolation is always the predecessor of new totalitarian regimes. I never identify myself so much with my age. I'm also not so sure that I am so much more vulnerable to the virus than others. I don't think it's a good idea to put this into the heads of elderly people because they can panic and get scared. It's important if a person gets sick, that they don't panic because then they block their immune system. There was a rule for some time that elderly people could do their shopping in stores only at certain hours of the day. When I went to the shop and they asked me how old I was, I felt confused. A few times they didn't allow me to buy my groceries because it wasn't the right time for me to be in the shop – because I'm in the elderly group. This is 'fake care', I think, and I don't see it as an effective measure.

The pandemic has an effect on our connections within the family too. My daughter has two daughters with whom I love spending time. Now I see my grandchildren less and less often also because they go to school, and with my husband, we take care that we don't get sick from them. This is really unpleasant. My daughter also is afraid that the kids may infect us; she would feel responsible for us if that would happen.

I had some worries about getting vaccinated, but finally I did, in order to be able to participate in cultural events. It was very confusing – everything around the vaccines – because even though I'm vaccinated, I can still transfer the virus to other people. So the question of personal responsibility is a big one. I think that in the whole pandemic, there is a lot of manipulation – and pushing us to greater isolation that serves certain interest."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "To me the strong focus on protecting the elderly seems like 'fake care' that doesn't really work." "I miss a lot my social and cultural life."

**Keywords:** social isolation, lack of physical movement, negative health and psychological effects, loss of cultural life, discrimination towards the elderly, less time with grandchildren

## BG06

**Title:** A young woman gathers strength to leave a toxic and abusive relationship during the pandemic.

**Narrative:** “I’m 32 years old and I’m from Dimitrovgrad. For the last 14 years, I’ve been living in Sofia. I finished my university education in Sofia. I’m working in the IT sector. I’m now living with my new boyfriend after the toxic relationship that I ended during the pandemic lockdown. The rest of my family consists of my parents and my brother, but I don’t live with them.

Exactly during the pandemic, or worsened by it, I had a very bad emotional experience in the relationship I was in. I was in a toxic and somewhat violent relationship for a long time before the pandemic started. We met at my previous workplace, and we spent 5 years together. When the pandemic hit and we were locked inside one apartment all the time, the relationship, which was already bad, got much worse. The first months of the lockdown were somehow bearable, but later the tension became worse. All side factors that distracted both of us disappeared - we couldn't even go to the office. We were stuck together at home, with both of us working from home. We couldn't even go to the shop. We were 24/7 at home, locked from the rest of the world. The only thing that exists for you at this moment is the person next to you. When he is abusive and he doesn't have something on the side to put his anger on, he puts it on you – in my case verbally, luckily, and not physically.

While our situation was not rosy before that, the lockdown was a very serious factor in worsening it. The news scared us every day about the virus, and this is a lot of pressure even if the relationship is going well. But when you have a violent partner, he puts it all only on you because you're the only person in front of his eyes. Before the pandemic, when he could go to work and see his family and friends, he could put his violence and aggression on them. Instead of shouting at me, he was doing this at his parents, and I was happy, at least it was not me. It was a pause for me. But as said, during the lockdown, this was not possible. No way to go out and get distracted. I felt like I was in a prison inside my home.

I wasn't financially dependent on him, luckily. But I was dependent on him because we lived together in his flat. He knew it very well and made me as dependent as he could. During the pandemic, he wanted us to live in his house outside the city. I was fully isolated from people. When I finally gathered strength to leave him, I had to come up with reasons to go back to Sofia to pick up my stuff and run away.

Regarding work, I didn't lose my job, as it didn't depend on the location we were working at, so I could continue working online. I even managed to find a better job.

When I changed my job and started earning more money, actually, I got the extra power

to leave the relationship.

Long before the pandemic, he started manipulating me not to communicate with my mother and brother and with my friends. So when the pandemic hit and the hotels were closed, I barely had any contacts, plus even the few friends that I had left wouldn't host me in their places because they were scared from the virus. So I felt I had no place to run to, no safe spot. I had to persuade myself that despite these conditions, I have to gather strength and leave anyway.

The pandemic, in fact, sped up the process of our breakup. I knew something was off from the first weeks of our relationship. But I thought it could be fixed. With the lockdown, the relationship became so horrible that it motivated me to leave. I could finally see that this is truly wrong, that I shouldn't bear all of this, not even a part of it. Towards the end of our relationship, he was regularly swearing and shouting at me, threatening to beat me up, throwing objects at me. I left in the beginning of 2021, so I spent almost a year in this hell. I was lucky not to have a child with him. One day, I called my mother. I hadn't talked to her for a year and a half. I just called her and told her, I'm coming back to you. She had no idea what was going on before that.

Regarding the rest of my family and the pandemic, I was scared for my mother because of the virus. She is a schoolteacher and she's elderly. I was worried that she could get infected at work. When I went back to Dimitrovgrad where she lives, I started helping her out in everyday life. I spent a few months with her there during which she went back to work in the school after months of teaching online. I decided to get vaccinated because of her – to protect her. Even though she was hesitant, I managed to persuade her to do it too;

Nowadays, I can say I have a happy ending to the story. With my new partner, we got Covid at the same time and we spent the quarantine together. Instead of fighting and shouting, this was an experience in which we helped and supported each other. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Before the pandemic, I almost felt happy when he was putting his anger on the rest of his family. But during the lockdown, I was the only person he could channel his anger on -- and it was horrible."

"I felt like I was in a prison inside my home."

**Keywords:** toxic relationship, gender-based violence, psychological abuse, social isolation, abusive partner, care and worries for an elderly parent, social isolation

**BG07**

**Title:** A single woman goes into full social isolation for a year and suffers serious mental health problems afterwards.

**Narrative:** “I’m 39 years old from Burgas. I have lived in Sofia for 20 years, along with my whole family - my parents, sister, and aunt, so I would say my life is here in the capital. I’m a freelance marketing consultant. I live alone.

The pandemic had a very damaging effect on me, but mostly on my mentality – on a couple of levels. The most visible aspect was work. The marketing project that I was working on in the beginning of 2020 was canceled. The investor had to close his business, so I lost this job, along with many other people. I was left without any income, alone at home. My work is connected with marketing and advertising, so during the pandemic, at this time of the year, people had to give up on this activity and direct their budgets to other more important things. Luckily I had savings. For months, I had no work at all. Nobody thought that marketing was necessary for their business.

The financial part, however, turned out not to be the biggest problem for me. The most important thing was my health and my relatives’ health. I lived in isolation almost for a whole year, totally limiting my contact with other people. I was living alone during this time, but I was visiting my parents. We were all worried for each other – my sister lived with my parents during the pandemic, but I was the one coming from outside so I had to take care because I was afraid for their health. I didn’t want to infect them. I was also afraid for myself and how I would react to the virus. I had no in-person social contacts beyond my family and I made no meetings with friends. When I started having projects again, I was working online at home all the time. All the communication was happening remotely. Then the psychological problems started. After this long period of isolation, I started having panic attacks. All the time, the fear of infecting my elderly parents and getting ill myself was very strong. I had a full nervous breakdown because of all this, I couldn't cope with it. Over time, I managed to get vaccinated. This helped me to reduce the fear from the virus. I worked with a psychotherapist as well, so I can cope with the fears. I’m still worried about getting infected, but I hope that because I’m vaccinated, it would not be a tough illness.

Many of my friends were careless about the virus. They thought it’s nothing to worry about. I was getting really angry with them, and I didn’t see them for a long time because I was isolating myself. To me, this was doing the right thing. Now this frustration is over, and we continue to be friends. But back then, I felt that they didn’t care about themselves and the people around them, and this made me angry.

I didn't have a relationship during this period, and I wasn't looking for one. During this period of isolation, I turned to other activities besides socialization, which I could do on my own, trying to still take care of myself. I started running in the park, doing more reading, and taking long walks. Still, I had these mental health problems, but I’m much better now and I think I’ve overcome them. ”

**Specifically telling quotes:** “After a year of social isolation, I started having panic attacks.”

“I had a complete nervous breakdown.”

**Keywords:** single woman, loss of job, financial problems, loneliness, social isolation, worries for elderly parents, panic attacks, mental health, alienation from friends, strong fears

**BG08**

**Title:** A lesbian struggles with a new relationship during the lockdown, while facing financial issues due to reduced workload and strong anxiety about her elderly parents.

**Narrative:** “I’m a 34-year-old woman from Sofia. I studied and lived in England for a long time, but I returned to Bulgaria 6 years ago. I have lived alone in a rented apartment since then. My parents live in Sofia also. I have an elder sister who is married and has two children - they also live nearby. I’m a healthcare practitioner with my own practice.

Just before the pandemic started, I had started a new relationship with a woman. It was going well, but the new circumstances put a lot of strain on the relationship. We couldn’t date, so we could meet only at home. All other social contacts were limited because of the lockdown, so we ended up spending a lot of time only together. I celebrated my birthday at home, only with her, just 10 days after meeting her. This made the relationship very intense, and it was specific. On one hand, it was great to have a close human being next to me during this challenging period. At the same time, there was a lot of demand. Somehow, she had to meet all my normal social needs – communication with friends and relatives whom I wasn’t meeting at that time. Lesbians anyway have the tendency to get very close very quickly and even to move in together soon after they start dating. The pandemic intensified things even more, which probably also caused our relationship to end rather quickly afterwards.

In terms of my work situation, it wasn’t very rosy at the start of the pandemic. As a self-employed health practitioner, the lockdown caused a lot of uncertainty. I experienced strong anxiety and stress about the future of my work and my financial situation. I have constant expenses every month that I have to cover, while my income is proportionally related to the number of the patients that I treat. When the pandemic started, in the unclear and chaotic situation, I had to take out a loan because my income stopped. I had to close the practice temporarily because there were no clear regulations about my profession and whether I could continue working. There were no hygienic supplies on the market too – like sanitizers and masks. From this point onward, a lot of my patients stopped their treatments because they were worried about the virus. Obviously, this led to even more financial insecurity and anxiety about my professional prospects. Once we got into the routine of disinfection, my work continued almost normally, only that I had to comply with stronger hygiene measures. My schedule since the pandemic started changes very often. I have a lot of last-minute cancellations because people get ill with

Covid or are contact persons of other ill people, etc.

As my parents are in a risk group because they are elderly, my biggest anxiety was actually for them. I was really worried that they may get ill, go to hospital or just die. As the daughter who is not yet married, I felt I have a bigger responsibility towards them than my married sister, who has a family of her own. To protect them, I avoided going to their place. We didn't see each other properly for a long time. We met only in the park once in a while during the whole 2020. We got together on Easter in 2021 only after my parents had gotten vaccinated. In the meantime, my sister and her family didn't want to meet anyone. They stayed mostly at home and didn't even go to the shop because they were scared about the virus. They ordered food to be delivered to their door and disinfected everything. I think the stress from the situation was getting to all of us. It was a difficult period, but I was happy we could still communicate and see each other from time to time.

Despite all the worries and the social isolation, I still continued to take good care of myself – I did sports, kept in touch with friends and even met with some of them, and so on. I had a very strong anxiety about the state of the world before the pandemic – but after the pandemic, the anxieties became so many and so strong that I just had to drop them all. I reached a high peak in anxieties and now I'm actually a bit calmer because I know I have no control over such large-scale phenomena. The world has its course and me worrying about it is not going to help. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I experienced strong anxiety and stress about the future of my work and my financial situation."

"I reached a high peak in anxieties and now I'm actually a bit calmer because I know I have no control over such large-scale phenomena. The world has its course and me worrying about it is not going to help."

**Keywords:** financial problems, loss of work, social isolation, anxiety, worrying about elderly parents, strain on lesbian relationship

**BG09**

**Title:** A Syrian refugee, single mother of three children, loses her income and struggles to make ends meet.

**Narrative:** "I am a 34-year-old woman from Syria. I had lived there my whole life. But when my husband was killed in the war in Syria, I had no choice but to flee with my children. That's why I came to Bulgaria four years ago. Here I work in the telecommunications field, with my knowledge of Arabic and Turkish. I have three children and I live with them in Sofia – a 13-year-old daughter, 11-year-old son, and 8-year-old son. They go to school here and they speak Bulgarian very well.

In the beginning of the pandemic and the lockdown in Bulgaria, I lost my job, as many other people did. The situation was very bad for me and my children. I couldn't secure food for them; it was really tough because they rely only on me. I received very little food aid, almost negligible. I didn't take any loans but just lived with whatever I had. I was without work for six months. I have a brother and sister in Germany, but they live on state aid, so they couldn't help me financially.

After these six months, I managed to find a new job, luckily. It is in telecommunications, as I speak Arabic and Turkish. I started working very hard in order to make ends meet. Because of the nature of my job, I can't work remotely. I always have to be in the office. So even in the highest peaks of the pandemic, I have been going to the office just because I had to keep my job and only finances. I was scared that I might get ill – but I had no choice. I was also worried about what will happen if I do, what if my children get ill too, and who will take care of them if something happens to me. But I kept going to work, taking a lot of care to stay healthy, because I needed money.

My children also had a lot of difficulties during the pandemic. They had to sit at home for more than a year because their education was online most of the time. It was tough for them and for me. They were studying at home but I couldn't help them much because they study in Bulgarian, and I don't know the language so well yet. They were getting behind with the school material sometimes. Also, it was so bad for them to stay inside all the time. They couldn't play and meet other children, socialize with their peers. They really needed other activities besides studying because they are kids. They were suffering a lot from this.

As for the pandemic itself, I was very scared of the virus at the start of the whole thing, both for myself and for my children. I am very thankful to God that it is no longer like this. I didn't get vaccinated because I'm very afraid of it also. I knew even before how hard it is to live in Bulgaria, but I couldn't get out of here and I was just working to be what I should be. But during the pandemic, I realized how bad it is to be in Bulgaria as a refugee because I simply do not receive any support, as is the case in other European countries. Now my children are going to school, but without any other activities that a child needs. It is very difficult here in Bulgaria. So I hope that I can find a place that can provide support and care for my children. At the same time, I did not feel discriminated against by the regular people.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “The situation was very bad for me and my children. I couldn't secure food for them.”

“During the pandemic, I realised how bad it is to be in Bulgaria as a refugee because I simply do not receive any support.”

**Keywords:** refugee, poverty, single mother, loss of job, difficulties with children's education, fear of the virus

## BG10

**Title:** A Roma mother of two loses most of her work and struggles with home schooling her son.

**Narrative:** "I'm a 42-year-old woman. I live in Sofia. I'm married and I have two children. My daughter is 22 years old and my son is 12 years old. My daughter is about to have a child now and she lives separately with her husband. I live with my husband and my son in a rented flat. I work as a cleaning lady for private clients. I have had stable clients for many years, so my work is usually quite alright.

The pandemic had a very negative effect on my work, however. When the lockdown was announced, I lost all of my work because my clients were afraid of the virus. Nobody wanted outside people coming into their homes. Even though they knew me well, people were scared because of all the horrible things they saw and heard on TV. My income is month for month, so I was left without money. My husband kept his job, so we managed to survive, but it was difficult. We also couldn't help my elder daughter with financial support.

The other really difficult thing for our family was my son not going to school. It was very tough for him. He had to stay at home all the time. He had difficulties with studying because everything was online. We had to quickly find a computer for him to use so he could study. But it was still not the same and he was upset. I had to help my son with his classes instead of his teachers. It was stressful for him and for me too. I was very worried that he would get very much behind his peers, but also maybe they didn't find it so easy to study online either. The teachers were not very helpful, they didn't know how to use the new technology so much. They were also stressed, probably from the virus and everything that was going on. So I had to learn the material that my son had to learn, so I could pass it on to him as well as I could.

The whole time I was not only worried about money and for my children, but I was also very scared of the virus, mostly for my family. I didn't want my husband and my children to get ill. The same goes for my elderly parents who live alone in another city. I didn't know what would happen. When the hospitals were full, I was only imagining how horrible it would be if one of us was so ill to need a hospital. It would have been hell. I'm very grateful that none of us needed this.

The other unpleasant thing for me was that I was also stuck at home, which is very strange for me. I'm usually going around all the time, working at different houses and meeting people constantly. I'm very sociable and outgoing. And now I had to be in my apartment all the time, like a prisoner. Some people like staying at home, I also do, but not all the time. I needed to socialise more, and this was difficult for me, to be so closed. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** “I had to help my son with his classes instead of his teachers. It was stressful for him and for me too.”

“When the hospitals were full, I was only imagining how horrible it would be if one of us was so ill to need a hospital.”

**Keywords:** Roma, ethnic minority, loss of job, financial problems, issues with children's education, anxiety, fear of the virus



## Cyprus

### CY01

**Title:** I felt trapped as I refrained from travelling to see my family

**Narrative:** "I am 45 years old woman, although I do look younger as you can see. I am from Greece. I migrated to Cyprus for work almost 13 years ago. I came to work and I stayed because I made really good friends, and I could not leave the island. Mainly I stayed because I fell in love. I have one brother and my mother. Last year, a couple of months before the covid situation started, my father passed away in Greece. I went to the funeral. Thank God my brother was there for my mother and the funeral arrangements. I was away I did not see my father before that, and I could not help my mother. Even if I were in Greece, I don't think I could be around my mother a lot. I love her but we get on each other's nerves.

I work at a semi-government organisation in a low paid position, but I am happy. I do not ask for much money. My girlfriend and I live in a rented house with our cat, and we just need to have each other and be healthy. I studied economics and finance. However, I work as an administrative officer.

The lock down... well I loved the lockdown phase. I could avoid seeing people that I didn't want to see, I lost weight because I cooked and exercised, I had the time to wash my curtains and clean the house in places that I never knew existed! I stayed at home and got paid for doing nothing, since my employer could not provide me with a way to telework. Things changed later and we got laptops and access to the software to be able to work. Although the government issued measures for people who were at home and could not work, i.e. to be paid 60% of their salary, my organisation never cut any money from my salary. I was lucky since I was not affected financially by government policies. Others were not. I have friends who could not work, because gyms were not open and others who lost their jobs.

One thing that made my life difficult is that I cannot travel. I cannot go home. I love Cyprus and I chose to live here, but I miss my family in Greece. I miss travelling and being able to be there for my loved ones. I hate feeling uncertain. I don't want to fly home and be forced to stay at a hotel for 7 days or more. I do not have so much annual leave available. And my mother, I cannot force her to stay in one place. She is old and vulnerable, but she wants to go to church to see people. With the new Covid mutation, I am scared. It is so easy to contaminate another person. Let's not lie to ourselves. In a plane people do not keep their distance. If one person has covid, the whole plane will be sick. You wear your mask but at some point, you will eat and drink. This augments the risk, and I cannot risk my vulnerable mother's health.

On a psychological level, at first it was ok, it was something new, exciting, I felt that they

should close everything. But now, I feel bored. I feel sick and tired of this situation. I just want this to be over with.”

**Specifically telling quotes:** “I was lucky since I was not affected financially by government policies. Others were not. I have friends who could not work, because gyms were not open and others who lost their jobs.”

“I cannot go home. I love Cyprus and I chose to live here, but I miss my family in Greece. I miss travelling and being able to be there for my loved ones. I hate feeling uncertain.”

**Keywords:** Lucky financially, not able to travel, fear for loved ones.

## CY02

**Title:** Lost years...but with positive attitude

**Narrative:** “I am 66 years old, and I am retired. However, I still work in the fields exercising my passion with fruit cultivation (oranges, grapefruit, mandarins). I am happily married with 3 children. Two of my children live abroad and one lives in Cyprus.

Covid was very restrictive in my lifestyle. Life was very different than it was in the past. During the lockdowns and now I could not do any of my extra-curricular activities, I could not see friends, family, I couldn't travel. I feel that it was not a tragic situation for me. But I stopped going to the gym and now I am afraid to go back because of the covid situation. Due to that I gained weight which may have a negative result on my health.

I was, however, lucky because I had my field as an escape when I could not see my friends and family. I do not feel that I was psychologically affected. Nevertheless, the restrictive measures were a great challenge to me and my family. I felt bad because I could not see my mother and father who are vulnerable and old. I wish I could see them more often. Moreover, another time where I felt stress was when my 87-year-old father became sick with covid-19. I honestly thought that he would not make it. He got sick at a retirement home. We knew that retirement homes in France were having trouble in 2019. Instead of benchmarking and thinking of ways to avoid this situation, we had to experience the same situation in 2020. My father got sick because the government did not take the correct steps.

Another problem for me was that I could not visit my 2 children who live abroad. In March 2019 when the covid-19 situation started in Cyprus, I was travelling from Australia where my family and I went to visit my son. Travelling was difficult at the time because of the uncertainty related to covid-19. I had a bad experience with delays at Qatar where I had my transit flight coming back home. Once in Cyprus my family and I had to remain at home restriction. At the same time I had a great fear because there was uncertainty about the seriousness of covid-19. I was scared because there was no cure and being a covid-19 patient was considered more serious for people over 65. I was not

65 at the time but I was close so I felt scared when I heard that people of my age were dying. I was wearing gloves, masks, I had to take extra precautions that made my life unnecessarily complicated. Things changed when scientists discovered more about covid-19. Later on, during 2021 Christmas holidays, my son came for a visit from the UK and a couple of days later he became sick with covid-19. Fortunately, he had no symptoms, but I felt trapped and unable to fully express my love. I had to cancel the New Years eve party that I always organise for the past 20 years and spend dinner with only 5 family members instead of 30+.

Generally I believe the government initially had taken reasonable measures but then it did not take enough precautionary measures. The government could have seen what was first going on in other EU countries and adopted similar measures instead of waiting for people to die first. I believe that my attitude was positive, and I followed the rules for my protection and for the society's protection, This made me see the situation with humour instead of feeling pressured. I stayed home and dined at my wife's "restaurant".

Now the main problem we face as a family is the continuous increase in necessary goods prices. Generally, I feel that after covid-19 we as citizens have to pay a lot and I am also going to pay. I am sure there was a lot of waste.

Finally, I feel that I lost some years of my life. When a person is retired, one wants to travel and enjoy life. Due to covid-19 I lost that opportunity and I feel that I wasted some years of my life. I feel my years are wasted because if covid-19 was a real threat to humanity, then states would stop wars, fighting and generally political unrest. On the contrary they are using this illness as an excuse to gain influence and earn money."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Moreover, another time where I felt stress was when my 87-year-old father became sick with covid-19. I honestly thought that he would not make it. Another problem for me was that I could not visit my 2 children who live abroad."  
"Finally, I feel that I lost some years of my life. When a person is retired, one wants to travel and enjoy life. Due to covid-19 I lost that opportunity and I feel that I wasted some years of my life. "

**Keywords:** Losing valuable time, anxiety, stress, economic loss, uncertainty, fear for life due to age.

**CY03**

**Title:** I am not even sure I reside in Cyprus legally

**Narrative:** "I am Chinese born and raised in China and currently I am 30 years old and living in Cyprus with my wife. She is Cypriot. I am an only child. In China we are all only children. I have the responsibility to carry on the family name. My family lives in China. I am an architect. I studied in China and France. I speak Chinese, French and English. I am

learning Greek now in order to get A2 level and be able to apply for my architect license. My learning process is slow.

In 2019 I was in China when covid-19 started, close to my hometown. I was planning to come to Cyprus and reunite with my girlfriend who was already here, in February 2020 after the Chinese New Year celebrations. When covid-19 broke we didn't know how serious it would get, until people started dying. People started panicking when we lost food and medical supplies. The government started preparing. We had lockdowns. At the moment since I was planning to come to Cyprus, I quit my job, so I was unemployed. I was between jobs because I left my current job to start my life in Cyprus. I tried to work a bit online but I had no income. I didn't start job hunting because I didn't know how long it would last and when I was going to be able to come to Cyprus. Uncertainty was the worse part of my experience.

I did not get infected with covid-19, but I know a lot of people who did. In China people with covid-19 became homeless because they would leave their homes to keep other family members safe, they had nowhere to go at the beginning and they slept in parking places. Some of them died because there were not enough beds in hospitals.

It took me 8 months to come to Cyprus. The normal way to apply for a visa was not available for tourist and working visa. I tried to get a work visa but got rejected without a main justification. So my wife's family had to use special resources to get me a visa. I had to do something that I was not comfortable with. I hate using corruption, but it was the only way to come to Cyprus. Once in Cyprus, I stayed with family. It is hard for me to meet new people and make friends. During the lockdowns I learned Greek on my own, but it is hard. My wedding happened during the lockdown with only 20 people, and it was not ceremonial. It was mostly administrative. I couldn't get married at church because I am not Christian Orthodox.

Making contrasts between the Cypriot government and the Chinese government, I see that in China the government used technology very effectively for applications. Back home we minimise physical contact because we are millions, so people are used to avoiding contact. here in Cyprus people like the physical contact. When they want something from the government they like to go and wait in queues. During covid-19 I see a lot of change here in Cyprus. It started to become more efficient like in China. Things changed with the Land Registry, food deliveries and government applications. My situation is special. I came with a special visa and then I married a Cypriot. When I got married, I got a temporary family reunification visa. I also applied for a permanent visa. The government Immigration department made a mistake with my address when they send the reply. It took me 6 months to discover the mistake and why my visa was not issued. I am not even sure I am residing in Cyprus legally at the moment. For example I want to take my driving license here in Cyprus and work legally but I cannot do it. The immigration department is very slow. I cannot go back to my country and see my family, because I don't know if I can leave the country or come back. Due to the inefficiency of the Immigration Department, I cannot travel or work. It has been a year since I applied. I had to go there in person to find out what happened. Now that the situation is clear I

hope I will get my visa soon to stay with my family legally. My situation means I could not apply for any support scheme during covid-19. Even psychologically I am worried. I can't do anything on my own. I cannot have electricity in my name, I cannot register for the National Health System GESY. I am patient and I feel supported by my family here. I feel I have to rely on other people all the time. I even had to use acquaintances to open a bank account.

I didn't feel racism either because I am from China (where covid-19 started) or because I am a foreigner here in Cyprus. I know that in other EU countries people are being racist to Chinese people. Here in Cyprus measures are generally not so strict. Back home we all abide by the law very strictly. I am not vaccinated. I am not against vaccination. Most possibly I would be vaccinated if I were in China. In Cyprus one can chose to be unvaccinated since there is no wide use of public transportation, you can go anywhere with your car. It is annoying to do a rapid test every 48 hours. I did not get vaccinated because of family influence. I don't feel they would reject me if I got vaccinated but I feel they would worry for me. Being unvaccinated here in Cyprus is inconvenient. I cannot go for a drink or to a restaurant, I can't go to events with my job. I feel discriminated against because of my vaccination status it is not inclusive. It is hard. I feel there is a continuous argument between vaccinated and unvaccinated people. I am sick and tired of this discussion and generally talking about covid-19. It is not the virus itself but the psychological dividing of people. The virus treatment is artificial.

I am in contact with a Chinese community here in Cyprus and I an find out how to get vaccinated If I want to get vaccinated. I am not registered with a GESY doctor yet because I do not have permanent immigration status.

A positive observation is when I first applied for a visa, I had to wait in a long queue. This year, I did a reservation, and my appointment was at a specific time. it was much more organised. I was really frustrated by the Immigration department mistake so the fact that I didn't have to wait made things a bit better.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "When covid-19 broke we didn't know how serious it would get, until people started dying. People started panicking when we lost food and medical supplies."

"I tried to work a bit online, but I had no income. I didn't start job hunting because I didn't know how long it would last and when I was going to be able to come to Cyprus. Uncertainty was the worse part of my experience."

"So my wife's family had to use special resources to get me a visa. I had to do something that I was not comfortable with. I hate using corruption, but it was the only way to come to Cyprus."

"The government Immigration department made a mistake with my address when they send the reply. It took me 6 months to discover the mistake and why my visa was not

issued. I am not even sure I am residing in Cyprus legally at the moment. For example, I want to take my driving license here in Cyprus and work legally, but I cannot do it. My situation means I could not apply for any support scheme during covid-19. Even psychologically I am worried. I can't do anything on my own. I cannot have electricity in my name, I cannot register for the National Health System GESY. I am patient and I feel supported by my family here. I feel I have to rely on other people all the time."

**Keywords:** Chinese, Immigration Status, Unemployment, Uncertainty, inability to use Covid-19 support

**CY04**

**Title:** Feeling depressed and stressed for my father

**Narrative:** "I am 34 years old, single and I have a sister and a father. My mother died 5 years ago from cancer. I am single for the last 7 years. I have a good job, but I am always looking for something new.

During the covid-19 situation I felt stressed. Not for me but for my father. My father retired and he had a lot of health problems. He started being forgetful. I was worried for the economic issues. My father was in charge of my mothers' estate after her death, but he was not able to make choices. I was worried about my mother's estate and for the money he got due to his retirement. I had to take him to the banks and settle the financial issues with him. I was scared due to the previous economic recession of 2013 where the Cyprus government decided to close Laiki bank and account holders who had more than 100.000 euros lost their money for the banking system to survive. I was worried that due to covid-19 my family might have a cash problem. Once I realised that this crisis was different, I felt a bit better. I am scared for the economy of our generation and due to covid-19 because of the non-sustainable population situation.

My father is my main concern since March 2019. He used to be a casualties doctor but he always had health problems. He had a bad life. He smoked, he never exercised, he had heart attacks when I was at primary school. I was always afraid that something bad would happen to him suddenly. I have experienced sudden loss. He was very private. He never talked to us. I felt that when my mother died in 2017 he became more vulnerable. He had a minor stroke in 2009 and in 2017 when my mother died he started getting worse. At 72 he stopped taking care of himself. He did nothing to help himself. He had a problem with his prostate, and he had an impaired nervous and vascular system in 2018. In 2019 he had another stroke. I took him to the beach to help him. In November 2019 I moved to the capital for work (my hometown is not the capital). I would come home every weekend. He got worse day by day. My sister never visited our hometown at the time. So, I felt that I was the sole person responsible for my father. At the beginning of 2020 my father drove his car. One day when I came to my hometown I asked where the car was, and he said he had a small accident. At some point during the

lockdown, they closed access to my hometown, so I had to get special permission to go visit my father and look after him. One time I did not visit for a month. He said he was ok but I knew it was not true. I called the car shop and found out his car accident was not small. His car was a total loss. We discussed with my sister and decided to sell my father's car and take his driving license from him. He lived alone at home. He could not get used to it. He did not eat healthy food. My sister made food for him, different food for every day because he didn't like to eat the same. She also lived in another town. She froze the food in tappers, and we bought a microwave for him to defrost it and heat eat up. We tried to help him eat healthy, but he wanted to eat junk food and chocolate. He asked for help from the neighbors.

Covid-19 made it difficult for my to take care of my father the way I wanted to. I could not go to my hometown as much as I wanted to. In October 2020 my father had to undergo an operation. He could not move or stay on his own. We searched for a carer, but covid-19 made it very difficult to find a carer. We searched for retirement homes. I had to look after my health at the moment due to an injury, but I sacrificed my health and decided to look after my father. I did not go to the physiotherapist I needed to go to in order to avoid risk of covid-19 infection so that I could see my father.

At the beginning of 2021, the covid-19 incidents were on the rise, and we could not visit my father at the retirement home. For the past years my father encapsulated the word problem in my life. I feel worried and depressed.”

**Specifically telling quotes:** “During the covid-19 situation I felt stressed. Not for me but for my father. My father retired and he had a lot of health problems.

Covid-19 made it difficult for me to take care of my father the way I wanted to.

I had to look after my health at the moment due to an injury but I sacrificed my health and decided to look after my father. I did not go to the physiotherapist I needed to go to in order to avoid risk of covid-19 infection so that I could see my father.

For the past years my father encapsulated the word problem in my life. “

**Keywords:** Young, responsibility for others, lack of freedom of movement, lack of care facilities, concealed depression.

**CY05**

**Title:** Being forced to abide by the rules

**Narrative:** “I am turning 65 years old soon and I live with my 70 year old husband. I have four children who are over 18. They all live on their own. One of them is married, the other recently engaged and my daughters are also independent living on their own. My younger one lives in the UK and studies. When covid-19 appeared in Cyprus I worked at my towns' hospital in the pathology ward. Not only did I have to treat and witness first hand incidents of covid patients but I also treated and tread patients who suffer from the vaccines' effects. I believe covid existed since centuries. They are trying to create a

pandemic since 2011. Big pharmaceutical companies are trying to become millionaires. When I was infected with covid-19, the worst memory I have is my psychological state. I was locked in a white room all alone all day long and people with astronaut uniforms would come to give me food and measure my vital signs. I was panicked by the media. They are at fault they made us feel so bad, they were bullying us into being careful to serve the government's interests.

I was one of the first covid-19 patients in Cyprus. I talked to journalists and they wrote an article about me. They took me to the specialised hospital in Masochists. I think it was not really necessary. My husband is a cancer patient. We lived together and we were very lucky he did not get sick. We were careful when I was at home. I had fever, I lost my appetite and smell, I was stressed all the time and got diabetes. When it was my time to leave, they tested me again and again and the tests where once positive and once negative. I had to do 7 PCR tests. A positive note was that I lost weight because I had to be on diet. I lost 15 kilos. I was provided help by a psychologist and medicine. I feel that it did not help me. I can only get better when the problem goes away. At that time, I was alone for 20 days now they say covid-19 only needs 8 days to stop being contagious. I advise everyone to stop watching the news. They are harmful they make you believe what they want.

I disagree with the measures. They only decide this way due to their interests. Nurses have to be back to work after being sick with covid-19 in 8 days but they cannot go to the supermarket to do their groceries! This is absurd.

I work for the government so we were ok financially. In my town the Municipality took food to some people who were restricted in their houses, but they did not take care of me. I always wondered who helps the ones who have no children.

In my opinion the measures were insufficient. The Ministry of Health is at fault. There was not correct management of the situation. In my hospital we had 3 patients with symptoms. I told them to test them and they did not believe me. They accused the English man and his relatives who came from the UK as the ones who spread covid-19 in my town but I know it was another patient.

Concerning vaccines, I know that people got thrombosis and other symptoms from them. I now that both vaccinated and unvaccinated people may get sick heavily from covid-19. I believe they do not protect enough. if they protected why do we have to do it every 5-6 months? Why is it in Greece and Cyprus they say we have to do another shot so early and in other EU countries not? Economic interests. I got the vaccine because I was forced. I did not do it until they forced us to test every 48 hours. If it were every 72 hours I would continue to test myself. I did the Johnson vaccine to get over with it. I feel they lie to us. They created hatred amongst people the vaccinated and the unvaccinated.

I am stressed as a woman, as a nurse, as a mother. The private sector has no business. My husband works in the tourist sector. He sells leather goods, and he was heavily affected by the situation. At least I work in the government. what about families who are

both in the private sector or who lost their jobs? The prices go up, bread, milk, petrol but our salaries no. I feel stressed because the real crisis will follow and we will have no food on our table. I am stressed for my children because they got vaccinated. I am scared that I will not become a grandmother. Our life will never be the same, we will never get it back. It is a scam. 60% is already vaccinated but nothing is really changing.”

**Specifically telling quotes:** “When I was infected with covid-19, the worst memory I have is my psychological state. I was locked in a white room all alone all day long and people with astronaut uniforms would come to give me food and measure my vital signs.”

“I advise everyone to stop watching the news. They are harmful they make you believe what they want.”

“Our life will never be the same we will never get it back. It is a scam. 60% is already vaccinated but nothing is really changing.”

**Keywords:** Stress, Patient, Nurse, media, financial interests, crisis.

**CY06**

**Title:** Not being able to move on

**Narrative:** “I am 34 years old, single and I have a sister and a father. My mother died 5 years ago. I am not in a relationship for the last 6 years. I have a good job, but I am always looking for something new.

During the covid-19 situation I felt affected. I am one of those people who are deeply affected when their exercise and eating routine changes. The lockdown affected me in a negative manner psychologically. I feel depressed. At the end of 2020 I had an accident with my shoulder. Until March 2020 it was improved and I could go to the gym again. I was getting ready to go to a scuba diving trip with a friend. However at that time the first covid-19 patient was found in Cyprus and we had to cancel since the first lockdown in Cyprus was decided. I felt stressed. Not for the trip. During the first lockdowns our movements were controlled. We had to send a text message to circulate and the police would stop us and ask to see the SMS and our identity cards. I felt controlled. I had to reduce my movements to 2 per day. I liked it because I could stay home without feeling guilty. I feel guilty when I do nothing. I don't like wasting my time. During the lockdowns I felt nice with myself because I could not do anything anyway. I felt constrained. It was nice and scary that there was no people in the streets. During the first lockdown I was not alone, I had a flatmate. It was bearable. It felt eering, scary and captivating, it felt paranormal but not supernatural it was surreal.

I went to the gym when the gyms were not forced to close. I enjoyed the lack of traffic and teleworking when it was available for other people. I cannot telework due to my job. The government made the right decisions at first taking into account the available facts. People used to respect the decisions at first. Then they stopped. At first they obeyed because of fear of the unknown. I was also responsive. Now that we know what covid-19

is all about we see that the first government decisions may have been wrong. Then they were right for the risk management.

During summer 2020, things were almost normal again. I decided to do an operation for my shoulder. I did the operation in Fall 2020. I did it before the situation got worse but I was alone due to restrictions. Recovery was bad the following year. I could not exercise or swim. I could do nothing. I could only go for a walk.

At the beginning of 2020 I wanted to try to start a relationship. I wanted to start dating again to meet a girl to give it a shot. I wanted something that would last. I decided to be active in that domain but until 2022 I did not have much choice to meet people due to the lockdowns. I tried to date during summertime but it was devastating from the covid-19 situation before it even started. Sometimes I ask myself if it weren't for covid-19 would I still be alone now? Possibly not. At least I would have some experience. On the other hand I feel it is less unnatural not to look for a girl. After my brake up in 2016, I always had an issue with girls. I felt I was not very good at the dating sport and covid-19 made me feel relaxed about it so I did not try to get better. After covid-19 it is more difficult to meet people and feel comfortable with them. My social life is affected. I don't flirt or go out. I became friends with the mask, I avoid handshakes, I watch movies where people do not wear a mask and wonder why. Covid-19 is unnatural it is still not history. We still live it and it develops. I am excited by the fact of covid-19 existence and that generations after us will be studying us in search like this one.

I was disappointed by the general population in Cyprus due to their inability to follow rules and their lack of knowledge or half-knowledge. They read an article and think they have become experts. Especially our generation that has experienced no war like our parents did. We were brought up to feel exceptional "snowflakes". I believe general rules must be enforced and the majority of people will follow. The other approach would be to let only the strong ones survive. Governments are not Gods. People are complaining in general. The Cypriot Government (with the exception of the first lockdown) observed their political loss and gain and acted accordingly. I do not believe they saw the health needs of people. In March 2020, the measures were decided for the people. In November, the measures were decided for the president's re-election.

Covid-19 exposes the worse and the bad behaviours of people everywhere. On TV in the streets. When a virous with a low mortality had this adverse effect, imagine what would happen in a much worse situation. The lack of preparation especially with retirement homes was inexcusable. We saw what happened in other countries but Cyprus did not follow the benchmarks to help the elderly. I felt our politicians where ruthless in the sense of using covid-19 as an excuse to pass their own messages. I believe covid-19 will soon become a regular seasonal disease like flu. Unfortunately people are suspicious they don't understand that vaccines are now created much faster than before due to better resources.

I miss some aspects of covid-19 lockdowns. I miss seeing my friends in their houses (since we could not go out). Now this stopped they went back to their normal lives that do not include our game nights at home. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** “The lockdown affected me in a negative manner psychologically. I feel depressed.

“During the first lockdowns our movements were controlled. We had to send a text message to circulate and the police would stop us and ask to see the SMS and our identity cards. I felt controlled.”

“I liked it because I could stay home without feeling guilty. I feel guilty when I do nothing. I don't like wasting my time. During the lockdowns I felt nice with myself because I could not do anything anyway.”

“It felt eering, scary and captivating, it felt paranormal but not supernatural it was surreal.”

“Sometimes I ask myself if it weren't for covid-19 would I still be alone now? Possibly not. On the other hand, I feel it is less unnatural not to look for a girl. After covid-19 it is more difficult to meet people and feel comfortable with them. My social life is affected. I don't flirt or go out. ”

**Keywords:** Positive attitude towards the lockdown, lack of confidence, inability to create relationships, alibi.

## CY07

**Title:** Too much to take at the same time

**Narrative:** “I am 49 years old, married with 3 children aged 11, 13 and 14 years old. I am an art teacher at a gymnasium and a lyceum. Covid-19 was a great period to get to know oneself, to spend quality time with the family during the lockdowns. I didn't mind the lockdowns. I tried to see the positive side of the crisis. However it was too much for me personally since I am a teacher and I have 3 children at school. I worked too many hours to handle the new situation, to be there for my children and my students, to create new material from scratch to do online courses. Art is not an easy subject to teach online. The Ministry of Education had no online teaching platform! For one month since the lockdowns started we had no means to continue teaching. The children lost time and valuable knowledge that year (2020). Once the Ministry of Education created the platform, we had no relevant training to learn how to teach online, how to engage with students. We had to have a camera on but the students were children so no cameras were allowed (GDPR). I never knew if my students were actually following the class or not. The last 2 years, the Ministry did not provide the right training tools to make our job efficient and to facilitate children. I still feel restricted. Even for teachers who taught from school, things were not easy. Schools are not properly equipped for teaching during covid-19. For art classes, we lacked drawing material, at school the computers did not

have a camera or a microphone. I tried to connect my personal laptop and I could not do it. There were technical difficulties.

As a woman and a mother, I felt that I had to carry a lot of weight. I worked from home during the lockdowns and had to take care of the children and my husband had to work. He administers a canteen he is a chef in the private sector. It was very hard. We had to operate four laptops, we had internet problems because we have no land line. We had to pay extra for internet, so it was a n economic burden as well. I worked day and night during the lockdown. I worked until 3 o'clock in the morning some days to be able to cope and I had to wake up at 6 to prepare the children for their day. I didn't mind the government measures and policies because I had no time to follow them, I had no time to go out. My husband went to the supermarket since he went to work.

My man problem was with children vaccination. I am vaccinated with 3 doses. The 2 vaccines had a nasty effect on me especially the 3rd dose. When the government tried to force us to vaccinate our children, I felt discriminated against. Not because of all the restrictive measures unvaccinated people have to take but due to the fact that the government tried to remove all responsibility from vaccine side effects from itself and made us sign that we consent for our underaged children to be vaccinated and that we as parents bare all responsibility if we accept. Of course all my children are not vaccinated. I never had to sign for other vaccines my children got. I am not against vaccines. I am against the way the government tried to alleviate its legal responsibility and pin it on parents who are not experts or doctors. I don't feel comfortable with side effects that my children may have in 50 years from now.

Concerning the economic side, we are relatively lucky. I work in the public sector and my husband was affected but not heavily. What I see now however is the prices of basic goods on the rise. Our salaries do not rise and sometimes it is difficult to go through the month with our income. My husband's job at the canteen was affected because people work from home so they do not order as much.

During the lockdowns and the covid-19 situation I had to undergo an operation. Although the hospital staff was really helpful and nice, I felt alone. I was alone when I went to the hospital. I was alone when I woke up after the anesthesia. I had no visitors and no moral support from my family. At some point after my operation when I had to visit the ER, the people around me were found covid-19 positive. I was scared for the unknown.

In April 2021 my husband got covid-19. We had to restrict him in one room. he couldn't bare it. Thankfully we did not contract the virus and he did not have serious side-effects.

Recently my son and younger daughter were found covid-19 positive. The had a but of fever and some coughing. Again we managed to seclude them in their rooms, but it was difficult. My son was very creative during his restriction. he created games and art. He had to read by himself since his teacher at school did not do the classes online. My daughter was a bit more difficult she had online classes and she spend her time reading

books and cleaning her room. She was bored and ate all the time. I had to run up and down the stairs all the time.

Concerning my extended family, my father is old, vulnerable and lives in a retirement home. To see him we have to book an appointment in advance and only 2 people are allowed. When I go with my children I have to choose. It is hard and not logical.

I feel prejudice against people who are covid-19 positive or their contacts. There is discrimination and fear against them. I see it at school. I see it as a teacher. Now the rule is that if an unvaccinated person is a contact due to a school covid-19 positive person, they can come to school if they do a rapid test and it is negative. This is the new "test-to-stay" rule. It is stupid. If my unvaccinated daughter is a contact at school, she can go to school with a negative rapid test. If she is in contact with her brother at home she cannot. I am vaccinated so if I am a contact I go to work. When I took my daughter the other day to an after-school class, the manager told us she had to go and remain home because she was a contact of her siblings. This was so irrational. The covid-19 stricken children were obligated to stay home for 10 days and she was forcing my daughter to stay home for 17 days according to her understanding of the protocol. The problem is that everyone explains the protocols as they see fit."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Covid-19 was a great period to get to know oneself, to spend quality time with the family during the lockdowns. I didn't mind the lockdowns. I tried to see the positive side of the crisis."

"As a woman and a mother, I felt that I had to carry a lot of weight. I worked from home during the lockdowns and had to take care of the children and my husband had to go to work. I worked day and night during the lockdown. I worked until 3 o'clock in the morning some days to be able to cope and I had to wake up at 6 to prepare the children for their day."

"When the government tried to force us to vaccinate our children, I felt discriminated against. Not because of all the restrictive measures unvaccinated people have to take but due to the fact that the government tried to remove all responsibility from vaccine side effects from itself and made us sign that we consent for our underaged children to be vaccinated and that we as parents bare all responsibility if we accept."

**Keywords:** Woman, Mother, Operation during covid-19, Teacher, tired, lack of educational tools

**CY08**

**Title:** I fled my country to save myself and I am trying not to starve

**Narrative:** "I am 25 years old and I come from Somalia. I fled my country when I was pregnant and came to Cyprus through the occupied areas from the Turks. I was scared

for my life and for my husbands' life. He was persecuted back home because he denied help to Al Qaeda so we both had to run. When I arrived in Cyprus with the help of a man on a boat, I received medical attention and the help needed to fill in my application for asylum. I gave birth to my little girl in Cyprus and since then we wait to see what the future awaits for us. We came here during the covid-19 situation, so we had to follow all the rules. At first, I did not believe covid-19 could infect us. Many asylum seekers from African countries believe so and they do not want to wear a mask. But after my friend got infected and had to be hospitalised I now believe, and I am careful.

I live in a house with my husband and 3 other women and my daughter. I am still shocked for what happened back in Somalia two years ago. I wish to hear news of my family but I am scared to contact them. My husband is worried and depressed.

I recently had to take my daughter to hospital because I gave her the wrong type of milk. 9-month old babies are supposed to drink their mother's milk or formula milk but I had no money to get her formula milk. She is thankfully ok now. The doctors and nurses at the Makarios hospital were very helpful.

My husband works illegally because we need the money from the coupons they give us and the allowance. I only get 95 euros per month but the allowance is not always available when our family needs the money. Unfortunately, the two shops where I could use the coupons did not have formula milk and my baby was hungry. The covid-19 situation made it more difficult to find work, a place to live, we are scared to get vaccinated. I feel alone, I want my psychological needs to be cared for but right now I am worried for my daughter and my depressed husband. He wakes up at night from nightmares. I don't know how to help him. I don't know what to do. The ladies who give us the money are nice, but the money is not enough, and I am worried that even my husband's not regular job will cost us the one allowance.

I am scared that he is infected from covid-19 like my friend and get hospitalised and what will happen of me then?

**Specifically telling quotes:** "At first, I did not believe covid-19 could infect us. Many asylum seekers from African countries believe so and they do not want to wear a mask. But after my friend got infected and had to be hospitalised I now believe, and I am careful."

"I feel alone, I want my psychological needs to be cared for but right now I am worried for my daughter and my depressed husband. He wakes up at night from nightmares. I don't know how to help him. "

**Keywords:** Refugee, Somalia, Alone, Depression, Baby, basic needs.

**CY09**

**Title:** Infertility, making me feel half and disabled

**Narrative:** “I am 35 years old, married for 5 years now. I have a great husband, a caring family, an excellent job. I have always been the perfect daughter since the time I started to talk and walk when I was 2 years old. I did everything right. I was always a star student at school, I learned French, Ballet and piano like all good girls were supposed to at my time. I became thin and beautiful like the society of Cyprus stereotypes provided for and after finishing my degree and masters I got a job that a woman in Cyprus is supposed to have (government job) so as to have enough time and energy to create a family. I had a long-lasting perfect relationship since I was 21, got engaged at 27 and married at 29. We build our perfect home in the perfect neighbourhood and in 2018 we decided it was time to create a family. We had to have children first of all because we both love them and wanted to have children at an early age and also because of family and peer pressure. I honestly never imagined that having children would be a nightmare for me. The most difficult task of my life. We tried naturally for a year and in 2019 I persuaded my husband to see a doctor. My gynecologist found that there was nothing wrong with me because she was clueless. My husband had a problem due to an injury he had when he was young. So we went to a fertility clinic right before the covid-19 break-out in Cyprus. We had our last happy trip in November 2019 and in December, we started IVF treatment. It was stressful, psychologically damaging and nobody understood how I felt. My husband made me hide it so I could not talk to my sister or my best friend about it. I felt so alone, so secluded, I felt I was lying whenever I smiled and said I was ok. My gynecologist provided no support. Not even after the first failure when I asked for her reference to receive the government aid. The process was very expensive, embarrassing and lonely because my husband felt that it was my duty to be at the clinic all the time and to take all those hormones and blow up and feel depressed. I was not myself. I was somebody else. I felt that someone else was inside my body and my mind. I wanted to hurt myself. I wanted to run outside and shout how unfair that was for me. How some women had children and had abortions and others had them by accident. How some people have children and molest them or stop caring for them. I did everything right I was perfect, I was a good student, a good person, I did volunteering and donated money for the poor, I was thoughtful and caring with people around me. But I could not find the support I needed because it was a secret I had to keep inside and hide my feelings. The first IVF failure was followed by the covid-19 lockdown. Not only had I have to get over my depression while lying to everyone about it but I also had to change my lifestyle due to the lockdowns and restrictions in movements, gyms had to close so I could not exercise I couldn't see friends and family. I had to pretend at work and I still feel weird when people ask me why I don't have children or if I have children or when they say they don't want to stand in line to do rapid tests for their children or that their children consume their time. And I want to scream and tell them to shut up. To love their children and cherish them to be therefore them because some of us cannot have children even if we love them so much. I changed my baby brother's diapers from the age of 10. I looked after my aunt's children and went to their birthday parties to entertain the children. I teach at the university part-time because I feel that my students are the only children I have right now. I feel weird whenever a woman I know gets pregnant and when people say that covid-19 was the perfect time to start a family because couples had more time

to create children during the lockdowns.

I had to undergo two more IVFs during the covid lockdown. All unsuccessful. Every time it was a bit better than the last, but I felt that I was killing myself for 2 months in order to try to create another life. I went to a psychologist during the covid-19 measures. I feel a bit better but not cured. It was required to try to express myself with a mask and not to see my psychologist's expressions. I made her cry one time I think. She had a similar problem in her family she said. Tackling a taboo matter like infertility is hard especially in Cyprus where everybody knows everybody. Handling it in a covid-19 situation where one is afraid to do the IVFs or seek support and the right guidance is torture. I am getting older, and my new gynecologist discovered I have an infertility problem too. I had to undergo another operation (hysteroscopy) a couple of months ago to improve my ability to have a baby. Being in a hospital during covid-19 is lonely and scary but the support was really good. Even after the operation I have no luck. My mother-in-law blames us for not going to church regularly. Other people tell me that it is my fault because I work too much and because I am stressed. I postpone the new IVF, the last time I can receive 50% of the money from the government because I am scared of failure. I feel responsible because I am the organised one and my husband is the cool follower. Covid-19 makes health problems even bigger than what they really are, especially concerning family creation for women. It is a discriminatory process all the way from the first test to the blood coming on the 14th day to signal the next failure. I know that I am depressed and sad even if I pretend to be ok. Covid-19 makes things worse. I believe a miracle will happen when I least expect it. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "The first IVF failure was followed by the covid-19 lockdown. Not only had I had to get over my depression while lying to everyone about it but I also had to change my lifestyle due to the lockdowns and restrictions in movements, gyms had to close so I could not exercise, I couldn't see friends and family. I had to pretend at work, and I still feel weird when people ask me why I don't have children or if I have children or when they say they don't want to stand in line to do rapid tests for their children or that their children consume their time."

"I went to a psychologist during the covid-19 measures. I feel a bit better but not cured. It was required to try to express myself with a mask and not to see my psychologist's expressions. I made her cry one time, I think. She had a similar problem in her family, she said. Tackling a taboo matter like infertility is hard especially in Cyprus where everybody knows everybody. Handling it in a covid-19 situation where one is afraid to do the IVFs or seek support and the right guidance is torture. "

**Keywords:** Woman, Discrimination, Infertility, Covid-19, lack of support

**CY10**

**Title:** Doctor struggling to help patients from distance

**Narrative:** “I am 65 years old, female, doctor and married in Cyprus with 3 children. I come from Cyprus from a village in Morphou and I have 8 siblings. 5 sisters and 2 brothers. Covid-19 affected me in multiple ways. I remember in 2020, around the end of March, my older sister had an accident. She injured her leg very badly. Fortunately she did not brake it but she needed immediate medical assistance. The accident happened during the 1st lockdown. Usually I run for help as I am the only sister who is a doctor and also a specialist dermatologist. However I could not attend to my sister and run for help because I was quarantined due to travelling. I felt that my ability to help my loved ones was compromised due to covid-19 measures.

After the lockdown when we were allowed to see patients, my sister was my first patient in April 2020. I was really intimidated because she is vulnerable due to a health problem she has and because of the fear of the unknown consequences of covid-19 to older people at the beginning. Now I am not so worried but at the time I was scared just like everybody.

Another issue that made me feel uncomfortable was my fear to do covid-19 testing because I was afraid to contract the virus at the testing place. A doctor, it was very difficult for me to see my patients through Viber. I did not charge my patients and tried to help them through calling and talking on Viber. At the time, in 2020, I made my first steps into the National Health System (GESY) as a doctor so covid-19 was also a financial problem for me because (1) I could not practice medicine face-to-face with my patients at my practice and (2) I examined my patients online with the risk of making an incomplete diagnosis and I also did not get paid. On the other hand, I had to pay my taxes, social insurance and all of the levies to the government but I could not benefit from the government measures and company/individual schemes, as I was “working”. What I observed as a doctor from my patients, is that many of them developed psychological issues, including stress, depression and they had to see a professional. Even young people. I feel lucky that I had a place to escape. Technology was a very important feature of covid-19. I was forced to learn to use GESY system, zoom and other systems.

Covid-19 was a darker period in my psychological status because I felt alone. I could not see my two children for a whole year, I didn't see my family and I reduced my activities.

Fortunately although my family is very big we did not have any loss from Covid. I was worried for my niece who is a front-line doctor who also administered PCR tests at the hospital and she has 3 very young children. I was also worried for my daughter who is a doctor in Germany and worked at a hospital at the time with covid-19 patients. I am grateful that nothing happened to them. We were all very careful.

The positive side of covid-19 is that I live next to my order daughter and I did not feel so lonely. Also my husband and I have fields with oranges and we could escape from everyday home-quarantine. I felt uncomfortable with one incident during the lockdown when we were forced to send text messages to go out from the house. We were allowed to send 2 SMS per day. We sent one SMS to go to the fields to cut the oranges. We had

to cut them alone since we had no ability or willingness to employ third parties due to covid-19. So we went in the morning and naturally this job lasted more than the 3 hours “unwritten rule” for each message. When we were returning home a police officer stopped our car and accused us of using the SMS in the wrong way because he said that a whole day of work in the fields was not “reasonable time”. We started arguing and shouting and this made my husband and I feel very bad. He did not impose a fine after all but we felt so bad that we would ask our children to walk the dog until the police check point to see if police was there when we were returning from our field work. I believe this is a grand obscenity and obstruction of our human right of free movement due to bad interpretation of government measures.”

**Specifically telling quotes:** “Usually I run for help as I am the only sister who is a doctor and also a specialist dermatologist. However I could not attend to my sister and run for help because I was quarantined due to travelling. I felt that my ability to help my loved ones was compromised due to covid-19 measures.”

“A doctor, it was very difficult for me to see my patients through Viber. I did not charge my patients and tried to help them through calling and talking on Viber. What I observed as a doctor from my patients, is that many of them developed psychological issues, including stress, depression and they had to see a professional. Even young people.”

“He did not impose a fine after all but we felt so bad that we would ask our children to walk the dog until the police check point to see if police were there when we were returning from our field work. I believe this is a grand obscenity and obstruction of our human right of free movement due to bad interpretation of government measures.”

**Keywords:** Doctor, Restriction of movement, psychological damage, depression, care.

## Czech Republic

### CZ01

**Title:** All people are equal, but some people are more equal than others: as a non-EU migrant, I felt like a second-class citizen during the pandemic

**Narrative:** "I am 39 years old and a mom of three, my older son is nine years old, and I have twins who are six years old. We moved to the Czech Republic four years ago; my husband got a job here as a software engineer. I am originally from Russia, where I got my medical degree. I was planning to continue my aesthetic medical practice in the Czech Republic, but I could not finish the so-called recognition of qualification process. One of my sons was hospitalized a day before my exam, but I was not allowed to reschedule it. So I got my business license and opened a cosmetic studio instead. We live in a mid-sized (70 000 inhabitants) city in the Central-Bohemian region.

When the pandemic started, my friend and I joined the wave of volunteers sewing face cloth masks. The municipal office provided us with fabric, and the masks we sewed were later distributed by other volunteers in the retirement homes, schools, and other facilities. I found the handicraft to be a soothing exercise amidst this stressful period. Like many other services, I had to close down my salon for an extended period several times during the pandemic. Indeed, there were some financial compensations programs I applied for. I was able to pay the rent and buy some food with that, but that's it. Luckily, contrary to many other migrants in the Czech Republic, we are pretty financially secure. So this was not such an issue for us as my husband's job wasn't affected by the pandemic.

Our family has a very good experience with our children's school - both before and during the pandemic. One of our sons got an assistant helping him and a few other migrant and Roma children in his class with the schoolwork. She continued to meet with him during the school closure for online sessions. We could be involved in our children's education, but it was great to get additional support, especially with the Czech language classes. Overall we appreciate the school's personal approach here.

Still, even though we will be able to obtain permanent residency here soon, we decided to move to a different country. The pandemic experience, and especially the issue of access to health care and us being treated as second-class citizens here, became a sort of deal-breaker for us. As non-EU migrants with long-term residency, we are not part of the public healthcare system and have to pay for our private insurance. There have been many instances when it was difficult for us to register our children to specialists (for example, a dentist) or when we had to visit an emergency with them, and we were treated with disrespect and suspicion. On top of that, the government passed a law last year changing the conditions of private insurance for third-country nationals - now the prices have gone up three times, and we are obliged to register with only one state-owned insurance company. Yet, the issues like limited accessibility of medical care or

excessive paperwork did not improve one bit. As we need to pay for the overall period upfront, this is a considerable amount of money that many migrants struggle to pay. If you are a nurse and have children, it is three and a half months of your salary. And if your husband works as a construction worker, your family won't be able to afford it. The financial side of it is not such an issue for us, but it is a matter of principle. We disagree with how the state denies us access to health care even though we are here legally and pay taxes.

This became even more apparent during the pandemic. I know that being able to go to a restaurant or swimming pool is not a fundamental human right, but still. While Czech nationals had several Covid-19 tests for free per month, we had to pay for a test every time we wanted to use services. OK, we don't often go to restaurants, but we have small children and wanted to take them swimming for example. I was also among the first migrants to get vaccinated - the vaccination for migrants with long-term residency regardless of their age or health status opened at the beginning of June 2021 - long after the registration was open for all the Czechs over 18 years old [and EU citizens and migrants with permanent residency]. I had to pay upfront, which was reimbursed to me by my private insurance after approximately one month. Our family trusts science, we wanted to get vaccinated as soon as possible, and we have the money to pay upfront. But again, for migrants who work as general low-skilled labour, this might be money they cannot spare. That's why most migrants with long-term residency got vaccinated only after the Ministry lowered the price from 800 CZK to 400 CZK in November 2021.

I am 39 years old, do sports, and don't have any underlying diseases. But imagine you came here with your grandma, or you have a disabled relative, and you could not get a priority spot for them. And these people had access to covid-19 vaccination only after - and I am sorry to say that - the last person with public healthcare. So this was a decisive moment for me; I felt like a second-class citizen. We like living in the Czech Republic, the local culture and traditions. We made friends here that are good to us. It is a beautiful state well equipped for sports, great schools. But we can see that the legislation here has a negative impact on our lives. That's why we will be moving to a different country which is less like Orwell's Skotnyj dvor, the Animal Farm."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I am 39 years old, do sports, and don't have any underlying diseases. But imagine you came here with your grandma, or you have a disabled relative, and you could not get a priority spot for them. And these people had access to covid-19 vaccination only after - and I am sorry to say that - the last person with public healthcare. So this was a decisive moment for me; I felt like a second-class citizen."

**Keywords:** non-EU migrants, access to healthcare, vaccination, testing, discrimination, private healthcare insurance

**CZ02**

**Title:** The loneliness was extremely difficult: a non-EU student shares his experience of living in the student dormitory during the pandemic

**Narrative:** "I am 32 years old, and I have lived and studied in the Czech Republic since 2018. I am originally from India, and I came here to get my master's degree in engineering informatics. There are not many ways to get to the EU other than on a student visa. I was supposed to finish my studies in 2020, but I had to extend it because of the pandemic as I still have two more courses to pass, including my final exam. I had issues mainly accessing my supervisor, who has been largely unavailable in the past two years, responding to my emails with as much as two months delay. And as the in-person office hours were suspended during the pandemic, everything took longer than initially anticipated.

I have been living in the dormitory, which has been challenging at times. In the first wave of the pandemic, there was a lot of fear and unknown; people hid in their tiny rooms, not meeting anyone. I was a bit disappointed by the university or the dormitory that they did not offer us any postponement of rent payment. I have friends all around the world, and this was the case in many countries. Foreign students have to pay fees for their studies, and many lost their part-time jobs and income. Their families back home were struggling financially, and some had issues transferring money.

Luckily, ever since I came to the Czech Republic, I got myself a job in a tech company, and I was able to work through the pandemic. So I did not struggle financially myself. It also kept me occupied when I was spending weeks and months locked in my dormitory room. In the first wave, my parents contracted Covid [in India]. We are not from a medical family (...); everyone was worried about how it might affect them (...). Covid [positive] people were being ignored, like untouchable. They were transferred to the hospital, and my brother was calling me crying (...). They had insurance that did not cover Covid-related hospital stay (...). My mother sold her gold, and later, I sent them some money. This was extremely difficult for me, being trapped here and not knowing whether they would be able to make it.

Since I am employed by a Czech employer, I am able to access public healthcare, which is great. But still, I have issues accessing information, and it is difficult for me to navigate the system. When I contracted Covid in March 2021, I did not know whom to contact. A friend of mine who is from Portugal helped me to contact the health department or someone related to the health department and told them we have the symptoms. And then they put us through with [the friend's] doctor because I am not registered with a doctor here because they were always telling me they have full capacities (...), and then we got tested (...). I was sick at that time. I could not even get up from my bed. And it has been even more difficult for my friends who have only private insurance here. Last week, I tested positive again, but as I am already vaccinated, I had only mild symptoms.

I travelled to India in October 2020 because I was matched with my future wife. The travel was quite stressful, but I made it and stayed home for a couple of months. Unfortunately,

due to the restrictions, we had only a very small wedding - around 50 people - so we did not receive as many blessings as we would like. I have tried to apply for a dependent's visa for my wife ever since. Still, the Czech embassy in India ignored our calls, gave us vague information, and generally, the clerk was quite rude to us. There were almost no slots open in the reservation system, so we gave up. My wife got her study visa in Ireland and is starting her studies in Dublin shortly. She does not want to move to the Czech Republic after her experience with the embassy staff, so once I finish my studies, I will be moving to Dublin to live with her there."

**Specifically telling quotes:** When I contracted Covid in March 2021, I did not know whom to contact. A friend of mine who is from Portugal helped me to contact the health department or someone related to the health department and told them we have the symptoms. And then they put us through with [the friend's] doctor because I am not registered with a doctor here because they were always telling me they have full capacities (...), and then we got tested (...). I was sick at that time. I could not even get up from my bed.

**Keywords:** non-EU migrants, access to healthcare, vaccination, testing, student, dormitory housing, visa application, public versus private healthcare insurance

### CZ03

**Title:** I am lucky to have people around me who help me when I need something: the importance of a support system for senior citizens.

**Narrative:** "I am a 76-year-old widow, and I have four children - three stepsons from my late husband and one daughter. My husband passed away in 2018, so I live by myself. Luckily, two of my boys live and work nearby, so they have been helping me both before and during the pandemic. If there is anything I need, like, for example, helping with technical issues with my TV or computer, I call them, and they always come. My daughter and her family - on the other hand - moved across the globe and lives in Canada. But we talk over the phone or Skype almost every day, so we can stay in touch, and seeing her fit in there and thrive makes me happy.

My daughter also instructed my neighbour's son to come and check on me every other day, so I am under surveillance (laughing). My neighbour is 86 years old, and we used to work together; her son - a really nice boy - is helping me a lot, taking care of big grocery shopping or driving me around the town if I need to get somewhere. He even helped me with the vaccination - when the registration opened for people of my age, he just came over and said, "I registered you on this date at this place." Then he drove me to the vaccination centre and back home, the same for the second dose. For the third booster, I called my practitioner and got vaccinated as part of my regular medical check-up. I was a bit dizzy after one of the doses, but that's probably because of my blood pressure, which is very weather-sensitive. I was watching TV that evening, and while

trying to get up, I fainted and fell on a small table, which got completely smashed. But I ended up being OK; I just had to order myself a new table, and my neighbour's son came over and put it together for me.

I have been visiting my daughter in Canada every year since my grandson was born; he is ten now. And not even the pandemic could stop me - I was able to fly in 2020 and 2021 as well. My daughter always arranges assistance at the airport, so someone waits for me with the wheelchair at the transfer. This time around, I had to present the confirmation of my vaccination, but other than that, not much has changed. I usually stay for around one month. The restrictions in Canada were similar to those in the Czech Republic - masks and other stuff; my daughter has been working on the home office during the pandemic.

I have a park right behind my apartment building, so I go for regular walks because being home within four walls or watching TV all the time would make me crazy. I have never been too much of a fan of shopping, so when stores were closed, I did not miss going to the shopping malls or things like that. If I need something urgently, there is a convenience store or grocery shop nearby. I usually go there when people work, so it's not busy. And for more extensive grocery shopping, I always ask my neighbour's son. I even ordered some things - like, for example, respirators and masks - online and had them delivered. But I am only basic internet user, not a skilled one.

I have a group of friends, former classmates, and colleagues I am in contact with over the phone. So you are not alone if you don't want to. I studied at the University of Chemistry and Technology and worked in laboratories my whole life. That is why we also take this seriously, not listening to the misinformation, adhering to the measures because we know what we can expect from this disease. Also, given our age, it is about other conditions and diseases we are carrying with us as well and how covid would "get friendly" with those."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I also have the advantage that my former colleague from work, who is ten years older than me, and her son live here in our apartment building. So when I needed something, like to go to the hospital to get vaccinated, he got in the car, drove me there, and brought me back. I still have to laugh at this - my daughter assigned him to check on me. One day he rang the doorbell and said, 'Your daughter told me to watch out for you.' I feel like I'm under surveillance. So when I need something, he is here. In return, when I go shopping, I take small grocery shopping for his mother.

**Keywords:** senior citizens, age, vaccination, digital gap, support system, traveling

**CZ04**

**Title:** Regular testing and mandatory masks as only minor inconveniences: a homeless

woman's overall life situation is more pressing to her than the pandemic

**Narrative:** "I am 37 years old, and I am in a difficult housing situation. I was staying at various asylum houses; the last one was in a small town in the southeast region of the country. I spent two months there and came back to the capital only yesterday. So I am trying to get back on my feet again, looking for a spot in an asylum house for women. I filled in an application, and now I am waiting. I studied to be a kitchen aid staff - I had a few part-time jobs here and there, working as a cashier or in the kitchen, jobs like this.

The main restrictions that concern me are respirators and Covid testing. Everywhere you go, like emergency shelters or day centres, you need to put a respirator on, and you have to have a test. I've heard that if you get a positive result, they put you in quarantine. In certain places where I stayed, it wasn't always mandatory to put on the mask, but I think all of them had a mandatory testing system in place. For example, in the asylum house, they were testing us every two weeks (...). [The medical team] comes over and does the testing for you. I also spent some time in a hospital, I was there for about six weeks, and visits were fully banned. They can bring you something, like a gift for example, but then they have to leave. Also, they had some measures in place there, like keeping our distance while queuing.

I was thinking about getting vaccinated. I know one can get registered at a practitioner, one's doctor. So I would try it there to get a jab, a dose for free (...). I've heard it's some sort of flu, so they say. And then not much else, people wear these respirators, and they are more careful, so they don't get sick. They keep their distance. I just want this to be over, for them to say, "Enough, the disease went away, and you don't have to wear the mask anymore, and all is back to normal." And that's it. I just want to get a job, and that they approve my housing application. I want to live a normal life like everybody else, work, go home, have kids, and things like this."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "In certain places where I stayed, it wasn't always mandatory to put on the mask, but I think all of them had a mandatory testing system in place. For example, in the asylum house, they were testing us every two weeks (...). [The medical team] comes over and does the testing for you. I also spent some time in a hospital, I was there for about six weeks, and visits were fully banned."

"I was thinking about getting vaccinated. I know one can get registered at a practitioner, one's doctor. So I would try it there to get a jab, a dose for free (...). I've heard it's some sort of flu, so they say."

**Keywords:** homeless, shelter, vaccination, testing, masks

**CZ05**

**Title:** The importance of CSO in supporting homeless people during the pandemic -

testing, vaccination, and housing for Covid-positive

**Narrative:** “I am 41 years old and currently homeless; my difficult housing situation was partially caused by Covid. I used to have a part-time job helping in the kitchen, but as the pandemic started, part-time workers were the first ones to let off. Once I lost this job, I could not pay the rent. So let me tell you, this whole Covid thing seems like a pretty bad idea (laughing). I think the impact of the entire pandemic did not have to be this bad if they would soften it a bit. Restaurants especially got hit hard; lots of them went bankrupt. I mean, the politicians haven't lost their salaries, huh? Alongside my part-time job, I was getting benefits for those with insufficient income [the Extraordinary Immediate Assistance]. I am still receiving that, but I can't do much with it as it is less than 2 500 CZK [103 EUR] per month. Most shelters and lodging houses for homeless people are full, and they are not taking new people because of Covid. They were supposed to be opening a new hostel [turning a hostel into lodging for the homeless]. But as the virus spread again, they turned it into a place for those infected who need accommodation [to self-quarantine] (...). So I signed myself up on a waiting list; there are many of us. Luckily, I have a spot at the emergency dormitory; a boat turned into a shelter. So I go there every evening and spend the night there because being on the street overnight, I wouldn't be able to handle that. I don't feel comfortable around other people on the street, and I don't want to associate with them too much. Every Thursday, an ambulance from the hospital comes to the shelter and tests everyone on the list. They process the tests and then call out names of those Covid positive through the radio so people in the underdecks can hear that too. Those infected then have to pack their things, gather at the front desk and wait in isolation for the ambulance to drive them to the hostel-turned-shelter, where they spend their isolation. During the pandemic, the offices where one can apply for financial support were often closed or were collecting the applications online. Luckily, the girls at the foundation [an NGO supporting homeless women] are helping us a lot. Especially with the offices and this kind of stuff. If it weren't for them, I don't know what I would have done. The stores were also closed, but honestly, there was almost no money to spend, so I was barely affected by that. I got vaccinated in the summer at one of the day centres for the homeless by the main train station. It was for free, so I told myself, OK, I'll go for it. I received the second jab just yesterday, but now I am wondering if it was the right thing to do since the politicians just announced that you would no longer need the vaccination certificate to go places. I guess maybe it is better that I got it, but then again, so many vaccinated people got the diseases. It also seems to me that people are generally more nervous and anxious during the pandemic.”

**Specifically telling quotes:** “Most shelters and lodging houses for homeless people are full, and they are not taking new people because of Covid. They were supposed to be opening a new hostel [turning a hostel into lodging for the homeless]. But as the virus spread again, they turned it into a place for those infected who need accommodation [to self-quarantine] (...). So I signed myself up on a waiting list; there are many of us.”

“Luckily, the girls at the foundation [an NGO supporting homeless women] are helping us a lot. Especially with the offices and this kind of stuff. If it weren't for them, I don't know

what I would be done. The stores were also closed, but honestly, there was almost no money to spend, so I was barely affected by that.”

**Keywords:** access to housing, homeless, shelters, vaccination, testing

**CZ06**

**Title:** Young, homeless and struggling with psychiatric issues during the pandemic

**Narrative:** “I am in my early twenties, and I am homeless. Growing up, I lived in the children's home, and when I turned 18 years old, I moved to the transition, a so-called halfway house for young adults. From there, I went to the asylum house for women. I ended up quite a few times in the psychiatric hospital between the halfway and asylum houses. I have an anxiety-depressive disorder and borderline personality disorder, and I started to intersperse that with drinking somehow. I used to work in a company doing internet surveys and questionnaires. But unfortunately, I had to end my contract there. First, I wasn't happy with the job, and second, I felt like I was not good enough for it. I didn't feel good enough for anything. So I resigned and started another round of treatment. For a while, I was able to pay the accommodation fee in the asylum house, but then I realized that my income was not enough. So I decided to terminate the lease and left the mental treatment cycle as well. All this time, I've been under constant pressure that I don't know what's going to happen to me, that I don't really know what I'm going to do next, and I just couldn't stand it anymore. So I decided to “move-in” with my mom to her tent. She has been living like this for about five or six years, and she's glad we're together now. However, our relationship is so complicated, and it's challenging for both of us. We often get into arguments over petty things that can turn pretty violent quickly, especially if alcohol is involved. Just recently, I had an opportunity to move back to a shelter. But I don't know what to do if it's harder for me to live with my mom or leave her and go my own way.

I felt the weight of the pandemic the most while in the psychiatric hospital. There has been a whole unit dedicated to those who either contracted Covid or had to be placed into quarantine because they have been exposed. Lots of activities, including therapies, group therapies, and art workshops, were limited, there was a staff shortage, and the whole hospital worked in this limited mode. Also, they restricted and then entirely banned any visits, which was pretty tough, especially around Christmas. During the past years, I was admitted to the hospital at least once a year, and I used to quite like my stays there. One gets to relax a little bit and meet new interesting people. But this time around, it was different. They also limited visits between different units or the number of people per activity; overall, people were more apart. You are never truly alone in the psychiatric hospital, there is no privacy and all, but still, it felt lonelier.

When I got out, the first thing that surprised me was how little things improved. We thought - in our little micro-world - that things were getting better outside and the

restrictions would loosen. But it seems not much has changed, quite the contrary. While on the street, the whole Covid experience is a bit easier for me. I have relative freedom, and I don't need to travel, so - apart from the face masks and respirators - nothing restricts me in any way.

In the hospital, I was offered a free vaccination and took it. But when I told it to my mom, she almost slapped me. She is anti-vaccination and claims it burdens one's body. To me, it is not such a bad idea to get vaccinated because the more we can defend ourselves, the better. Thanks to the vaccination, the body can identify the disease and build a wall against it. Sure, there might be people who don't need it because they have strong enough immunity, but how do I know if that's me? So I'm kind of happy I had the opportunity to get vaccinated, but it's everyone's business; no one should be forced.

When I talk about this with my mom, I have a feeling that she is making fun of it. Because my mother is older and I don't think she will ever understand this whole situation. Just trying to explain a respirator mandate and all that to her is incredibly hard. Occasionally, she puts the respirator on, but we take the public transportation together most of the time without wearing one. At first, I tried to convince her, telling her to put it on. But lately, I gave up and joined her side. The thing is, I'm vaccinated and, I don't know, but my mother probably has the strongest immunity in the city because she is seldom sick with anything. It probably has to do with living outdoors for almost six years. We often get a stare or hostile comment for not wearing a respirator. My mom claims she was once attacked by the "mask-worshippers," as she calls them, but I don't know if that's true or if she was just joking."

**Specifically telling quotes:** There has been a whole unit dedicated to those who either contracted Covid or had to be placed into quarantine because they have been exposed. Lots of activities, including therapies, group therapies, and art workshops, were limited, there was a staff shortage, and the whole hospital worked in this semi-limited mode. Also, they restricted and then entirely banned any visits, which was pretty tough, especially around Christmas.

**Keywords:** homeless, shelter, mental health, psychiatric hospital, vaccination

**CZ07**

**Title:** Life has been hard before the pandemic as well as now: experience of a senior homeless woman who is a GBV survivor

**Narrative:** "I am 66 years old, and I have been homeless for 20 years. I lived with a man who did a terrible thing to me back then. I don't know how to say that; he almost killed me. So I ran away and lost everything. I still feel terrible, psychologically speaking, even after all these years.

I've been living as a homeless person in a small town, but I was forced to move to the capital a couple of months back. In my "hometown," let's say, the social service office didn't have anything for me, no shelter or emergency accommodation, and would often send me away. They just gave me a tent and told me to go camping. But how can one go camping without proper gear or anything? And the constant fear for one's life or attacks on women. It was terrible. I even got robbed - they stole my tent, grill, sleeping bag and blankets, everything. On top of that, I was being stalked by a guy who worked as security. He would chase me on his bike in the evenings when I was returning to my tent from work. So that's why I ran away and moved to a different city where no one knew me.

I've been living here for about five months now. I stayed at the emergency housing boat; a boat turned into a shelter. But then some random guy attacked me there, so now I am sleeping at a different shelter. I sat down with one of the social workers here [we are recording the narrative in an organization that supports homeless women]. I told her my story, and she said they would submit my application to the Municipal office and get me accommodation for senior citizens. But I don't know what my chances are.

When it comes to coronavirus, I'll be brief (...). I think coronavirus is not really a disease, I think it is mainly an economic issue, and it comes from above - from the officials or the government. They are targeting pre-selected people with that. I used to work for a minimum wage - twelve hours a day, seven days a week but I left myself, not because of the pandemic. I couldn't stand the humiliation. When it comes to the closed shops, well, that's infringement. They can't force people to buy just groceries! I don't know, I don't understand it. I think life has been hard before the pandemic as well as now. And I just want to say that I don't know what to do. That's enough, I don't have anything else to say."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "When it comes to coronavirus, I'll be brief (...). I think coronavirus is not really a disease, I think it is mainly an economic issue, and it comes from above - from the officials or the government. They are targeting pre-selected people with that."

"When it comes to the closed shops, well, that's infringement. They can't force people to buy just groceries! I don't know, I don't understand it."

**Keywords:** homeless, shelter, senior citizen, gender-based violence, conspiracies

**CZ08**

**Title:** They invented Covid to divide and control us: a homeless woman with a strong anti-vaccination perspective talk about the negative impact of uncertainty

**Narrative:** "I am 34 years old, and last year, I became homeless. I am originally from a

city in the western part of the country. I was supposed to move to the capital because of a new job and apartment, but both my job and the accommodation fell through, and I found myself on the street. I spent the first night outside because I didn't know what to do. I was taken aback by the situation and cried the whole night; it was terrible. Then I heard about the boat-turned-shelter and went there.

Back in my hometown, I was working in a factory, and I had to wear a respirator and protective glasses, and it was really uncomfortable. It is difficult to breathe in it, let alone work. It bothers me a lot, and I often have a constipated nose. I even have respiratory issues that I never had before and I blame the masks. It also divides people. I find it a bit exaggerated that a lady will cross herself because we are in a tram together, and I don't have a respirator. But it doesn't bother her anymore when I make three steps and I am out of the public transportation. People can be pretty mean to you if you don't have it on.

Then there is the testing. You have to have the test everywhere you go - day centre for homeless women, overnight emergency shelter, you name it. Every Wednesday, I get tested here in the day centre for homeless women. They have a medical team coming which tests everyone, and then you have a certificate that is valid for one week, and you can take it to other places, like the boat shelter or the Salvation Army. What is important for me is to take a warm shower and keep myself sorted a bit. I want to take the opportunity to praise them a bit [the organization that supports homeless women]; the staff is really helpful here. Of course, if you don't have a test, you can be friendly as much as you like, but that is the rule. But if you have it, the girls here will help you with anything.

There are still places where no one requires the testing, though. I worked in the parking lot for my last part-time job, collecting money. And my employer didn't care at all whether I was tested, vaccinated, or whatever. I am curious about what would happen if my test came back positive. I would be forced to go to a Covid hotel, they would lock me there, and I would fall out of the system for one week (..). And imagine you'd have a job where you need to be, and you wouldn't show up for a week.

I have my opinion on Covid. It's mainly the destruction of humankind for me. I read something about the new world order, and I have completely different information. So I don't believe it's about Covid (...). It is more of a needless hysteria the way I see it. It is essential to say that I don't belong to vaccinated people. So the question is, paradoxically, whether the past two years have been difficult for me or if it will be difficult for me if you know what I mean. I've heard that it won't be a walk in the park for the unvaccinated. They are planning specific blackmailing tactics. If you are not vaccinated, you won't be able to go to a shop or get a job. So I am more worried about what the future will bring than what was happening until now.

The more I think about it, the clearer it becomes that the common denominator is uncertainty. The uncertainty in every step you take is why the Covid situation sucks (...). That you don't know if it's worth finding a job, how long I'll be able to keep it? How long

I'll stay negative? When I'll be positive again? Will I ever be? I don't know. Will anyone ever mind that I am not vaccinated? And if yes, what will happen to me? I'd say it's mentally hard for a person. Being in permanent insecurity, that's crazy. It doesn't help to be constantly stressed. And I think that's why it's all done like this. They are trying to destroy us somehow, that's what I think.

Lastly, I know this is not something original, but I just want this to be over. I want my freedom back. I no longer want us to be divided between those tested and non-tested, vaccinated and unvaccinated. I want people to stop pointing fingers and saying they are better because they have more tests or vaccination doses (crying). I just want it to end."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I want to take the opportunity to praise them a bit [the organisation that supports homeless women]; the staff is really helpful here. Of course, if you don't have a test, you can be friendly as much as you like, but that is the rule. But if you have it, the girls here will help you with anything."

"I have my opinion on Covid. It's mainly the destruction of humankind for me. I read something about the new world order, and I have completely different information. So I don't believe it's about Covid (...). It is more of a needless hysteria the way I see it. It is essential to say that I don't belong to vaccinated people. So the question is, paradoxically, whether the past two years have been difficult for me or if it will be difficult for me if you know what I mean."

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**Keywords:** homeless, shelter, vaccination, testing, conspiracies

**CZ09**

**Title:** The online education affected the most my younger brother who does not speak the local language yet: young non-EU student reflects on his experience with distance learning and private healthcare insurance

**Narrative:** "I am 21 years old, and I have lived in the Czech Republic for the past five and a half years. I am originally from Indonesia - we moved here because my dad was studying and then got a job. I have three more siblings - younger twin sisters and a younger brother who is seven.

When the pandemic started, I was in the final years of my high school studies. The school closed down, we stayed home for a week or two, and then online education started. Occasionally, there were some technical issues with the internet, either on my side or on the teacher's side, but otherwise, it was OK. Luckily, my school was quite good (...), they adapted quite well. It was not perfect, but it was enough to study all of the required things. What bothered me the most was the uncertainty. We were unsure whether the final high school exams would get cancelled or somehow be reorganized. In the end, I was quite lucky because they cancelled the Czech language exam altogether. I must admit that both the level of the coursework as well as the required standard decreased a bit, so the coursework was not bad. I have two close friends. I used to call them every day. So when I encountered any issues with homework or anything, they always helped me. Yeah, if I were alone during the time, like, doing homework and studying by myself, it certainly would be difficult. My friends helped me a lot. I was then accepted to the university in 2021 without any entrance exam; they just checked my high school results. The classes are offline, and we go to campus, but I had some difficulties catching up as the courses are way more demanding than what I experienced at high school.

My dad worked from home, and my mom is a stay-at-home mom, so not much has changed in this regard. I am close with my family, so I did not feel alone, especially since I kept in touch with my friends online. My younger siblings all go to a school that has a special program for migrant children. The online study affected my little brother the most because he doesn't really speak Czech very well. And he needed help. But my parents couldn't help 100%. I also helped him, but I had my own studies so I couldn't do it all the time. Typically, his schools offer an extra Czech language course, but I think the frequency of the classes decreased a little bit during the pandemic. We do not speak Czech at home, so that plays a huge role.

I got permanent residency only recently. Up until then, I had private insurance. So I had to pay every time I went to get a PCR test, I think something around 800 CZK [33 EUR]. When I had [the private insurance], I decided to just wait for the free vaccine. But when I got [access to the public insurance], I got Covid. So yeah, it was like three months ago, and then I got the certificate that I had already gone through the disease, which is valid for six months. So I am not vaccinated yet."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I have two close friends. I used to call them every day. So when I encountered any issues with homework or anything, they always helped me. Yeah, if I were alone during the time, like, doing homework and studying by myself, it certainly would be difficult. My friends helped me a lot."

"The online study affected my little brother the most because he doesn't really speak Czech very well. And he needed help. But my parents couldn't help 100%. I also helped him, but I had my own studies so I couldn't do it all the time."

"When I had [the private insurance], I decided to just wait for the free vaccine. But when I got [access to the public insurance], I got Covid. So yeah, it was like three months ago,

and then I got the certificate that I had already gone through the disease, which is valid for six months. So I am not vaccinated yet.”

**Keywords:** non-EU migrants, access to healthcare, vaccination, testing, student, dormitory housing, visa application, public versus private healthcare insurance

## CZ10

**Title:** It felt like war: a nurse commuting cross-borders between her work and home daily describes mental and physical exhaustion during the pandemic

**Narrative:** “I am 53 years old, and I live in a small town close to the Czech-German borders. I have three children – two of them are adults, my youngest son is 14 years old – and I have worked as a nurse in a social centre in a city in Bavaria since 2018. Before that, I worked as a nurse in the Czech Republic. I am the so-called pendler, which is an expression for someone who commutes to work and back across the borders daily.

When the pandemic struck, our government closed the borders and left only one border crossing in the area open. In a matter of days, the management of the social centre where I work together with employers pleaded with the German government to give an exemption for pendlers working in the so-called critical infrastructure. On the one hand, I was glad, but on the other hand, it brought me lots of difficulties, both mental and physical (...). The commute that usually takes twenty-five minutes got stretched to three hours and fifty minutes. Mainly because the government closed most of the crossings, and all the critical infrastructure workers and truck drivers were queuing at the one crossing that remained open. For me, it meant leaving for work three hours earlier, working my shift, and then driving home for three hours again (...). It got to a point where it was psychologically and physically unbearable. There was also lots of paperwork, the requirements were constantly changing, and we had to check several websites and sources on a daily basis. Otherwise, they would not let us through. We also had to get tested every 48 hours, which was not easy at all during the first wave. Back then, the testing stations were only at the border crossing. At times, I was waiting there in line for three hours in the winter, the snow, and the cold. And it was a bit like – how to say that – mental exhaustion and even a war-like feeling. I don't know, I've never experienced a war, so I can't imagine what it's like, but it was really hard for us.

Our employer was extra accommodating, though, switching our shifts so we could at least make it to work on time. Later on, they also offered me a place in a dormitory which was more like a fully equipped four-star hotel. The quality of the accommodation was outstanding, that wasn't the issue. But when I stayed there, even though I have two adult children, I still have a fourteen-year-old son, then a twelve-year-old, and two dogs. And it was a bit difficult for me when I was lying there, not knowing how it was going to evolve; no one really knew. For example, I have a friend who works with me. She is a nurse, but she is a single mother, and has two children, a similar age as my youngest. It was

extremely difficult for her. She had a mental breakdown, crying for a really long time. When we talked about it, not knowing what'd happen next, she said: "What is going to happen now? Will the borders remain closed, and they will just bring our children to the fences for us to at least see them or what?" I was not as pessimistic, mainly because I knew my husband and my older son were home.

There has been lots of fear and unknown in the first wave, causing this sort of hysteria that labelled pendlers as the "virus spreaders," even though the numbers show that many cases were not brought to the Czech Republic this way. I was, for example, taking gas at the gas station, and a cashier told me, "So you are coming from Germany, bringing the virus with you, huh?" But on the other hand, there has been a tremendous solidarity among the pendlers, sharing information about new rules, paperwork, or the traffic situation. Also, we received a huge amount of support from our employer, the clients, and the German side in general. We received lots of gifts, food, fruits, and sweets. They probably thought that a well-fed nurse would last longer (laughing). People were leaving thank-you notes and flowers on our cars. So this was really nice. But those were tough times; we struggled with staff shortage, many people fell sick, and we worked eight days in a row. However, I have never thought about leaving work, leaving those people behind. We were already understaffed, and the thought I would leave the patients? No, that is not in my nature. I'm pretty stubborn.

My husband and my older son work in a factory that produces plastic wrapping, and they soon got an exemption as well and were able to commute as the demand for single-use wrappings sky-rocketed. So we all have been swamped, and it was challenging at times to sync our schedules to make sure someone is always home with our youngest and takes care of the dogs. The upside of it is that we weren't impacted financially by the pandemic. But I know some people who didn't work in what was classified as essential labour, didn't get any exemption and lost their income. With us working so much, our youngest was occasionally left home alone. But luckily, he is well organized, doing all his homework and in general, keen on school. So we had virtually zero issues with him or his online education. Also, our local school has been helpful and well organized. I can imagine it could have been an issue for others with smaller children, though. This pandemic experience is also a testament to what extent Germany is dependent on cross-border labour, especially in healthcare and social services."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "At times, I was waiting there in line for three hours in the winter, the snow, and the cold. And it was a bit like - how to say that - mental exhaustion and even a war-like feeling. I don't know, I've never experienced a war, so I can't imagine what it's like, but it was really hard for us.

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leave the patients? No, that is not in my nature. I'm pretty stubborn."

**Keywords:** cross-border worker, closed borders, commuting, healthcare, nurse, mental health





## Germany

DE01

**Title:** Hard restrictions during the pandemic led to more equality in our family

**Narrative:** “I am 38 years old, mother of four kids, a social educator, and we are self-employed, my husband and I. I have been working as a social educator until I became mother. After the second child, we founded a café. This was a tough time, I did not take the time for my cot, was standing in the kitchen, preparing cakes for the café during the nights.

Since I am self-employed, I have always been working a lot from home, especially doing the accounting stuff. Therefore, there has not been a big change in my professional activities through the pandemic. What was difficult for us was the fact that we work in gastronomy and we really did not know what could happen during that time. For me, with the beginning of the pandemic, the workload was reduced, there was not too much to do in the accounting. During the first lockdown, we just closed the café and honestly, I was happy about that because due to the whole home-schooling conditions I could focus on taking care of my children. Before the pandemic, my husband was responsible for the work in our café and I was the family and home manager plus the accountant for the café. That work was made by me in the evenings when the children had gone to bed. With the pandemic, this work distribution changed. As my husband spent more time at home, he could also take care of home schooling and household. The pandemic led to more equality in our relationship, and it was not the case that we had more disputes during the lockdowns than before. For us, it was positive to see that our children had us two as a reference person. I had less work to do and he was there. Of course, we also tried not to panic even though we were not sure about our financial situation. I have to admit that everything works more smoothly when there are restrictions as when the normal business is running. Now, he is again more present in the café and I am at home with the children.

We both agreed that we have to stay positive even though without knowing what will happen. We were very grateful for what we have: we have a big apartment with a garden, the children could play there outside in spite of the restrictions. We were able to make some family trips to the forest or other places which is not the case when my husband works regularly. He generally has to work a lot on the weekends but during the lockdowns he had time for the family. We agreed that the children are the focus and we have to support them in their development during that time. This was our most important thought. Especially for my daughter you had just entered school. My husband was happy he had more time to spend with his children.

Even though, we had one negative experience which was the opening and closure of our third café. We had opened up a third café just three weeks before the outbreak of the pandemic in Germany and after some months we were not able to keep it. Even the to-go-business did not help us since we had not built up a clientele. This café did not

survive the pandemic. We did not receive any financial aid from the state and lost all the investments we had made. We were only able to exceed this loss because of the good running business of our first and second already established cafés.

Our last child was born during the pandemic. Now, I cannot work anymore as an accountant of the café. It has just become too much for me with four children and with the experience I had at the beginning. My husband supports me with this decision. I am happy about this decision because otherwise it wouldn't have been healthy for me. My last child needs me more than the others, he is awake during the nights when I used to do some work for the café. My mother used to help me a lot but also she is becoming older. Everything is more: four children, household, etc. My husband and me, we take care of each other, it has become more in the last years.

This interview was translated from German to English. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "What was difficult for us was the fact that we work in gastronomy and we really did not know what could happen during that time."

"As my husband spent more time at home, he could also take care of home schooling and household. The pandemic led to more equality in our relationship and it was not the case that we had more disputes during the lockdowns than before."

**Keywords:** home schooling, childcare, lockdown, family care, privilege

**DE02**

**Title:** Since I am in home-office, I have more contact with my children and more additional work at home

**Narrative:** "I have been living in Germany for 18 years and am 39 years old. I have two kids and am married to a Moroccan man. We are an international family.

In my country of origin, Belarus, I studied languages. I came to Germany as an au-pair to learn German and already some weeks after arriving in Germany, I decided that this would be the country I want to live in. I learned German, studied and got married still as a student. We have now been together for 15 years. Two years after our wedding, our son was born.

I would say that we are not a family with a typical role repartition because we decided one day that the first one getting a job would be the one working and I drew the lot being this person. My son was 9 months old at that time which meant that my husband took care of him and I worked full-time. Two year later, our daughter was born and I stayed at home for just 3 months due to economic reasons, but first in a part-time position. I had 2 hours of journey going to work and coming back, it actually felt like working full-time. I am working at a corporate company as a team manager in the IT sector. Also nowadays, my husband is the one taking care of all the children-related tasks, he does homework with my son and picks them up from school and kindergarten.

I have never done that.

I have now been working for two years from home, my son is in school and my daughter will enter school this year. As I work in an IT-company, we always had the opportunity to work from home but since the beginning of pandemic, our office is closed and now that I am at home I get to realize more what happens at home and with my kids. This is really something that has changed in my life. I still remember when my son lost his first tooth. It happened during the day, he came home from school, running into my office room, showing me his tooth. And I was so moved that I had to cry because in normal circumstances I would not have been there to live this moment with him. Now, after school and kindergarten, my children first come into my office to tell me about their day. I am very happy to be part of this now.

Of course, there are still some negative aspects. I don't have time for myself and I still have to take care of the house. My husband supports me in some way but he does just some little things. I really have to plan how to keep the house tidy. This has also changed during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, my husband had to take care of many things because he knew that I was not there to cook the lunch or clean the kitchen afterwards. It was always his task. Now, I am being involved in more things. I really have a lot of responsibility and duties at my job, I actually don't want to take care of these other stuff. I need to clear my head sometimes.

My children have a lot of activities and therapies in the afternoon. Before I began to work at home, my husband would have taken always both children to the activity of one of them. Now, that I am at home, he leaves one child at home with me, though I am working. This is an additional burden for me. My husband had to learn in the last months that I am there but not there at the same time.

But I don't want to talk only about the negative aspects. I have to admit that the house-related tasks can be managed sometimes also during the work hours. Furthermore, I am very thankful that we have a huge flat where I can close my office door and work silently. During the lockdown, my children had to stay at home, my son had to be taught at home...this was really stressful for all of us. Yet, my husband took care of all these tasks. Still, I hope that the schools will remain open. For my son, who does not have so many friends, the attempt to find new ones was really hard because most of the parents did not want to take part in birthday parties or other events.

I have also realized that we never appreciated the time we spent with colleagues preparing a coffee in the office kitchen or having a short chat. I think that this is the basis for a good work environment and collaboration. All of that has now been lost. I believe that new regulations like working some days in the office and some days at home would be perfect.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "My husband had to learn in the last months that I am there but not there at the same time."

"For my son, who does not have so many friends, the attempt to find new ones was really

hard because most of the parents did not want to take part in birthday parties or other events.”

**Keywords:** double burden, home office, contact restrictions, selfcare, gender roles

**DE03**

**Title:** Despite my age, I created new ties during the pandemic

**Narrative:** “I am 75 years old and I have a family with two children, single mother. I have always been working as an artist self-employed but also was a lecturer at a University. I am divorced and have never married again but have been living with different partners or roommates. My financial situation was always a bit sparingly, I have always tried to find additional work resources during my life, especially when my children still lived with me. Then the idea arose to share my atelier with other artists. I have always been very satisfied also with everything I had. With the age of 65, I retired, as it is usual in Germany. I also moved to a smaller space also in regards to my pension. But this is not unfortunate, I was happy to limit my belongings to the minimum necessary. Until now, I have always been sharing this space with other people and it works very well. With the pandemic, some things have changed due to the contact restrictions and an accident I had with my bike which led to severe physical constraints. I still had contact with my friends through WhatsApp-groups, expecting to meet soon, that this time will pass by. Now, I am better and every morning I go to the forest to some waling and I am one of the few women that does it on her own. I need this time to enjoy nature. During that time, I met a woman I knew through another friend and then she told me that she was mortally ill. She really impressed me because she continued her life very positively, living with a lot of animals. She told me her wish to die at home and stay there together with her pets. I felt the wish to accompany her in this last journey as I am also at an age where we deal with death and especially for me, as I am also a single. Due to this happening, the people surrounding her created a - so to say - new circle of friends with the purpose to support her with some daily life tasks. This was done between us women; we even did not think about involving the men. During the pandemic, we all had to adapt the contact restrictions, there were no problems at all, we were all healthy. It was impressive that due to the restrictions I gained new close ties to at least two persons. Of course, there are always people that are very fearful, especially the younger people and families felt a bit safer.

I am a person that loves to be moving around and being with other people. Currently, I am taking care of my ex-husband who is living in care home because of dementia. My children resent me for doing that because he simply wasn't a good father. I just realize that he depends now so much on other people and he is really helpless. Due to the pandemic, of course I have to test before visiting him and it is really not comfortable to visit people at this care home. There is no possibility of coming together in a natural way, there are these plastic separations, really not comfortable. Imagine, sitting there with a

person with dementia. So I prefer to go out with him for a walk. I have the impression that this situation is worse for men than for women because they are used to not show any fears and helpless behavior. I feel that I am doing something good. But my children really judge me for doing this but I have been divorced for so many years and am happy to be able to help. For me, it is more important to give instead of taking. My children, they are already more than 40 years old, have suffered from their father and still it seems that their lives are influenced by their experience during childhood. Who suffers more from that is my older son who has not had a male role model.

For me, the pandemic has shown that the physical contact is so important. And this need is not easy to be replaced. At least with the phone, we can talk to people, listen to the voice or have a video conference and create some kind of relationship. Including me and my son, a lot of people have acquired pets to substitute the human physical contact.

I would also like to add something regarding my artistic work. I used to be in different groups where we met to draw together and some weeks ago we met for the first time after two years to draw. It was interesting to see that I am coming back to what I began. I am still not sure if I am continuing the same thing or if I shall do something different. Maybe I have unlearned drawing, I don't know.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “There is no possibility of coming together in a natural way, there are these plastic separations, really not comfortable. Imagine, sitting there with a person with dementia.”

“For me, the pandemic has shown that the physical contact is so important. And this need is not easy to be replaced.”

**Keywords:** single mother, elderly care, contact restriction, friendship, art & creativity

**DE04**

**Title:** For me, almost nothing changed during the pandemic

**Narrative:** “My name is Susanne and I live together with my husband and our six-months-old son. We got married before the birth of our kid, but have been together for eight years and moved together very fast. My parents live in another region in Germany, I came here because of my studies and stayed because of the love. I had some longer study exchanges in Italy and Latin America. My husband was born and raised in Germany, but his parents come from Morocco. He has no strong strings to this country and feels here at home. He is self-employed and I am a full-time employee at a company but at the moment I am at home for maternity leave and plan to stay home for two years. At the beginning of the pandemic, I have been working in home office all the time which was great. I had more time for private life, to do sports or other things. I was very flexible, could also do some purchases during my work hours in the lunch break. My husband was also lucky after the beginning of the pandemic since he is metal worker and during that time, many people began to renovate their houses which means that he has more

work than before the pandemic.

I feel that I am a single mother since my husband works a lot. He always tries to be there, but in the end I am all day long alone with my child. This has also affected his relationship to our child, as he did not want to be taken by my husband and always cried. This was especially at the beginning. Now it is getting a bit better.

Regarding household, nothing has changed. Before the pandemic, I was the only one doing the cleaning, cooking, purchasing, everything and he just worked. I prefer to do all this during the week and on Sundays I manage to visit some friends because otherwise we would just stay at home. I am the manager at home. Since I am a mother, we arranged someone to take over the cleaning at our home once a week. I cannot take care of everything. For me it is more important to buy fresh products and prepare healthy food therefore somebody has to do the cleaning. And he is the one paying for it. I myself also cleaned other people's houses when I was a student and I know what it means to clean properly other people's places.

I don't feel any restrictions nowadays. I do a lot of activities with my son, e.g. swimming for babies. Since there are test centers everywhere, I use this opportunity just to be sure, as I am also vaccinated. Only at the beginning, when there were no test centers, you had to make a real effort to get tested and participate in social activities. I am lucky that all the post-partum activities took place in person. But still there are women that do not feel save taking part in person and would like to switch to an online-course.

There is one thing that annoys me which is the different rules that have to be considered. At certain places it is enough to be vaccinated, at other places you need an additional test, etc. There is no general rule and sometimes I don't know where to look up the information. For example, I find it easier to find this information in the Italian press than in the German press.

I got vaccinated because I wanted to have the liberty to take part in social life and events with my baby. Before I got vaccinated, I wasn't able to buy clothes for my son because of the regulations. When I was pregnant, there was no vaccination recommendation for pregnant women and when my child was born, there was no recommendation for nursing women. Therefore, I got my first vaccinations just some months ago. I felt a bit insecure but when I realized that in the postpartum course everybody got vaccinated, I also decided to take this step.

I am really not a fearful person. Of course, I try to be careful, always test myself and I really don't want to get the virus but I feel that it is coming closer to us. In my family, a lot of people already got infected with Omikron. I am really tired of the pandemic, it affects the economy, it affects relationships, we should try to live with it. A friend of mine just got separated. Her husband always worked on assembly and then suddenly he was at home all the time and they had to bear with each other. The pandemic destroyed their relationship. I just wish to have a normal life, especially for our kids. Childcare should work properly. Not everybody is lucky to be able to work in home office and take care of

the children at the same time. I could not imagine to be working while taking care of my child. There has to be found a solution on how to live with the pandemic. Things have really changed. Before the pandemic, for example children played together at the playground. Nowadays, every child plays on its own, this is horrible in my eyes.

[878 words]

This interview was translated from German to English. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Before the pandemic, I was the only one doing the cleaning, cooking, purchasing, everything and he just worked."

"I feel that I am a single mother since my husband works a lot. He always tries to be there, but in the end I am all day long alone with my child. This has also affected his relationship to our child."

**Keywords:** home office, pregnancy, social participation, child care, insecurities

**DE05**

**Title:** The pandemic brought financial problems to our family

**Narrative:** "My name is Vanha, I am from Mozambique, I am 48 years old and I have been living in Germany since 2012. I live here with my family, my husband and my 21-year-old daughter. My husband has already been living in Germany since 1986 and for us it was not that easy to adapt here, we come from another culture. It was not easy but we got used to it. My husband had already acquired the German way of thinking; he came when he was 17. He lost a bit also the African culture. He was young. We had to adapt also to each other because we had different ways of seeing things, he knew more the European culture. For example, in Africa, the issue of being on time is not our strength. Here it is very important. In Africa, pupils can arrive late at school and here it is very different. I remember that my daughter had problems because when we still lived in Mozambique, she arrived late at school and it was never a problem at all. When she came here, every time she was late at school, the teacher recorded the missing hours even though she was there. She accumulated so many missed hours that we received a letter from the Ministry of Education asking my daughter to do community service or pay a penalty. So she opted for the community service. That happened twice. Then she realized that things work differently here and she changed her behaviour. She has really adapted to the society. Thank God. My husband learned us a lot, he was a real support. I work as a cleaner since I came here. As I did not speak German that well I did not have other opportunities because for cleaning you don't need any qualification. I also had to work a lot because I had to pay some language courses for my daughter as she did not speak any German when she came here. I had already a basic command of the German language.

Some time ago, I attended a course for caregivers of elderly people, which I liked. There, I had to attend two internships accompanying people. I found it interesting but

afterwards I realized that I would not have earned more than cleaning. I am already used to clean, I have also some liberties and for me it is not a hard physical work. My professional life changed when I came to Germany. In Mozambique I had been working as an accountant at a big transnational company. If I wanted to work as an accountant in Germany, this would not be possible as you need a special vocabulary and I did not have a good command of the language.

My husband has a full-time job, I have a part-time job and my daughter is doing an in-company training where she also has to attend school. So the household remains with me. I do what I can. On the weekends we do the cleaning, sometimes my daughter helps. My husband is a man (laughing), he does some things, he takes away the garbage, does the laundry, his laundry and mine, my daughter washes her own clothes. He washes, I do the ironing. But sometimes, when I don't have time, he also does the cooking. My daughter does the cooking, as well. My husband and me, we eat Portuguese or Mozambican food, my daughter - as she was also raised here - cooks the food people eat here like pizza. At home, everybody eats what he or she wants.

When the pandemic began, for us it was a hard time, we had some financial problems. It came together that we had to leave our flat because the owner wanted to make some refurbishments. We moved. Then with Covid, my husband's work hours were reduced, I lost one of my jobs. Our new flat was not ready, we still had to do some renovations but we had to stop because of our financial situation. This pandemic really brought a lot of problems to us. My husband had to carry the financial burden and the expenses changed and I was not earning enough money. It also had an influence on our private life: We all had to stay at home. During the lockdown, we tried to get along, we could not leave our small home. It was some kind of stress. My daughter stayed only in her room but she was tired of staying at home. She sometimes left her room to go to the toilet or eat something. TV and the phone were our best friends.

Now, I am still working less hours. My husband is working full-time but I am still waiting to find a new job. But I want to travel first to Mozambique in the summer before looking for a new job.

**Specifically telling quotes:** " Then with Covid, my husband's work hours were reduced, I lost one of my jobs. Our new flat was not ready, we still had to do some renovations but we had to stop because of our financial situation. This pandemic really brought a lot of problems to us."

**Keywords:** migration, language, access to labour market, economic burden, education

DE06

**Title:** The outbreak of the pandemic was one of the hardest times in my life

**Narrative:** “I am Charlotte, I live in Germany and am a dancer. I am married and have an almost 2-year-old daughter. We are a migrant family. I have been living in Germany for 8 years. 7 years ago I met my husband who was living in Great Britain at that time. He came to Germany 3 years ago to live with me.

When I came here, I was part of touring dance groups. Afterwards, I began to work as a freelancing dancer but it was a hard time because dancing is not a very reliable job. As I support also my family in Senegal and I pay all the expenses here, I did not make it to earn enough for our living why I started to work additionally in different domains.

I was working in a kindergarten when I became pregnant. It was the moment when I decided that I would prefer to work with elderly people and to pursue the required vocational training. I like it and I am still working in this field. When there are bad times at work, I think of my family and why I am doing all this: Paying school for my brothers, supporting everybody over there. I won't quit just because of one person.

I became a mother during the first Corona-lockdown. After three months of my pregnancy, I was prohibited to work [Editor's note: This is generally done when the pregnant woman works in a domain of strong contact to other people]. Additionally, my cervix was opened already at the beginning, I was sick during all my pregnancy. I was neither able to dance nor to do any sports and even spent some months at the hospital. The conditions during the pandemic, of course, affected us a lot since we live on dancing at big shows, events and workshops. Everything was cancelled. And my husband was still only working as a dancer, he did not have any additional occupation. We had to apply for the general state subsidies but I was in hospital and my husband did not have the required knowledge of the German language back then. I could not receive visits during that time due to the pandemic, just my husband for two hours per day, and I really could not take care of this. My husband himself was not allowed to ask for state aid as he has another nationality. It was a really hard time because we had not received any income for more than four months. It was a catastrophe. I couldn't even sleep when being in hospital because I was so worried about this whole situation. I think that it affected my baby inside my belly. And then, when I was home to take care of all the paperwork, I really felt that the German administration just does not care about the people. They have rules to follow and don't care about the people behind the letters and phone calls. How shall a person take care of all this paperwork when you are in hospital?! It is simply not possible. I then also realized that life in Germany can be very hard, even sometimes harder than in Senegal. There, at least, you can ask the owners of your flat, to pay the rent later because of financial difficulties. Here, don't even think about this option!

I really have to say, I won't ever forget corona, it was the hardest time.

I came out of hospital in April, took care of all the paperwork and then my daughter was born in May. Directly when she was born, I began to look for a new job. I was really fed up and did not want to depend on the state at all. Since then, I feel free. And I am a feminist, I like to work and I don't want to depend on anybody. Even though, we are sad

that we are not dancing as we did before. Dancing was our life. Also my husband had to adapt. He learned German after our daughter's birth, looked for another occupation and now has different jobs. Corona just changed everything in our lives.

My dream is to finish having my house built for my family in Senegal and that my brothers and sisters find a good job. I come from another culture, another country. Me, I think that if I succeed but my brothers and sisters don't, then it is no success.

[741 words]

This interview was translated from French to English."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I really have to say, I won't ever forget corona, it was the hardest time."

"I couldn't even sleep when being in hospital because I was so worried about this whole situation. I think that it affected my baby inside my belly."

"Corona just changed everything in our lives."

**Keywords:** racism, pregnancy, language skills, state support, cultural background

DE07

**Title:** I always took care of everything, during the pandemic it was just more

**Narrative:** "I am Heike, I am 35 years old, mother of 4 children. My oldest daughter is 15 years old, one son is 9, the other 7 and the youngest is one. My three first children were born during my studies. In 2014, I suffered from cancer directly after the birth of my third child and since then I am incapacitated for work due to the repercussions of my illness. In 2015, I then separated from my two first children's father. For many years, I have been a single-mother and until now my current partner and father of my last child is not living with us because we just haven't found a place that could be large enough to live together. But in half a year, we will be moving to a house and I am very happy about that. I have mostly been the only responsible person for the education and care of my children. Especially in my last relationship, it was very clear that I am the sole responsible for them. Even though my partner at that time was also a student and took some semesters off to take care of the children, it was me who did all the work. Now, I am officially a single-mother and the children live mainly with me, so that during the time of the pandemic it was me who took care of home-schooling for example; Also on the days when the father was supposed to take them. As he works and I don't, it was always clear that I was the one taking care. Therefore I can say, that the pandemic had an effect on me, having my children all the time around. All the four of them. The last one was born end of 2020 and then the second strong lockdown came and I was at home in childbed, doing home schooling and taking care of everything. My current partner was not allowed to take paternity leave because we are not living together. But he pays alimony. Of course, it was a very tough time but I really did not take it as very onerous. I was just happy that we were healthy. The cancer illness had been the toughest time for us.

In general, all the partners refused to take paternity leave as I am home anyway due to

my incapacitation. It has really always been like that. And from my last relationship, I have learned and decided that I want to do that differently in the future. My current partner works as well and I am just working as a freelancing journalist occasionally, but it is really not regular. I just felt that I had to use all my energy in more important things in the last year that I simply did not have the power to enforce this support. In addition, I know that my children don't have such a good time with their father, why I prefer to do everything by myself.

Regarding the financial situation, this hasn't change due to the pandemic because these worries had always been present. My current partner is a musician and, of course, now he has been earning much less. The biggest burden for me were the restrictions for the hospitals, nobody could visit me during and after the birth. Also the medication I need was mostly not available. And of course the general situation: We cannot inspect kindergartens due to the pandemic. This limits us in some way.

Regarding my illness, I am incapacitated for some years. I just have one vocal cord which means that I cannot speak for too much time. As I have studied to be a social worker, I will not be able to consult people. Besides, my hands are numb and I suppose that this will stay like this forever. Officially, I will be healed in 2 or 3 years, therefore I will not be able to work regularly but I really want to focus again on writing and continuing the path of journalism at least as a side job.

In 2020, I published a book about my illness and about the time afterwards when the doctors discovered my 4-year-old's tumor disease.

I don't feel that I can work now. I still have so many commitments with my doctors, physical therapist and so on. And I have to wait until my youngest son will enter the kindergarten.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I have mostly been the only responsible person for the education and care of my children. Especially in my last relationship, it was very clear that I am the sole responsible for them."

"Regarding the financial situation, this hasn't change due to the pandemic because these worries have always been present."

"Therefore I can say, that the pandemic had an effect on me, having my children all the time around. All the four of them. The last one was born end of 2020 and then the second strong lockdown came and I was at home in childbed, doing home schooling and taking care of everything."

**Keywords:** home office, corona pregnancies, social participation, social pressure, outsourcing, cleaner

**DE08**

**Title:** For me and my family, the pandemic brought some sad moments but there are always positive aspects

**Narrative:** “For me, like for many other people, the pandemic caught us surprisingly and in a crucial moment in my life. I had just been retired in December of 2019 when nobody was talking about Corona and I was able to carry out a trip for 2 months. When coming back from my journey, the restrictions were already being established. It was Carnival and the moment when Corona expanded in Germany, where we realized how serious it was. I had to stay isolated, very afraid. I couldn't even meet my own family, nor my children neither my grandchildren. My children were very worried about me. When they called me and I was not at home, they got panicked. I felt a pity for my older grandson who wanted to come and visit me but he couldn't. We were all really sad. A time of sadness began.

After this first wave, I decided that I couldn't stay like this all the time and began to go for walks or little bike tours. But it was so sad to see the empty streets, the closed shops, nobody working. This actually did not affect me directly, which I was happy about. I did not need to think about how to organize my work at home, how to adapt to these changes, etc. I could do everything at my own pace.

The established restrictions were panicked reactions because of insecurity. This affected the population not only in its daily life but also emotionally. The fact of not being able to meet friends. But when I strolled through my very diverse neighborhood, I saw all these announcements made by young people, offering their help to elderly people, I found a really positive and warm effect of the pandemic on this society which is generally very cold, distant and individuality driven. I have always disliked this.

What changed for me completely was that I had been living in a flat sharing community which was dissolved due to the pandemic. Therefore, I had to cover all the costs by myself which was impossible. I had to find a solution before spending all my savings. This forced me to find a new flat. My former roommate could not continue working as she did before. She generally came to my town once or twice a month but now she had to work from home, in Berlin.

Also my social environment changed after the outbreak of the pandemic. The communication with my friends that I generally met once per month, with which I speak in Spanish, we exchange books, experiences, receipts and a lot of conversations, were reduced to WhatsApp-conversations. But I really think that the personal contact cannot be replaced by video-calls or others.

In the first moment when the restrictions were loosen, we began to meet again. But only under the conditions of being vaccinated and being able to maintain the distance. That meant that we met at my friends' houses with larger spaces or outside in a garden or on a terrace. Then, the second wave came, and we really felt that we missed each other but it was a moment to be patient. This is something we all had to learn in these times:

patience. The ties, luckily, are still the same. Then, I have another group of friends which are whole families with which I shared the time and experience of migration and which have always replaced our absent families we left behind. We have not been able to meet again with the whole families because of the fear of infection.

On my journey to Peru this time - where I stayed more than two months - there were a lot of family members that I was not able to meet, we had to limit our exchange to phone conversations but, you know, it is not that easy to have such profound conversations as when you meet in person. But also here there was a positive aspect within the negative experience: We were not able to celebrate the big parties that we used to but I met a lot of cousins separately which gave me the opportunity of deepening a lot of conversations, talk in a more intimate way and exchange experiences. Of course, I have grown up with these cousins but even though now I found out more about the last developments of their lives.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "What changed for me completely was that I had been living in a flat sharing community which was dissolved due to the pandemic."

"My children were very worried about me. When they called me and I was not at home, they got panicked. I felt a pity for my older grandson who wanted to come and visit me but he couldn't. We were all really sad. A time of sadness began."

**Keywords:** single mother, pension, sadness, contact restriction, elderly people

**DE09**

**Title:** The pandemic left behind especially the women that most need help, support and exchange

**Narrative:** "I am a 66-year-old retired woman.

At my work - a center for international women - where I work on an honorary basis, most of the women work voluntarily and are retired. These women also felt limited: they couldn't continue teaching German, giving sewing classes and others, all the activities that we offer to vulnerable women had to be cancelled. This affected, hence, even more the ones that benefit from our offers and courses: vulnerable women because of being migrants, fleeing from their countries in conflict, being already elderly women or mothers of older or younger children, mostly single mothers, and much more. They were the ones that lost meeting, networking and exchange opportunities in Germany.

Generally, these women are not able to take part in the regular national integration courses because either they don't have the access or they are not available on the times proposed because of child care or professional commitments. At our center, they can bring their children as we offer child care during the classes. Furthermore, women can receive very individual support at our center. This can be in very different aspects of their lives, also for their children for example, when they are applying for a job or want to have

their foreign academic titles recognized.

Some of these women have isolated themselves completely during the pandemic. But we really wanted to continue with our activities and after short time tried to reorganize our work conditions, considering sanitation measures everywhere. We were happy to receive a donation of sanitary masks that we could offer. The women were and still are very grateful.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “This affected, hence, even more the ones that benefit from our offers and courses: vulnerable women because of being migrants, fleeing from their countries in conflict, being already elderly women or mothers of older or younger children, mostly single mothers, and much more.”

**Keywords:** meeting opportunities, social participation, societal disadvantages educational opportunities, support between women

## DE10

**Title:** Single-mothers have a lot of challenges in these times

**Narrative:** “I am Lidia, I am 37 years old, have two kids and am a deputy store manager at a German supermarket chain. I have been a single-mother for already six years, my kids are 8 and 3 years old. Since then, everything has become much more complicated because of the child care situation. I always depend on other people and my work hours just don't fit the hours of kindergarten. With one child it was already hard but still possible in a way, but my second child was not planned and then now with the covid-situation it is just frustrating, with home schooling, the lockdowns, the closed kindergarten, etc. I don't have the possibility of working in home office, therefore I had to extend my parental leave and have been receiving unemployment benefits even though I am still employed. And I cannot go back to work because there is always a reason why one of the children has to stay at home. I am receiving a little part of my salary but in the next months this payment will end and I will be officially unemployed. I have sole custody of my children. Their father is a soldier and has been deployed in different countries. I was alone during my second pregnancy and also alone during the birth. Actually, my son is supposed to be every Friday at his father's house, but in reality this is not the case. It always depends on his work situation and at the moment his father is on sick leave because of a post-traumatic stress disorder. What means that, of course, I sometimes prefer my children to be at home with me instead of spending time with their worried father. Luckily, he pays alimony. I am thankful that we have a good relationship despite everything, my ex can come to our home and see his children whenever he wants. Currently, he is with us approx. every second day. And I also have a boyfriend. Sometime I feel bad and sorry for my children that I was not able to provide a “normal” family life to them, but you never know what comes next in life. Last year, I began to carry out a continuing education as a homeopathic practitioner of psychotherapy which ended last month. I am pursuing some further advanced trainings

in this field and I do also already have a space where to pursue my new profession and soon I want to begin to work as a freelancer. Maybe I can have a part-time job in retail but I really don't get a job because of being a single mother - I am not flexible enough. When I am at my job interview, I never lie, I just say what the situation is.

Home schooling and the lockdowns were not always too bad for us because we all like to spend time at home and sometimes we enjoyed the time of being together. But even though, my 8-year-old son is very demanding. I sometime feel left alone. In these situations, it is not only a problem that I cannot work; I just never have time for myself. Really, with two children it is very demanding. Also the additional information and exchange with the kindergarten, the school, whatsapp-groups with other parents, the information sent by the ministry of education, etc. I just cannot read all of this! That is an additional effort.

I want to add that I am really not a fearful person, also in relation to covid. Of course, I don't want to get it, but some people really exaggerate. They are afraid but without being in danger. I wish more state support for single-mothers. I don't know exactly how but something would need to change on the labor market. It is very obvious that there is no company who wants to give a job to a single-mother. If I could work from home, I would also work in the evening, I would be flexible in this way. Of course, I have existential fears. What will happen if I have not been working for so many years?! Who would give a job to me? At the same time, I also want to take care of my children and would not like to give them away the whole day. But the cost of living has risen and that is a problem. Nevertheless, I always try to be positive and confident. And thinking about the men: you can forget about them. I think that this last generation of men has to find its identity. I don't want to say that my ex is a bad father. He really tries to give his best and I am always happy when he spends time with our children. But he does not have patience, he has had a bad childhood himself. And I don't want to say that all men are bad, but there are just two types of men: sissies which are more woman than man, and then there are these hardcore masculine men. For example, my current boyfriend is a great man, he is even able to communicate in an appropriate way. But there is one thing about which I am pretty sure: boys just don't have good male examples.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I have been a single-mother for already six years, my kids are 8 and 3 years old. Since them, everything has become much more complicated because of the child care situation. I always depend on other people."

"Of course, I have existential fears. What will happen if I have not been working for so many years?! Who would give a job to me?"

**Keywords:** labour market, gender gap, child care, single-mother, professional life

## Denmark

DK01

**Title:** Transwoman, 25, nursing student, impacted through online education and lack of access to gender identity treatment

**Narrative:** My name is Elisa, I am 25 years old and I recently came out as a transwoman. I will commence my treatment in the summer. I am a nursing student, I have worked with vaccinating people from corona and I live in Copenhagen. I had three semesters of my education before corona. "It has affected me in the way that most of our lessons have been virtual, where I amongst other things did group work with people I had only met virtually." I did group work with people that I had no social interactions with. Everything was focused on working. I missed an internship opportunity and the opportunity to follow a patient through treatment. I had to take an exam virtually and I failed. I think I failed because the exam was virtual. I know that, because I passed with the top grade, when I took the exam again. I think it has to do with the lack of openness that you experience from a face-to-face examination. Another way I have been impacted has been because I am transgender. Normally there is a waiting time to access treatment for 4 or 5 months and now it is 8 months. It is all over the country, where there is a long waiting time for the Centre for Gender Identity. I think it has to do with busyness in relation to corona. It's probably also something that has not been prioritised as much as for instance heart surgeries or cancer. Something that is directly saving lives. I worked as a vaccinator for a few months. It was a very pleasant experience, if you could say that. I never experienced anything dodgy or anyone being angry. I never felt threatened or anything like that. It was a good experience and it was safe to work there. I am pro-vaccines and have gotten all of my shots. I have felt a feeling of loneliness. I only celebrated Christmas with one family member. The things that I missed in relation to my education and the skills I could have gotten during internships are lost. They will not be compensated. My degree has not been put on hold. I just have to continue through it. I feel I could have become a better nurse if corona had not been there. The skills that you have as a nurse are the skills that I have not been taught. Now I have to learn them another way. I feel like my life has been put on hold, because I recently discovered my gender identity. I think about how nice it would be if I could start treatment right away, both in terms of the legal aspect of changing name and CPR number (social security number), as well as hormonal treatment and voice training. It has long prospects, because it has been prioritised as it has. I feel let down by the Ministry of Health and the prime minister. I feel let down, because someone has assessed that my access to treatment is not as essential as something else.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I feel that my life has been put on hold right now, because I recently discovered my gender identity and how nice it would be to start (treatment) right away." "In that sense I feel there has been a kind of let down, because it has been assessed that the treatment I need is not as essential as something else." "I missed an internship opportunity and amongst that following the full process of a patient."

**Keywords:** Transwoman, nursing student, virtual learning, lack of access to treatment

## DK02

**Title:** Elderly man, 78, was infected with Covid-19, lost a close friend and had a family conflict because daughter is anti-vaccinations

**Narrative:** I am 78 years old. I have been in the corporate life for most of my life. I had two senior jobs and I have worked as a salesperson all my life. I have been self employed for 18 years. Then I was with a company for 23 years as a salesperson. After the 2008 financial crisis I voluntarily resigned and then I saw a new job in the newspaper. It was a super job that I had for 4,5 years. It was well paid and it was with really great colleagues. I am a divorcee by choice and I have three children and I have lived alone for 40 years. I had tried being married and I had tried having children. I live in a small city in the northern part of Zealand. I found out that this could be a solution. I have 9 grandchildren and I have two great grandchildren. I know everything about family life. I am a member of DaneAge (Ældresagen) and was a member of the board. They were not doing anything because of corona. We thought that was wrong. Last year before the restrictions were completely removed we did four events in July and continued until the lockdown in December. In the meantime we were elected to the board. We have had full blast, we just had an entertainer for 94 people. Normally, we are around 150 attending, but because of corona we have gone by with 60-70. That is fair. Some are sick and some are a bit scared. One couple in my network, where the husband is sick, they are so scared of corona, that we have not seen them for 2 years. That is a bit extreme. One of my sons lives 500 km. from where I live. I was infected with corona last year. My buddy sadly died with corona. When I was infected we found a way to solve it. My impression is that the well-functioning, the ones that are a bit outgoing, maybe around 10-20 % they have felt it. But the grandparents and great grandparents were not flooded with visits from relatives before. I can see with myself, my one child lives in Copenhagen and the other one lives in another city. I don't see them as often as I see the son that lives close to me. I have my daughter, she is against the vaccine, she is a health apostle and believes that the body can cure the disease itself. That has created some conflicts. My best buddy died from corona on the 30th of January last year, he would not have lived five more years, he was already sick. But corona is what gave the push. That for sure has created a conflict. Or maybe not conflict, but disharmony. My buddy, Jens, his wife Maria and I, we had a business for 18 years. We had a close relationship. I do not want to listen to those who do not want to get vaccinated and say that it doesn't matter, we can just do whatever. I do not share that opinion. Of course you need to show consideration towards other people. You have to do that in all aspects of life. There is a woman in our community. When we have lunch all of the other people complain about their food. She does not want to complain. She says not to spend time on that nonsense. I think a lot of people are like that. We were three people alone together on New Year's. January 6th I was called and asked to take a corona test. I was infected as well. Jens was put in the hospital on January 9th and was there the whole time. Since I have lived alone for 40 years, it was no problem. I think you can compare it to when spouses lose their partner. In the beginning there is a huge sense of grief. Some of them find a solution and some

of them never find a solution. Our future is shorter than our past. Two years is a huge chunk. People deal with it in different way. I think the media exacerbates the issues. You start to sort the information that you get. Some of it is supposed to scare people and make people angry with the government. Denmark has made it well through the pandemic. We don't have that many deaths. If they want to know about the pandemic they should be sent to Brazil. Then they can count the massgraves or Northern Italy in the spring of 2020. They would have a different relation to it. The things that we cannot change we should not spend our time on. They will happen either way. In our family some people have parties and some don't. We were at a birthday last year, where my grandchild and her husband were tested because they would not hold the blame for creating a ravage. As I see it they were considerate towards the elderly. It has been difficult with the masks. I have also attended events in the city, where we had to wear masks. You have to decide if you want to use the mask in the metro or do you think it is too much. The people at my age we are children of the war. We do not have the demands to a crisis as young people have. My grandchildren say that it's hard for the kids.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "That for sure has created a conflict. Or maybe not conflict, but disharmony." "I do not want to listen to those who do not want to get vaccinated and say that it doesn't matter, we can just do whatever" "Our future is shorter than our past. Two years is a huge chunk." "I was infected with corona last year. My buddy sadly died with corona. When I was infected we found a way to solve it."

**Keywords:** Elderly, infected, family conflict, community support

**DK03**

**Title:** Former mink farmer, 62, lost his job because all mink in Denmark were put down due to Covid-19

**Narrative:** I am 62 years. I have had minks since 83 together with my brother. I started working with my uncle in 77, when I left school. I have actually been working with mink since 77 as far as I remember. It was until around a year ago. I have two grown children. I was divorced in 2007. Now I live together with someone else. I live in a small city in Northern Jutland. Corona means that I'm not allowed to have mink anymore. I have another job now as a truckdriver. Most of the year I was alone with the minks. The minks were infected right up to the weekend. On Saturday I could see it on the minks. I was also tested positive on that Monday. The day after they came from the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration (Fødevarestyrelsen) and tested my mink. They were all positive (the tests). During the next 10-12 days it ran through the farm. The 1st of October (2020) they did tests again for antibodies, from the University of Copenhagen. They didn't have the virus anymore. There was an increased mortality during that week in the farm. If there were any weak ones they were taken there. There was absolutely not more mortality than normally. I had symptoms for two days and then it was over. The minks had symptoms

for two-three days. It took some days to go through the farm. The brown ones were more affected by the virus. They stopped eating for some days. After October 1st things were running normally at the farm again. We were told that we could continue as normally with creating fur and breeding, but that was changed around 3 or 4 November. We started putting them down on the 6th of November. That was exactly the time we should have started creating fur. That was the worst part. I had a farm where the infection had already passed. Someone helped me with putting them down. He had not been infected before and he didn't get infected by putting them down. My farm was not at risk of infecting anyone. I thought it was a waste of resources. A Romanian man helped me. "They must be crazy" he said. Because the minks were in good shape. The veterinarian and a professor from the University of Copenhagen told me that the risk of mutation was very small. In my opinion it was a political decision and not based on facts. They said that 50 % of the infected in Northern Jutland were infected with the mink variant. But if they only tested people with close relations to the mink farms then it would of course be 50 % of them with the variant. They were looking for the infected ones with the mink variants. After I closed down the farm I had a course in how to drive a truck and then I got a job driving a truck. "It affected me mentally. I was shaken up. They visited more times from the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration. There were also a few soldiers here, when we were putting them down. They sat and looked. I could sense that the employees were becoming more and more angry. One of them told me that the mink farmer she was with before me, he cried from when she came and until she left." The other mink farmers were affected by it all again, when everything came up with the text messages. Some were very affected by it. I wasn't that affected by it. It helped me to get another job. But some days ago, when I had to do some renovations on the farm, I thought it would be nice to have mink again. It's what I'm passionate about. If we didn't want to put the mink down, we were at risk of getting the public against us. If a mink farm was infected, then the mink farmer could not put the mink down by himself. I had to wait until they came. When they finally came the infection was over. If they had relied on the information from Copenhagen University maybe the mink wasn't put down. I think that the National Institute for Disease Control (Statens Serum Institut) was told that they had to say that the mink should be put down. They used the mutation as a reason for putting the mink down, but it was already gone, when they were put down. My wife worked at a care home; she might have taken the virus with her home. "I think I will continue to drive a truck until I retire."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "That was the worst part. I had a farm where the infection had already passed." "I had to wait until they came. When they finally came the infection was over." "It affected me mentally. I was shaken up." "There were also a few soldiers here, when we were putting them down. They sat and looked." "I think I will continue to drive a truck until I retire."

**Keywords:** Mink farmer, Covid-19 infection, mutation, lost dream job, political impact

DK04

**Title:** High school student, 19, had a hard time finding a social group in her class and felt alone in doing her school work

**Narrative:** I am 19 years old and I am in the last year of high school. Besides being a student I am also the student body president and I do a lot of work in relation to that. I am also a part of the Association for Danish High Schoolers (Danske Gymnasieelevers Sammenslutning). Corona came when I was in the first year of high school. I had just finished a year at boarding school. One of the things that I was happy about was that it didn't impact my year at the boarding school. Because I go to a private school they could make sure that we had the same classes from the beginning. We had these basic knowledge classes at first. I ended up having classes that I didn't want and then I changed classes. "I ended up in a class, where everyone already knew each other and I sort of came in as the new one. So I knew a lot of people from the school, but not from my class." It was hard dealing with that. "They already had a community in the class that I had to learn navigating in. This was before corona, but it still affected me a lot during corona, that I hadn't really found my place and had to do it while there was virtual teaching. Then we had this virtual teaching. The first week it was okay, but then it just continued and there was no deadline. One of the things that was hard for me was that I always had the camera on when there were classes. I was the only one with the camera. Sometimes it felt like I was the only one following the classes and like the others didn't really care." They had the camera on when they were together with some of their friends. I didn't have the same opportunity. It was challenging. There were so many communities that had not been established yet. They were hard to become a part of, because you had to stick with the small groups. It was hard to see the people that I had met, because it was not open and we had to take care of each other. The first year it impacted me a lot in relation to communities and social life. Of course it impacted me academically as well. When school started again after the summer break I was feeling more like I was a part of the class and I had some good friends. I think it took a longer time, because there was also corona. But there were still restrictions on how many we could see and on the parties. All of the social life was still limited. In the first year we had a musical, which is a big project, that a third of the school is a part of. It was cancelled in the second year. I think a lot of the things that are contributing to getting you through what can be hard are about being young and going to high school and having a lot of things to do all of the time. They were sort of the things that were shut down. It makes good logical sense, but it was what made it hard. When we were sent home again there was a different understanding of what we would experience, because we had tried it before. When I speak to my friends I get the impression that I was one of the only people that was consistent in getting up and going online. Some just stayed in bed while we had classes. It was cool that the teachers started asking the students what we like and how they could make the classes better for us. We had to write some big assignments while we were online. It was already quite stressful. Then we couldn't meet each other and we had online supervisions with teachers. Before I was good at reaching out to people, when I was having a hard time mentally. I talked to one of my teachers during lock down. It was clear that he didn't know how hard it actually was for me. It would have been easier for

me to establish myself both socially and academically if corona had not been there. I thought it was unfair and frustrating that the politicians blamed young people for not following the restrictions, when adults were also breaking the rules. We had some online social activities with some of the other high schools that I was planning for my high school, but people were not that interested in joining. It annoyed me that the politicians and the media blamed young people for breaking the rules, when adults were doing it as well.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I ended up in a class, where everyone already knew each other and I sort of came in as the new one." "One of the things that was hard for me was that I always had the camera on when there were classes." "There were so many communities that had not been established yet. They were hard to become a part of, because you had to stick with the small groups." "I think a lot of the things that are contributing to getting you through what can be hard are about being young and going to high school and having a lot of things to do all of the time. They were sort of the things that were shut down. It makes good logical sense, but it was what made it hard."

**Keywords:** Social life, communities, online teaching, responsibility, loneliness

## DK05

**Title:** Single mom, 44, worked from home during the pandemic while taking care of her two children

**Narrative:** My name is Diana, I am 44 years old and I live in Mid-Jutland. I work at the Danish Tax Agency (Skattestyrelsen). I have two children, one is 13, he turned 13 on Friday and one that is 6. I am alone. I think it has been hard. We have been sent home a lot. I have been home, all in all, for 8 months. It has been hard. At one time the big one was also home from school and Michelle was home in the beginning of the corona time. So I had Michelle home from kindergarten, she was 4 and then I had Christian home from school and then I had work. So I felt that I was max pressured in terms of being enough in all areas. If it wasn't Michelle pulling me in the one arm, it was Christian having trouble getting on his school stuff and figuring out what he had to do or shouldn't do. And then there was work where there were expectations. I think it has been hard. At one point I completely lost motivation. I sort of felt that nothing mattered, because I wasn't doing enough anywhere. I felt I was running around in my own bubble. The only contact I had was with my sister, my father and my brother. At that time I was starting to think that I didn't want to continue, now it was simply too much. I might as well stop, because I was not enough anywhere. I thought it was hard. It affected my mood, my energy and the general feeling of being able to do things. I didn't feel like I had energy to do anything. It was just a nightmare. I contacted my manager, because I have been down with stress before and it was those kind of symptoms that I was starting to feel again. They were returning. I felt that no matter what I did I was insufficient everywhere. I was allowed to go to the office even though we were sent home. It was approved by the

deputy director, because if not I wouldn't have been allowed to go in. I was allowed to go in together with another colleague, so there was something outside of these four walls, where I just sat staring into the air. That made a difference. It helped. It was hard. The teams meetings and everything we had during the time it didn't give me anything. Even if I could sit and talk with my colleagues, it didn't give me what it gave me to get away from home. Sitting at home constantly took my peep away. It was strenuous. Just getting out and being able to sit at my office, it made a huge difference. We had to show the good example, because we are a public agency. I felt that I was being punished. If the others could go physically to their office, because it's just a recommendation, then why couldn't we. That was hard for me to accept. We are actually also people, even though we work in public affairs. One time I had to throw away everything that I was working on to help my son with his schoolwork. My own work had to be put aside again. The teacher wasn't replying when my son asked. I had to contact the school and tell them that if teachers were supposed to be available they had to be there. I sort of had all of the roles. I was supposed to be the teacher, I was supposed to be the mom, I was supposed to be the pedagogue and I was supposed to be an employee at the same time. I thought it was hard juggling these roles. In one way I had to be the loving caregiver, in another way I had to be the person to say that they had to sit quietly and at the same time I had to be the creative one giving my daughter something to do that she could sit with on her own. And then I had to work at the same time. I think it has been hard. I'm happy it's all over soon. When we were working online, no one could put their camera on, because it would make the connection too slow or cause problems in other ways. There was no one where I could say: you have to take over here, they don't want to do anything and they are not listening. It became a vicious circle and then I became this angry person. No matter what they said or did I was about to rip their heads off in the end. I thought: now they just had to stop, it couldn't be right. I also had to pull the break and say I don't know what to do. I reached out to my dad and said "do something, I don't have anymore energy, I don't know how to act, I just get angry with them all the time". It wasn't very fun. It wasn't the type of mom that I wanted to be. With my employer I felt, I will do what I have the time to do, but with my children I felt insufficient. I felt that no matter which strings I tried to pull, I didn't really feel sufficient. I had no more tools to use. In particular I remember one episode, where my boy came and told me: "Mom, you are freaking angry all the time. You are just scolding". That was the last drop. I then thought that I didn't want this. I'm not interested in being the mom that is just scolding, as soon as they open their mouths. Both me and my children are vaccinated. All three of us have had corona at our home. My son had cold symptoms, my daughter didn't have any symptoms and I was really sick for 14 days, with coughing, shortage of breath and a sore throat. I didn't expect that I would have been hit so hard, when I recently had taken the third vaccine. Why did I have to take it, when I was hit so hard? I still cough and get a shortage of breath, when I walk up the stairs. Whenever my pulse increases, I cannot breathe.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "If it wasn't Michelle pulling me in the one arm, it was Christian having trouble getting on his school stuff and figuring out what he had to do or shouldn't do." "At one point I completely lost motivation. I sort of felt that nothing

mattered, because I wasn't doing enough anywhere." "It was just a nightmare." "I was allowed to go in together with another colleague, so there was something outside of these four walls, where I just sat staring into the air." "I sort of had all of the roles. I was supposed to be the teacher, I was supposed to be the mom, I was supposed to be the pedagogue and I was supposed to be an employee at the same time." "No matter what they said or did I was about to rip their heads off in the end."

**Keywords:** Single mom, caregiver, multiple roles, working from home, anger, guilt

**DK06**

**Title:** Therapist, 70, unvaccinated and felt a division and negative attitudes because she didn't get vaccinated

**Narrative:** I am Anne and I am 70. I live alone in my house. I am married to a Bedouin and have been for 23 years. He lives in Sinai, so we don't live together. I am a psychotherapist and have worked in crisis situations around the world for instance in the Middle East. I am part of a community of women, where I am a grandmother. I spend time with my children and grandchildren. I also spend a lot of time alone, because I like that. I also spend a lot of time in nature and it's nice with the dogs, because they have to go out several times each day. I am not vaccinated. It is a completely conscious choice on my side. Not because I am against vaccines, but because of the insecurity that was there in relation to these vaccines and because they were fabricated so quickly. I have all of the arthritis that you can have and I have some auto-immune diseases. I didn't want any more trash in my body where I didn't know what was in it. Even though I am at a higher risk or what they chose to call it. My old mom at 93 is vaccinated, my children and grandchildren are not vaccinated, but the rest of my family is vaccinated. I'm alone a lot of the time. I choose not to be around people that much. The people that were in my bubble were my children and my neighbors that I am used to seeing. My mom has dementia, so I had a lot to do with her. There's something about keeping your head in it and not taking your head under your arm and following the principles of carefulness with masks. I am not one of those with a tin paper hat. But being sensible and then get tested in the contexts, where it was required, when I had to go to examinations. My daughter and her children had corona at some point. Of course I didn't see them, but I had seen them shortly and therefore I was nervous... or not nervous, but extra attentive to whether there was something. And I didn't visit my mom before I had taken two tests, so I was certain about not being infected and I wasn't infected. I also did a lot of things to strengthen my immune system and I live relatively healthy. I still have clients. I have worked online for more than 20 years, because I have worked with education in the Middle East and other places, in Sri Lanka after the Tsunami. So I have been used to making treatments online. So all of this online stuff was not hard for me, so I also continued to work and have clients. The courses I had to go to in Sweden they were online, because some were worried about corona. One of the things that made me really angry was that it became like a dictatorship even though they said that it was voluntary

(to get the vaccine). It was like they made an a- and a b-team. That was something that affected me. Right there I became damn angry. It didn't impact how often I saw my children and grandchildren. I was also close with them. I also got tested before visiting the ones in Copenhagen. My grandchildren are in school and at the schools they were very attentive to limiting the spread of the disease. If I have been with someone and I know that they are tested, I am not going to get tested. It's not like I am testing myself all the time. I couldn't travel to visit my husband that was also a thing. I have not discussed or preached. It's important to me that people make an independent decision. We have exchanged point of views. I had one friend that was very hysterical - she was very scared of becoming infected. When she came to visit me of course I tested myself, but she also insisted that we wore masks, when we were close together. That lessened as the general hysteria in society was lessening. She just came here again. She was here for a week. There was an insecurity about my grandchildren being infected, so we also kept a distance and wore masks. I have a decreased lung capacity, it is one of those things that I have. When I go shopping I still wear a face mask in order to protect myself. But I could have done that without corona, it is because of my lungs and people could have the flu. At one point I stopped watching TV, because I felt that the language in the press conferences was blaming the unvaccinated people for the disease spreading. Then someone showed some numbers that both vaccinated and unvaccinated were equal carriers of the disease. It gave me feelings about a totalitarian government. At one point I talked to an unvaccinated friend. We had to be careful, we were discussing whether we would have access to treatment, because we are not vaccinated. There was this division very much in the rhetoric in a very uncomfortable way. There has never been anyone critical towards the vaccines speaking in public. I am a part of a group for unvaccinated people. There are damn many people with tin paper hats on, I think that is just as bad to listen to. My opinion is that I don't doubt there is a lot of money involved in this. The medical industry is making a lot of money on this. In the Facebook group that I am a part of for unvaccinated people, someone asked if anyone wanted to talk and wanted to see each other, because her children didn't want to see her anymore, because her ex-husband and children were convinced that she was wearing a tin paper hat and that she was crazy and all sorts of things. She was very unhappy. She then came to live here for a few days. She was very scientific about researching the vaccines. Her sources were scientifically valid. I didn't know her before, but we are still friends. It was very important for her to make friends. There were many people in that group that had troubles with friends and family.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I am not vaccinated. It is a completely conscious choice on my side. Not because I am against vaccines, but because of the insecurity that was there in relation to the vaccines and they were fabricated so quickly."

"And I didn't visit my mom before I had taken two tests, so I was certain about not being infected and I wasn't infected." "It was like they made an a- and a b-team. That was something that affected me. Right there I became damn angry."

"At one point I talked to an unvaccinated friend. We had to be careful, we were

discussing whether we would have access to treatment, because we are not vaccinated.”

“In the Facebook group that I am a part of for unvaccinated people, someone asked if anyone wanted to talk and wanted to see each other, because her children didn't want to see her anymore, because her ex-husband and children were convinced that she was wearing a tin paper hat and that she was crazy and all sorts of things.”

**Keywords:** Unvaccinated, illnesses, friendships, societal division, anger, inability to move around

## DK07

**Title:** Social pedagogue student, 24, sick with anxiety after having Covid-19

**Narrative:** My name is Sara and I am 24. I just moved to Aalborg a month ago. I am studying social pedagogy. I was on a vacation in Spain in July-August of 2021 together with my former boyfriend and some friends. When we came home and landed in the airport I could feel that I felt bad and so did my boyfriend. So we took a corona test to check if there was anything and we were positive both of us. My former boyfriend, Michael, was only sick for a day and a half and then he started to be well again. But that wasn't completely the case with me. It started with me feeling nauseous and throwing up. It then became worse and worse. When I hit day 6 I couldn't really wear clothes, because my body was so soar. I couldn't stand and shower. I couldn't lie in the bed or be anywhere, because I felt so sick. I had a very bad headache, so I couldn't be in the light. When I woke up I couldn't breathe... I completely couldn't breathe. It felt like someone was standing on my chest and I couldn't get air properly into the lungs. It actually became so bad that I called 911, because my nails and toes were completely blue. It took an hour before the ambulance came, while I was lying there. In the hospital they could see that my pulsometer was not the way it should be, so they gave me oxygen. When I came back home it was like it was continuing, and I actually think that I could breathe after that. I think that because I suffer from panic anxiety, it made my corona 80 times worse than it was. I thought that when I was standing it would be worse, so I started crawling, when I had to go pee and crawl if I had to get something to eat. So I lost 9 kilos, because I just lied in bed and couldn't eat and then I stopped sleeping and had a major crisis situation after this. I started calling the doctor from the emergency service every night, I called 911 all the time. Every time they picked me up, my values were just fine. I could easily breathe, I could easily catch my breath. They listened to my lungs and I could easily take in the air I needed to. There were actually no big problems, but my anxiety kept trying to convince me that I was still sick from corona and never would become well again. It was like that for 2-3 months, where I couldn't even go outside the door or go out in the backyard. I was just lying in my bed. I had to call in sick at my study. And then I actually started to feel better again in December. I am still registered as sick, but I will start again soon. Before I was infected I was not scared of it at all. It is a bit funny, because I have the illnesses of disease anxiety and panic anxiety. But I was not at all scared about

corona. I mean of course I kept a distance and used hand sanitizer, but I did not take it seriously, when the media was reporting on corona and when they said how many died and were very sick. As a pedagogue I still went to work, so I don't feel like it affected my everyday life until I was positive. I was in a residential institution, so people had to be there all the time. When I first started we wore masks, so I don't think they really knew how I look and we had to sanitize and keep a distance. It was really hard as a pedagogue because you have to care for the people you are with, and not being able to touch them was really hard. The school was shut down for a long time. From December 2020 to June 2021, we only had online classes. I feel my anxiety is even worse now, because we have physical classes and it's been such a long time. You haven't been social and had a normal everyday life, it has at least triggered something in me. I started seeing a psychologist working in the psychiatry in October. I had to leave my apartment in Copenhagen and move to the city and home where my grandparents live, because I needed someone to take care of me. After some time we agreed to call the psychiatric department, because it was not getting better. It was actually getting worse, because I suddenly could not get out of the door. I had a really good psychologist and started taking medication for my anxiety. My former boyfriend that I had been with for two years, he left me, because of it. All I could talk about was the illness and how I felt I was going to die. The people that were affected the most are my grandparents that I lived with, because I didn't sleep at night. I cried and yelled at them. I came down with stress because of corona and that made my heart beat really fast, I kept believing that my heart was ill, so I called the emergency doctor at all times and my granddad would get up at night to drive me. I didn't have any energy to ask my friends how they were doing. I was very dependent on my family during that time.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "When I hit day six I couldn't really wear clothes, because my body was so soar."

"It actually became so bad that I called 911, because my nails and toes were completely blue."

"I think that because I suffer from panic anxiety it made my corona 80 times worse than it was."

"It was really hard as a pedagogue because you have to care for the people you are with, and not being able to touch them was really hard."

"I felt very limited in my work as a pedagogue. Because if we were having dinner together we would maybe sit at a two meter distance, three people at a very long table."

**Keywords:** Anxiety, infected, care, health, worrying, student

**DK08**

**Title:** Social worker, 41, witnessed sexual harassment at the workplace and became sick with stress because she had to care for her children while she was working from home

**Narrative:** I live in Southern Jutland in a small village and I am 41 and work in a municipality. I am a social worker with young people that don't have a job, I mean young unemployed people. I changed jobs exactly on April 1st 2020, that is, during the lockdown. That was not really nice starting a new job without being able to meet your colleagues for many, many months. I thought that was very uncomfortable. Likewise I couldn't finish my former job. It was this vacuum like annoying thing. "It was something about learning by trying, call some colleagues, call some citizens. I didn't really know what I was supposed to do, because it was so unusual for everyone." I actually also ended up being on sick leave after a year, for a few months, with stress. I definitely think that was because of corona, because being in the crossing pressure of starting a new job and I wanted to do well. This I could do, but I didn't really know what my assignments were, or when were they really solved. And then at the same time I had to home school two children. "Even if I am married and think I have a good husband, who does not do those kinds of things on purpose, he was just very good at locking himself in his office, because he was at work, but so was I." So I think, and that is something I can recognise from my friends and we have talked about it: Holy crap, we suddenly had a lot to take care of. I think from a general perspective, the men were probably way better at taking care of themselves. And I am not saying it was their fault. But the thing about navigating that complete cross pressure from having a job, taking care of your children and home schooling them and they were also max frustrated, I have two teenagers. I thought that was a giant task. "And I also bent under the weight of it." I think it's a general thing that I can hear from friends, we did some extra things, because someone had to do it. "I am in a municipality, where I think they have a big focus on sexism and unwanted sexual attention, but it's like a group of our male colleagues, they understand it in a completely different way than us women do." It's really hard this thing, and I have talked to my colleagues about it as well, it's hard that they think you are a prude or that you can't take a joke. It's hard to speak about it, because my experience is that these men cross the boundaries, they do not know it themselves. "They are just like "hahaha, we are so funny" and they don't even realise that they actually made someone upset." If you said something to them, they would probably be like: "What, we're just joking." What was different with working from home I think was, it's not that I have experienced it often, but for example getting a slap on the ass or something like that cannot happen when you are working from home. They don't mean anything with it, but it's still uncomfortable. I remember for example something at my old job, there was this episode where I had to put paper in the printer. You are standing, for natural reasons, with your behind upwards, because otherwise you cannot put the paper in, there was an elderly colleague who grabbed my butt-cheeks, because he thought it was very tempting and he thought he was very, very funny. But I didn't think so. But he couldn't see that because I was standing right there and tempting him. That's what I feel you have avoided by being sent home to work. It's difficult to discuss. It hasn't been going on while I was working from home. "It's not in my department, and that is what makes it even harder to deal with, but I am a witness to it and it is something like making all conversations about something sexual.

Or maybe not all, but a lot of them, right? Putting a sexual content in what the female colleagues are saying even though there is no reason for it. And I think that is both a way to undermine their professionalism and it's just freaking uncomfortable, you know?" I'm not the one that it hurts, but I am a witness to it. I have talked to my own teamleader about it and she is very aware of it, it is a woman, and she really wants to be supportive, but I also think that she feels trapped, because she is the only female boss on that level. It is something with stupid, vulgar remarks about breasts and blowjobs and things like that. They come out of contexts that have nothing to do with what is going on. It just sucks to be a witness to that I think. When we came back from being sent home and we were more people at work again I started noticing the remarks. I feel in the corona period it has not been a problem, I would say quite the opposite. We haven't had much contact with our colleagues. Social workers are mostly women. I think when a lot of people are together in the same place, it's easier to limit oneself in terms of gross comments. I feel that the contact I had with the citizens was better, because there were fewer demands. I work with employment and in the law of employment there are a lot of demands. I could ask them how they were doing and what they wanted to do. That was quite liberating. I think that the ones with mental health issues, they have gotten a lot worse. They've been alone too much. Especially those with social anxiety. They can't leave their house and they are set back. There is a cross pressure, because I have to tell them that they have to leave their house. What I really didn't like about the corona situation was how much division it created in society.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It was something about learning by trying, call some colleagues, call some citizens. I didn't really know what I was supposed to do, because it was so unusual for everyone."

"Even if I am married and think I have a good husband, who does not do those kinds of things on purpose, he was just very good at locking himself in his office, because he was at work, but so was I."

"I am in a municipality, where I think they have a big focus on sexism and unwanted sexual attention, but it's like a group of our male colleagues they understand it in a completely different way than us women do."

"They are just like 'hahaha, we are so funny' and they don't even realise that they actually made someone upset."

"It's not in my department, and that is what makes it even harder to deal with, but I am a witness to it and it is something like making all conversations about something sexual. Or maybe not all, but a lot of them, right? Putting a sexual content in what the female colleagues are saying even though there is no reason for it. And I think that is both a way to undermine their professionalism and it's just freaking uncomfortable, you know?"

**Keywords:** Sexual harassment, stress, work from home, mom, social worker

**DK09**

**Title:** Lesbian, 29, rediscovered herself and came out because of the pandemic

**Narrative:** I am Carina, I am 29 years old, almost 30. Right now I live in a small city in Northern Jutland. I work as a teacher in a private school in a temporary position, where I have a temporary job from a teacher that is on sick leave. For me a lot of different things have happened during the past two years. Right when corona was on, when Mette Frederiksen (prime minister) closed Denmark, then I was actually writing my master thesis at the university and was finished with that in a weird constellation. We actually didn't know if we would be able to go to the exam and because of that it was a chaos when all graduates were done that summer. "It was simply the worst, oh it was depressing and I was actually close to having a depression because of it." I felt very confused about what I was supposed to do and what I even wanted. At that time I was living in Aalborg and I actually had a man as a boyfriend. I had been with him for five years and I had lived with him for three years. It was very hard finding a job. There were no places they would let you in. It was almost impossible getting in contact with anyone. "I also experienced that the job center was very pressured. They didn't really know what they would use all of those graduates for." For instance I experienced that my degree was undermined, for instance the first meeting I had with the job consultant, they said that was not the best combination you could have chosen and I was like "see, now I have just spend five years of my life, don't start telling me that." I have a master's degree in English and Media Science. It's easier if they have a person that they know is an engineer. It was a little like within the human sciences you were stepped on a little bit. "What the hell do you tell yourself, choosing something that is so open and wasn't easy making use of." In the summer things were open, but in the winter everything closed down. It was very isolating and I also think that I started to think, what am I doing. "I don't really feel like being with this guy and I feel like half of what I am." My family felt that I was slowly disappearing into myself and it actually reached a point where my parents said, "you need to come home now". And then I came home in January and have actually been with my parents around a year to get back to myself first of all, but also come back to my family, because in that relationship many of the things that I care about doing I stopped doing, because I thought I was supposed to do that. What happened while I was here, was that we were not right together. "And to be honest I also feel that there is a reason why I was so unhappy. I don't feel like I fit in in a heterosexual relationship. And I don't feel comfortable in the role as a traditional woman. I really feel like I shrunk in a way to nothing. "And that just made life too hard and limiting. I actually had to figure out what was going on, because up to that point I had just thought I was bisexual. And I had thought that since I was, let me think back, 17 I think." Then spring 2021 came and Denmark started opening up again. I was still a bit upset and had to figure out who I am and what the hell I want to do and who do I want to be and how do I feel. "Do I want to be in a relationship right now or do I just want to be myself? And I had to figure out the shame I had, I'm actually not into men I am into women. Does that mean I am trans for example? Am I a man in a woman's body? And I was like, no not really." I just think the

idea of the traditional feminine woman in high heels and lipstick and long hair and dresses. I feel that that is not right for me, that meant I also had to make space for being a woman can be more things. A woman does not have to be like the women from Hollywood. I don't need to be saved, I can save myself. It required some soul searching. I can be a woman and like women. It doesn't mean that I am trans or that I need to change things about myself. Some days were easy and some days were hard. This was the result, now I had to accept it. I've found strategies to satisfy this part of myself. I am on dating apps and have found friends that I meet. They opened an LGBT bookshop in Aalborg. It's a very open-minded place. This place has created a culture in this part of the country. It's like a sanctuary. In the summer of 2021 I got a job. I felt more free and cut my hair short. Some react fiercely when they see me. I have had some uncomfortable comments. I was working at a coffee shop and my colleague told me that if I was to be reincarnated, I would be so as a man. I thought he was being transphobic and really rude. "And then I chose for the first time in my life to say, "you know what, I am feeling pretty cool, I am a lesbian." He became very pale, it was funny. I ended up working in the school where I am now. I had to figure out how to be queer in a professional context. It's a part of myself that I don't want to hide. We do not have a lot of LGBT adults in this area, most people move to Aarhus or Copenhagen. The older children were asking me if I had a girlfriend or boyfriend. I felt I was not their friend, but their teacher. In the 9th grade they had sexual education and they were asking me all different kinds of questions. I thought I might as well teach them about it. Someone had a transwoman in their family and asked if that was weird. We talked about gender identity, LGBT and pronouns. They were very quiet and I think they got a lot out of it. I told them coming out was a big thing and they should not tell it to others if someone comes out in front of them. I came out to them and it has been going fine. I had a colleague who asked me if I wanted a t-shirt from the pride. I feel more like myself than I have done before in my life. "I think corona fast-forwarded that process. It's scary to think about that it had to take a pandemic, but apparently I had to reach the bottom to figure out who I was and also to say life is too fucking short to pretend to be someone you are not." A lot of the women and non-binary people I met have come out during corona. It has been like a period of reflection. In school we were also impacted by covid, with a lot of testing and everyone became sick including myself. I was worried about carrying the disease home to my parents and other family members with illnesses. Having covid made it hard for me to breathe, I couldn't run like I used to do.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It was simply the worst, oh it was depressing and I was actually close to having a depression because of it."

"I also experienced that the job center was very pressured. They didn't really know what they would use all of those graduates for."

"I don't really feel like being with this guy and I feel like half of what I am."

"And that just made life too hard and limiting. I actually had to figure out what was going on, because up to that point I had just thought I was bisexual."

“And then I chose for the first time in my life to say: ‘you know what I am feeling pretty cool, I am a lesbian’.”

“I think corona fast-forwarded that process. It's scary to think about that it had to take a pandemic, but apparently I had to reach the bottom to figure out who I was and also to say life is too fucking short to pretend to be someone you are not.”

**Keywords:** Lesbian, teacher, depression, self-acceptance, coming out, finding a community

## DK10

**Title:** High school student, 19, originally from Somalia, worried about Covid-19 and lost social life because of it

**Narrative:** I am 19 years old and I attend a high school in Odense and I come from Somalia. I am doing a two year high school degree. In the beginning I was worried that it would affect our everyday lives and that it would affect my family. It also did. I couldn't play football with my friends. In February or March (2020) I was in 9th grade and we heard something about the school was going to close. It became online. I was not happy about it. “It was in the end of the 9th grade when you have gone to school for a long time, it was in the end and you were supposed to have fun and stuff. We were supposed to go to Copenhagen, but we didn't do that after corona came.” It has ruined some things for me. The school was closed down, then it opened up and then it closed down again. “It made me angry, because you can't just close, open, close, open.” In 10th grade it was also the same. I was afraid that it had affected my grades. So I was not that fond of them closing and opening and closing again. They should either have closed all the time or opened all the time. It has made the days so boring and the days so slow. I couldn't go out to play football. Nothing but being at home and worrying about whether you were hit by corona. “My mom was hit by corona and that also affected me a lot.” One day I was out with her in the city and she got hit by corona. I didn't know. I was with her all day. “When I found out I thought corona kills people and things like that. It just made me worry more. When she was sick, we all had to stay at home until we had a negative test. We didn't get it anyways. I didn't get corona, but my brother and dad had it.” It just made it worse. It was hard going out and getting tested again or buy something from the supermarket for the family. You were worried about being hit by it and not being able to see it. And also infecting others, if you got hit. I didn't get corona. Now, if my brothers get infected I don't worry about it, because I am used to it now. I thought I could have done better in 9th grade, but I didn't, so I took 10th grade. In 10th grade my grades were a lot better even if corona was there. If you had a few cold symptoms, or allergy, I have allergy sometimes, you could see that people would move away from you. People thought you had corona and you had to get tested all the time. You had to get tested every other day to go to school. If you didn't get tested before school, you couldn't go.

My friends and I had a good bond before. We are not as close as we were before, but we still talk. Now we just remember how it was before. If corona had not been there it might have been different. We have become too used to staying at home and playing play station or studying. We don't really go out anymore like we did before corona. We are just used to being home right now. Maybe it's every other month we go out now. Before we went out almost every day until 10 or 11 o'clock. After corona came and football closed down, I came in bad shape and it was hard for me to start again. Not being able to hug and keeping a distance and using hand sanitizer all the time also impacted my time in school. We couldn't visit our family, our cousins, or they came to our place. It hasn't happened that often these two years, so we spoke on the phone or wrote to each other instead. My brother also played play station with them. I wasn't born here, I came here in 2013. It has been very hard. I made extra homework because I couldn't speak proper Danish. My mom always helped me. I don't think I would have gone to high school without my mom.

**Specifically telling quotes:** It was in the end of the 9th grade when you have gone to school for a long time, it was in the end and you were supposed to have fun and stuff. We were supposed to go to Copenhagen, but we didn't do that after corona came. "It made me angry, because you can't just close, open, close, open." "My mom was hit by corona and that also affected me a lot." "When I found out, I thought corona kills people and things like that. It just made me worry more. When she was sick, we all had to stay at home until we had a negative test. We didn't get it anyways. I didn't get corona, but my brother and my dad had it."

**Keywords:** Student, worrying, lack of social interactions, infections, anger

## Estonia

EE01

**Title:** Paradoxes of precarity

**Narrative:** "I am a 46-year-old woman who lives in a small village in the Estonian countryside (although we also have an apartment in the city where I used to work). I not married but live in a long-term relationship. My partner has no steady income: he makes some money from occasional commissions but mostly spends his time maintaining our country property, an old farm inherited from my grandparents. I am and always have been the main breadwinner of the family. This has at times been a source of tension, but we have reached a pragmatic peace in the years that we have been together. I have higher education, my partner vocational education. We have no children.

I had worked in the import-export sector for almost twenty years, having established a secure position in a company but I left, because the owner's erratic decisions threatened the customer base that I had developed over years. The undoing of my work was very frustrating. At the beginning of the pandemic, I was employed by an international company but most of my work was conducted long-distance. The company closed last year and all of the staff was fired, including me. I have been a freelancer since then, working on unpredictable small projects that bring in some income but nothing comparable to my previous salary that exceeded the Estonian average considerably. We are managing, however, as I have some savings and we have always lived frugally. Although my life is now almost as precarious as that of my partner, I am able to take interest in my local community affairs and I have even been invited to join the local government of the small rural parish in which we live. I know that as a woman nearing middle age who has worked all through her life I should be more afraid about my economic future, but I am confident that the diminished income I make is sufficient for us. If necessary, we can rent out our city apartment.

The whole situation thus, oddly, is not depressing but somehow liberating. The old job was well-paid but very stressful: my immediate boss was making management mistakes, communication was poor and the schedule was unpredictable. The management culture was unhealthy psychologically, as the manager refused to accept his mistakes and instead unfairly blamed staff. Thus the pandemic came as something of a relief, as the office staff all had to transfer to distant work. Communications, oddly, got better. The pandemic also reduced the need of unpredictable travel and allowed me to ground myself better and understand that I wanted to leave the job even before the company was closed. The pandemic was a wake-up call. I lost in income, but I have lost the stress that has been making me angry for years.

Although most people feel depressed about the pandemic, this has not been a major issue for us: we live most of the time in the country and thus are isolated from other people anyway. Of course, for somebody used to a high-stress job and international

travel, the eventless routine is also hard at times: on many days, the major excitement is walking 3 km to the local library, where I have set up an office to have a reason to leave our house. One also gets tired of cross-country skiing and running. We meet our family and friends, but we have cut down on our social contacts as you never know who has been where. My partner, because he has been living in the countryside, is not vaccinated—not because he does not believe in vaccines but because he believed he was so far from crowds for the first year of the pandemic as to not be in danger or be a danger to others. Now feels that he is stigmatized and this does not increase his desire for vaccination. This has been a source of some tensions with friends. I got vaccinated at the very beginning of the vaccination drive in Estonia and I was among the first, thus, to also get the booster. This imbalance in our vaccination status and this has made it harder to do things that he also likes: like seeing our old friends who live abroad or even go to a spa with our extended family. But we make do, one day at a time. There is a lot of poverty in the countryside and we are relatively well off here: so many people live off benefits only and it would be unethical for us to complain.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “The whole situation thus, oddly, is not depressing but somehow liberating.”

“There is a lot of poverty in the countryside and we are relatively well off here: so many people live off benefits only and it would be unethical for us to complain.”

**Keywords:** precarity, freelance work, management culture, income gap, vaccine hesitancy

**EE02**

**Title:** Depressing selfishness

**Narrative:** “I am a 38-year-old Estonian man and I live in a small Estonian town, but regularly visit a bigger city where I am completing a postgraduate degree. I used to live in the town where I study but I gave up my apartment during the pandemic, to save on rent. All courses were online anyway and thus it did not seem to make sense to spend the money, especially since I am living on a limited budget. I have steady, but small, income as a postgraduate student, but in Estonia we have to pass an annual performance review to maintain the income. Although people around me are very supportive, the atmosphere of constant competition creates a lot of stress.

Another source of stress is the atmosphere of, if not exactly intolerance, then at least a lack of acceptance for difference: as a gay man, I am used to not talking about my life with people I do not know. I am not hiding it but I also do not want to share too much information. The situation is complicated, as there is a big generational difference: while people in their 20s tend to be accepting of gender diversity and very open about their identity choices, this topic is very hard to even talk about with people over 60 who were

raised under Soviet regime where homosexuality was criminalized. Mostly people avoid the topic, but there is also casual intolerant commentary and jokes in the media but also on the streets, especially late at night when drunk people leave bars. Although I have not been a victim of violence, I have friends who have been attacked for looking different. You do not even have to be gay to be attacked! The attitudes seem to be class based: university students are accepting of difference but when one leaves the bubble, one meets people with less education who see the increasing tolerance in our society as a threat. It is not just about sexuality, although gays and especially trans people are often targets of violence. One learns to avoid certain kinds of groups on street at night by reading their clothes and body language. These stresses add up and made Estonian life seem quite toxic even before the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic did not initially have such a huge impact on me as I am not that social anyway and thus the closing of bars, restaurants, gyms and other similar facilities did not seem that big a deal. I was able to take long walks: oddly, as city centers emptied out, different nature walks around the city were very crowded. Things got worse when I had an injury that prevented me from walking and this indeed made my mental health get worse. This is odd to say, perhaps, but I was fortunate in already having a psychiatrist and thus access to medications, while I know many people had to wait for months to get access to even most basic mental health consultations. I felt bad but I had help at least. However, the crisis did create a pervasive fear and anxiety that was contagious and that added to my own pre-existing anxiety issues. The situation was made worse by the blatant way in which the government and the opposition used the pandemic for political gain. They explicitly showed that staying in power was more important than people's mental and economic wellbeing and health. Not that I had illusions about community spirit and kindness, but it was still disheartening to see the flourishing of individualism. I also cannot understand why the state was so inefficient in the distribution of masks and tests. I really cannot understand by the rapid tests have to be 410 times more expensive in Estonia than in Germany or the Netherlands. In the latter, students and teachers have access to free tests. And Estonians are so much poorer.

It is also very depressing to look at the selfishness of so many Estonians: if people do not believe in masks or vaccines, they still should not assume that they have the right to endanger the lives of more vulnerable people in society. There are ways of getting around, without putting others at risk, especially in Estonia where there are so many online services and e-commerce solutions. This, of course, is not an Estonian problem alone. It is just that the atmosphere in Estonia is often so unfriendly and this makes it hard to operate, especially when you are more vulnerable than the average person.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Not that I had illusions about community spirit and kindness, but it was still disheartening to see the flourishing of individualism. It is also very depressing to look at the selfishness of so many Estonians: if people do not believe in masks or vaccines, they still should not assume that they have the right to endanger the lives of more vulnerable people in society."

**Keywords:** intolerance, individualism, economic inequality, mental health, LGBTQ, political mismanagement

**EE03**

**Title:** Too numb to even be angry

**Narrative:** “I am a 30-year-old Estonia man living and working as a nurse in one of the major hospitals in Estonia. I am not regularly working with Covid-19 patients, but as hospitals have cancelled non-emergency care during the different surges of the virus, nurses from other departments are recruited to work in the Covid ward as well. I have done my hours in that ward, too. This is not a popular assignment, because of the long shifts and the need to work with PPE. At the beginning of the pandemic, people who agreed to work in the ward were paid double wages but this bonus went away, as the situation normalized. Nurses are not happy to volunteer without bonuses because they just cannot afford to. I am relatively privileged, but I have many colleagues who have to take on additional shifts in the ER and other places to make ends meet. The additional funding that hospitals were given has not visibly changed the general salary levels among nurses and there is therefore a lot of tiredness and many people are thinking of changing jobs. There is just too much stress: the heavy work load, the pandemic, the responsibility and the workplace atmosphere. I am lucky as in my clinic the atmosphere is good: we have an understanding boss who manages people well and we feel like members of a team but that is not a rule. Nurses, especially, are stressed out as they are between the doctors and the patients and have to bear a lot of negative emotion that they have not caused.

The hospital is offering different classes to combat stress and burnout—but the people who need the help the most just do not have time to attend a class! They even do not have the chance to go to a spa, even if given a voucher! At the beginning of the pandemic different companies donated gifts like these but what my colleagues want is a day off, some extra vacation. But with surges in the virus and with so many colleagues sick, you have to go in.

What makes the situation worse is the insensitivity of the society around us. I do not just mean the political debate around masks and vaccines—it is unbelievable that at a time when we could ease the suffering of so many people, especially the old and the vulnerable, there are political forces who are venting vaccine hesitancy and it works. So many people who we could help have been misled and when they get to us, they end up in ICU and Covid patients tend to not return from it. We are mostly vaccinated at the hospital but even we have some outliers. As if our job was not difficult already without this. There are so many people who do not understand how hard this job is and are making it even harder with their poor people skills. One of my friends did half of her internship in Finland and had a culture shock in Estonia, because the friendliness and support she was used to is not there. People are too busy, too overworked and just too numb. There is not even enough energy to get angry anymore.

**Specifically telling quotes:** There is not even enough energy to get angry any more. My colleagues want is a day off, some extra vacation

**Keywords:** care gap, work stress, burn out, numbness, economic precarity

EE04

**Title:** Care deficit on many levels

**Narrative:** “I am an Estonian woman, 48, who has two jobs: I have a freelance job that I love doing and that fills me with a sense of creative achievement and then a job that I dislike that guarantees steady monthly income and also health benefits. I am unmarried but cohabit with the same man for over 20 years. We have a harmonious relationship and have three children. We both work in a sector of the economy where we agreed on a 25% pay cut at the beginning of the pandemic, as this is what the company proposed so that all of us could keep our jobs. The pay cut was very hard for us, as we are paying off a mortgage, but we also wanted to make sure that we get income and maintain our health benefits.

During the pandemic, I was also the caregiver of my elderly mother and father. In other words, it seems that my whole life has revolved around care in the past three years, with very limited outside help. I am insured in the national health service and so are all my family members but it was impossible to secure daycare for my mother when she developed Alzheimer’s. There are very few memory care institutions and they are too expensive for us. In addition, according to Estonian law the family is responsible for the care of the elderly and, well, there are too many people, poorer than us, who are in even more dire circumstances. My mother’s decline was very fast: she was very sharp and physically active but then her mind went. We had issues with her escaping the house and having to search for her in the city and the challenge of explaining all of this to my own children. They were confused by the erratic behavior as well as my exhaustion and irritability. My father was also ailing and of no help. It is understandable that he was frightened by the possibility of memory lapses in himself but he became irritable and all this added to the stress. The situation was especially bad under the lockdown as they were cut off from all friends and we had to shoulder all care. I am afraid that I neglected my own children’s emotional needs at the time: the parent situation was a constant emergency and the children were old enough to take care of their school work. Yet the level of tension was very high in the house because we had no place to escape from the stress. We get along fine with the children, but they also were so aware of the tension that they stopped sharing their difficulties at school, as they did not want to add to the considerable stress levels they knew we had to bear. I felt very bad as a mother when I realized this. But we were left so alone. I guess this also existed before the pandemic, but it was during the pandemic especially that all care was just offloaded to families and in our age group things can be especially bad as we have school-age children but also

aging parents and the double care duty is just impossible, especially when you have to do all of this in your own home. It seemed that there was very little attention to parents, but from my perspective the silence about caring for older parents or sick relatives is even deeper: you have nowhere to go, unless you are very rich! Different kinds of memory care facilities seemed dangerous, too, as there were mass infections and it seemed cruel to send my mother there to potentially get sick and die alone. Doing what we did seemed inevitable. I wish there were some kinds of home health aids like abroad who could have given some relief. Or some kind of a support system. I am actually relieved that I did not lose my job, because I was doing so much of the care work. This invisible work should be talked about more. It is only looking back (now that my mother passed away) that I realized that I was deeply burned out: when I was taking care of everybody else, there was nobody to take care of me, including myself.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I am actually relieved that I did not lose my job, because I was doing so much of the care work. When I was taking care of everybody else, there was nobody to take care of me, including myself

**Keywords:** gender care gap, double care burden, elder care, child care, burnout, economic precarity,

EE05

**Title:** Mothering is a full-time job

**Narrative:** "I am a forty-year-old woman of Russian origin who lives in one of the bigger cities in Estonia. My partner is also Russian but we have chosen to raise our children as bilinguals to help their future careers. We are not married but we have three children: one under one and 2 in primary school. I work in education and my partner in the IT sector. We are both proficient in Estonian. We decided to not take any risks at the beginning of the pandemic, when there was a lot of confusion about vaccines: while I got vaccinated, my husband did not, just in case the vaccines had a bad effect, so that one of us would be able to be there for the children. When you have children, you cannot take risks.

Because our third child was still under a year, I was on parental leave when Covid-19 started and worked only part time. My partner was also able to work from home, but he had to spend the whole day in front of the computer and do work.

The beginning was very hard for my sons as well: when all schools switched to online teaching, they had to learn to be more independent and learn to manage their time better. This added to my work load, of course, as I had to keep an eye on their electronic school application my cell phone to check whether they had a video lesson or what web application they were supposed to use to do some tasks, which work sheets had to be printed out and completed, then photographed and sent back to the teacher. At times we were supposed to videorecord answers: the technical side was time consuming as the children were too small to cope with all of this on their own. The older son had

already acquired some independent learning skills and knew when to ask for help, but the younger son did not want to ask for help and was often just crying in his room. I understand that the teachers were trying very hard to create diverse tasks to motivate students and help them learn but all this diversity also put a lot of stress on mothers, who had to be available to help the students. Supervising schoolwork was a full time job even for me—and I work in education!

Fortunately, this was possible with my own work. I had my own classes in the afternoon, when my boys' school day was already over. If my youngest was not sleeping, the boys or my partner were able to play with her and I was able to withdraw into the bedroom and teach from there. I also have a tiny office at home but it does not have a door and thus could not be used for my own teaching. Not that the bedroom door helped: my daughter stood behind it, crying and demanding my attention. My students got to know my family, too. I am now conducting my Zoom seminars from my office and at times my daughter had to sit in my lap. Nothing doing. Like probably all mothers, I sinned by letting children watch cartoons to get some work done, instead of taking them out, but this does not really work because of disruptions.

The role division is clear: I have to be mother first and foremost. I have to keep an eye on the youngest, on the boys' homework, make sure all children spend some time outside. Pandemic or not, meals have to be cooked, laundry done and ironed. The boys help with some of the housecleaning, but the brunt falls on me. At least the rest of the family gets out of the house and I do not have to keep an eye on the children during the weekly cleaning. The times when I was able to do my own work were very limited: some hours when my daughter was asleep or I can read something when I am putting her to bed—but it is impossible to type in the dark. There were times when I fell asleep myself when putting her to bed and woke up at midnight to do my work for a few hours in peace and quiet. Not that this work was very productive. Getting up before others does not work for me, as this also wakes up my daughter and in our family the first person to rise also makes breakfast. Since my partner is an early riser, he usually takes care of this.

Thus, the main adjectives that characterize my life during the pandemic are sleeplessness and tiredness. Things got better over time, as we all acquired new skills and routines. Naturally I just cut corners with some tasks: if I am too tired to clean, I will not do a thorough cleaning, one can also wear unaproned clothes at home, I rearranged my work so I did not have to give so much student feedback. There was a lot of comic relief in the pandemic dress code: a formal blouse over sweatpants and slippers, with a nicer hairdo and some lipstick. The children knew this was the signal that their mother was going to work.

**Specifically telling quotes:** Supervising schoolwork was a full time job even for me—and I work in education! The role division is clear: I have to be mother first and foremost. The main adjectives that characterize my life during the pandemic are sleeplessness and tiredness

**Keywords:** Care work, unpaid housework, parenting, care gap, double day, exhaustion

EE06

**Title:** Long-distance relationships

**Narrative:** "I am 28-year old woman from a Western European country who currently works in Estonia in the white-collar sector in the largest city. I have worked in Estonia for four years on a temporary contract which will end at the end of the year but I have secured another temporary contract recently. I am safe for another five years and I am also glad that I do not have to move again, as I have come to feel comfortable here. I had was on the job market during the pandemic and there was also a lot of competition: I sent out many CV-s and did not really get any interviews outside of Estonia. I had networked quite hard and was thus disappointed. It seems that the competition has got tougher, as everybody now knows how to work long distance and employers are also more relaxed about people's physical location. The competition for people in my age group really is global. Since I work in an industry where we live from project to project, this is also something that makes it hard to plan your life long ahead. My older relatives do not get this, as they used to have life-long contracts in the same country. None of them, actually, has worked abroad, while I have been away from my home country since my postgraduate studies.

For work, transition to online life was not that hard at the beginning of Covid-19: there was some learning to be done, but in our field, the tools are good and teams adapt. However, it was hard for me personally, as it really disrupted my lifestyle. I am not a party-goer or even very social, but I am an avid amateur athlete and thus the closure of all gyms and other sports facilities made the lockdown very hard. Estonians had their own families and they tended to clam up into their little pods and forgot about us, foreigners, who did not have these pods. It was also at times hard to get adequate information in English. My workplace uses English, but this is not the case in society and my own level of Estonian is very limited. At least I am a legal immigrant, with all documents and health insurance. Fortunately, I have some friends who trusted me and whom I trusted and with whom we were able to run and do other outside activities. I think this was OK in Estonia, as it is easy to get into nature in even larger cities. Plus the lockdown was very limited: Estonians were on the streets again in May 2020 and although we have had some restrictions since then, society has not really been shut down. When you have an electronic Covid-19 pass, it is easy to go to movies, museums and cafes, so there is a variety even when you do work online for most of the day. This liberal approach at times makes me scared, even, as it seems that the general public is not taking the pandemic that seriously even now, when the infection rates are high. Restaurants are still full and so are gyms—despite the fact that I fear from my Estonian acquaintances that schools are hard hit. I am young and healthy and vaccinated, but it seems that it is just a matter of time when we all get it.

My personal life was horrible, though, because my husband was stuck in Western Europe during lockdown and his situation was even worse, because in his country the rules were way stricter than in Estonia and he really had to become a hermit and I had to console him on the phone. When we met again May 2020, after four months, it felt surreal as the trip that usually takes under a day took three days, because the usual airlines and train

connection were not there yet. I still have not been able to visit my parents, who live in a third country because I was supposed to go in December and then the omicron variant emerged and created new hassles for travel—and I stayed in Europe. It is of course sinful to complain as I have a job and I had not serious health issues, but the pandemic has really made the life of transnational couples very hard. At least we live in the EU, where travel has been relatively easy even during the pandemic. We all really love the airlines that kept on flying in the pandemic! People who travelled during the pandemic were considered selfish, but the critics forget about the many transnational families who wait for each new variant with panic as it might cut them off from their partners or children.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “This liberal approach at times makes me scared, even, as it seems that the general public is not taking the pandemic that seriously even now. People who travelled during the pandemic were considered selfish, but the critics forget about the many transnational families who wait for each new variant with panic as it might cut them off from their partners or children.”

**Keywords:** transnational couples, international travel, project based work, labor market precarity, linguistic challenges

EE07

**Title:** We do not really see other people

**Narrative:** “I am an 82-year-old man of Estonian origin and I live in a small rural community. Despite my age, I am relatively healthy, but I try to not move around too much, especially in winter when it is slippery to not fall down and hurt myself. When you fall and break something, it can put you to hospital and this scares me, especially today when people get sick in the hospital. My wife, who is almost as old as me, does most of our shopping when our children take her to the town. I have never become comfortable with all the machines you have to use these days to get out your money or to pay the bills. I am glad that I have children and grandchildren who help. I am not sure I would be able to cope on my own because I am too old to learn these new tricks. My eyesight is getting poor and I am just afraid of making some mistake. I stopped driving a few years ago, because I am not confident about my reactions and eyesight. We gave away our car—and gas is too expensive anyway. Thus we depend on our children to drive us, but fortunately one of them lives close by and so we see somebody most weeks.

I have vocational education and I worked all of my life as an engineer in a factory that has since been closed. It seems that today everybody works in a shopping center, as I no longer see the familiar factories or farms of my younger days. The habit of work dies hard, though: we still keep a garden plot and we also heat our house with wood and so there are small jobs to be done around the house all the time that keep me busy. We cope, although neither of us is strong as we would like to be and everything takes a long time. But I do not complain. Many of my old friends have already died, but many of them had a drinking problem or did not stay active. I did not even smoke: I tried it during the

compulsory military service but then quit. Physical work also keeps you active. If you do not stay active, you really start to decline. I try to listen to radio news every day and watch TV. I read the paper when the children bring it around. The grandchildren do not come as often as we would like to: when they were children, they used to stay with us and it would be good to have their company but now they have their own lives and we do not want to be a bother.

We no longer have many friends and now we do not really want to see many people either because of the pandemic and other viruses, too. There are two of us and we want to make sure we will be able to keep each other company. I have not been vaccinated because we live out of town and do not see anybody: when they started vaccinating people and there were shortages, it seemed important to get them to doctors and nurses and teachers, not people like myself who are not seeing anybody. We are still not seeing anybody and thus it has just seemed too much of a bother. It seems easy in cities but not in the countryside where we are forgotten. There are too many of us old people in villages. So who would I meet who could make me sick? And even if I get sick, I have lived a long and good life.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “We are still not seeing anybody and thus it has just seemed too much of a bother. Even if I get sick, I have lived a long and good life.”

**Keywords:** age, partial disability, economic insecurity, rural community, alienation, care gap.

EE08

**Title:** It is confusing even without Covid-19

**Narrative:** “I am a 19-year-old Estonian who lives in the second largest city of Estonia. I am female, but like many people in my social circles, I do not believe in rigid gender roles. This is quite typical of people of my age group—but not society at large. In fact, Estonian society has become scarier during the pandemic. The general anxiety has created a fear of difference among certain social groups and legitimated hate speech. My parents who are quite liberal are still freaked out whenever I stay out late with my friends because they fear that some nationalist thugs have beaten us up. But I need my friends. We keep each other going. I appreciate my friends even more now, after the lockdown. I started university this year, but I am still very close with my school friends. It has been harder to make new friends now that we sort of seem to move between in person and online studies. It is easier to hang out with people to whom I do not have to explain myself.

The pandemic was hard for me. I went to a very competitive school and when we transitioned to online learning in 2020, I just crashed. The school had always been stressful: demanding teachers, parents obsessed by their children’s success and just very little respect for creativity. My parents are not like that but you socialize with your friends

families and at times there was this huge culture clash. In any case, when we had to go to school, it was easier as the routine helped me and I was able to stay on top of things, get my homework and tests done. But when I had to plan my own time during the pandemic, when we were online, I realized I had never learned to study on my own or to even plan my time. It was also hard to find that motivation when you were stuck in your room. I often just fell asleep and tried to catch up at night. It seemed that our teachers were trying very hard to make themselves feel that they were doing their job, but there was just too much independent work. And there was no emotional support. But we coped somehow, or we learned to cut corners to cope. And we had each other online. Looking back it does not seem so bad but it was very tiring at the time. We did a lot of catching up over the summer—partying for the lost months as well. It is hard to be young in today's Estonia even without the pandemic. The culture of success puts a lot of pressure on you and older generations call us snowflakes, because we do not remember the Soviet time and the poverty of the 1990s. This is not our fault. We seem to have different values, like all of my friends are worried about climate change and are vegetarians, but my parents' generation is still buying large cars. I just wish the society were more open and accepting of difference and also of possible failure. I, for example, really do not know what I want to do when I graduate. I hate the corporate sector and I am scared of having to work in some supermarket, so I cannot afford to study the humanities. I chose social sciences, but now it seems I should have gone to IT.

I am now going to the university and this sort of makes me appreciate that I learned to manage my time a bit under the lockdown as we are expected to be more independent and do all the work during the semester, even if not all instructors check on us. At least all of the semester was in classrooms. We all sit in masks and try to practice social distancing. We have a few students who do not believe in masks and that is sort of creepy, but otherwise my institute has maintained a very relaxed atmosphere. Not at all like in my sister's school where they keep moving between online and in-person teaching as so many children are sick. Nobody tests us at the university, but of course some get sick here too and has to go into isolation. Several of my friends are at home now and I hope that I do not have to stay home next week. This is very bizarre, actually: you never know who is going to be in class. People leave for 10 days of isolation, then come back, but by that time somebody else is going. I do not know what would happen if one of the teachers fell ill. Still, it beats being online.

**Specifically telling quotes:** It is hard to be young in today's Estonia even without the pandemic. The culture of success puts a lot of pressure on you and older generations call us snowflakes. I just wish the society were more open and accepting of difference and also of possible failure.

**Keywords:** value clash, postmaterialist values, environmentalism, LGBTQ issues, economic insecurity

EE09

**Title:** I do not want to complain

**Narrative:** “I am a 45-year-old woman of Russian origin. I work in the retail sector, my husband in an office as a manager. We have been married for over 20 years and our marriage is overall good. My husband is not like many of our friends: he even sometimes helps me out at home and he is a good father for our two boys. He is a bit hot tempered, however, and this means that we have fights that can probably be heard by our neighbors. They are Estonians and thus they do not say anything, but it embarrasses me anyway. People look at me when I meet them on the staircase. But they do not interfere in our lives. Some people might think that I suffer from violence, but he has never hit me. OK, almost never. And he never intends to and always apologizes. The pandemic was hard for him: he is gregarious and likes to meet people and he is very good with people. When we were stuck in our small apartment, he lost some of his world. I was able to go to work because they did not close our shop right away, but he had to work from home. So I guess he was jealous, not because I was seeing somebody but because I had a legitimate reason to go out every day while he did not even get to go to the hairdresser. Plus the children were at home and moody—they saw their dad at home and could not understand that he had to work and did not have time to play with them or help them with their schoolwork. At least he does not lash out at children. Things got better when I too was able to stay at home and took care of the usual housework and the children. My mother offered to come and help but I think her presence would have made the household climate even worse. All through the spring I could not wait for my husband to go to work. Do not misunderstand, I love him but being at home was bad for him and it was bad for the whole family. He understood he was irritable because of the outside stress—we listened to Russian news and then Estonian news and it was all confusing. I was helped by my faith: even if I was not able to go to church, I prayed for patience. My mother also tells me that I am lucky that my husband does not drink. Still, I cry a lot. I know that it is not entirely normal to be afraid in your own home but where do I go with two children and my small salary? And he is not actually that violent, just angry when he winds himself up. And I guess I am not perfect: I have gained weight after my pregnancies and I have let myself go. I am not comfortable saying these things to a stranger, as I m actually lucky. I do not want to complain.

**Specifically telling quotes:** When we were stuck in our small apartment, he lost some of his world. All through the spring I could not wait for my husband to go to work. I know that it is not entirely normal to be afraid in your own home but where do I go with two children and my small salary?

**Keywords:** economic precarity, domestic violence, psychological violence, gender care gap, failure of communication campaigns

EE10

**Title:** I do not want to talk about my home

**Narrative:** “I am a 27-year-old man from one of the former Soviet republics that has become totalitarian and is well known for its human rights violations. I was also a victim of violence. I decided to leave and come as far as I could without having to fly. I came through Russia and managed to get into Estonia where I reported myself to the local refugee center. I managed to make my case and so I am in Estonia now legally. It seems that it is slightly easier for people who come from the former Soviet Union than from Africa or the Middle East. There are not many of us and thus I am treated as an individual, not a member of a big refugee group. I have been learning Estonian and I can now manage a bit (although it is very hard to understand people with masks!). It is hard, though, a very hard language. But in Estonia it is very important to learn the language: when Estonians see that you are trying to learn the language, they become more friendly and accepting. Thus, although the language is hard, I feel that now that I can manage in Estonian I am treated much better. I think I am even treated better than some Russian-speakers. It helps that I am a waiter and thus it is easier to practice language. I am also learning a second job, both to make more money and also to get ahead in society. Many others whom I know just work in food delivery (at times it seems that only people of color ride around with the delivery bags).

Estonians are as cold as the weather here. Estonian society is not that used to refugees: the country is very homogeneous and there are not that many people of color or people of different religions. Estonians are especially afraid of Islamic people—I come from an Islamic country and my name is Islamic. There are lots of fears, although they do not now anything about our religion. I know that there is also politics, as I have seen some scary people on TV, although I have not myself been a victim of violence. I want to stay out of local politics. The neighbors and officials are friendly, as I try to speak Estonian. It helps me that I do not have a family or a community as I must integrate into the local society. I have made local friends and they trust me. I initially thought I would move on to some other country, but I now think I will stay. I never want to go back and I do not want to talk about my past either.

Covid-19 was hard as Estonian really clammed up, even more than usual. I lost most of my job because restaurants had to close. We had a bit of work, because we did some take-out and I was able to make deliveries. It was tough, especially as our restaurant had depended on tourists who have not really come back. I am lucky I still have any work.

**Specifically telling quotes:** Estonian society is not that used to refugees. When Estonians see that you are trying to learn the language, they become more friendly and accepting.

**Keywords:** immigration, xenophobia, integration, Estonian language skills, economic precarity

## Spain

ES01

**Title:** Non-binary autistic person taking care of a disabled mother

**Narrative:** "I am Lur, a 33 year old nonbinary person living in Spain. I am also autistic and receive a modest sum of 400 euros a month from the government. I have only recently become independent in the past few months. During covid I was living at home with my mother who was also disabled and my father. I was unemployed the entire time and I was studying to get my high school degree at the Adult's school. My education was completely interrupted because of covid when the schools shut down, and my educational center made no effort to keep in touch with us students and so I felt very lost. "it was like a nightmare, strange, something completely unreal".

Living at home was difficult. My parents became very anxious after the confinement. My mother who was morbidly obese required much help at home as she couldn't move independently, clean herself independently, and despite my father helping sometimes during the day, I was required to take up the majority of her care, especially at night. Once confinement was over, my father began leaving the house again and my burden increased. This meant that for several months I had very little sleep as I was caring for my mother, and this negatively influenced my mental health. This to me was worse than covid itself. I have an older brother who also did not contribute to her care.

This only added to the fear that I felt due to covid and the restrictions we were made to follow. I am very scared of the police and was afraid to run into them the times I did leave the house to run errands. They were granted more power than they have in a long time. Because of my autism, I am vulnerable to the police. Often my body language and words are misinterpreted, and this is often a cause of police violence towards disabled people. People have gotten beaten by police for not being able to explain why you're out of the house. In one of the neighborhoods in the city, a young man with a mental disability and his mother were beaten by police when he had gone out to the store. I was afraid something similar would happen to me, where I would not be able to explain myself and end up in trouble. Because of this I very rarely left the house and became increasingly isolated.

Once things began to open again I restarted my schooling and got my degree. It took me some time to be able to readjust. Being autistic, changes in routine are very difficult and even my parents had to convince me to leave the house again. I even started having psychosomatic pains. I am now trying to get my bachelor's degree. I don't have any work experience and so to earn some money I have started taking care of kids without a contract. I made up my work history because I don't have any other skills beyond providing care. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "She needed me to make her food, help her clean up. Practically everything. During the confinement my father collaborated because he could

not leave the house. After confinement, things got a lot worse. She started calling me every night, even several times a night not to let me sleep, and that caused me more upset than the covid itself "

"It was like a nightmare, strange, something completely unreal"."

**Keywords:** autism, police violence, fear, care for the sick

**ES02**

**Title:** Migrant woman working as a live-in carer during lockdown was forcibly confined and isolated by the employing family

**Narrative:** "I come from Nicaragua, I am 28 years old and I arrived in Spain 2 years ago. I live and work as a live-in carer for the elderly. Confinement was declared eight days after my arrival in Spain. Due to the confinement measures, it took me two months to find a live-in care job. In my first job, I only worked four hours per day every day, and the family that was paying me offered me to live with the woman I was responsible for, to avoid contact with others on my commute. I did not want to lose the job so I spent all day at the woman's house, helping another girl who was working there, even if I only got paid four hours per day. I also accepted that offer because at the beginning every time I traveled to work I was stopped by the police.

My next job was as a live-in carer of a 94-year-old woman. At the beginning, her family helped me in providing care, but the son got infected with covid and infected the other family members, so I was left alone to take care of the old woman. I spent eight days locked up and isolated, without any support because even though the two of us tested negative, nobody could help us. I wanted to go out for a walk but they wouldn't let me. Then the lady caught the virus, but she was not isolated in her room, nor did she use the mask. I had to get her up, move her and do the household chores. Nobody cared about my health. I tested negative but she took a long time to test negative. I wanted to quit my job, giving them notice, but this woman's family wouldn't let me leave because they said they couldn't find anyone to take care of this person being positive, and that I was obliged to stay there because I was living with someone who tested positive. I went through some very bad months, the whole situation lasted for two months. They put the responsibility on me to find someone to replace me before I left the job and I didn't find anyone because I didn't want to hide the fact that the older woman had covid. When she tested negative, we found someone to replace me. I felt practically kidnapped, and I didn't know if they were right. I would have liked to have a phone number to get information or know someone who could advise me on my rights, but I was afraid of being reported. We come here to work, but as it is not our country... you always feel afraid. We, migrants, live a double life: we take care of the elderly here but we also have to take care and support our families there.

Subsequently, I worked in a house, but they allowed me to work for other families during weekends, and with the vaccine, there was no problem.

Together with other migrant women, we usually go to a telephone booth center to send

money to our families, because we cannot do that through banks. This center has become a place to share information, help each other find work, get news about each other's lives and share our experiences. We are a very large group of women.

I know women whose employers don't let them go out in the street, meet people from other villages, for fear of bringing the Covid to the house and infecting the elderly person. People are more distrustful or think we are not responsible persons, because we are migrants. As an immigrant, I feel that if someone says something to me, I can't answer or defend myself for fear that they will tell on me because of my irregular situation. Now I work in a house where I feel protected, I want to keep working there, I look after them and they look after me."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "As a consequence of the controls put in place during the confinement and for fear of losing my job, I was forced to live away from what was my only support network in Spain and to live as an intern even though my job was only part-time (4 hours a day)"; "I wanted to quit my job, giving them advance notice, but this woman's family wouldn't let me leave because they said they couldn't find anyone to take care of this person being positive, and that I was obliged to stay there because I was living with a positive person"; "I felt practically kidnapped and I didn't know if they were right. I would have liked to have someone or a telephone who could inform me, who could advise me on my rights, but I was afraid of being reported"

**Keywords:** migrant; live-in carer; forcibly confined; fear; lack of information

### ES03

**Title:** We have witnessed how, despite the fact that the world was brought to a standstill by the pandemic, prostitution and human trafficking have continued.

**Narrative:** "My name is Azuzena, I am 28 years old and I am the technical coordinator for the monitoring of human trafficking cases at the foundation where I work, as well as responsible for the migration emergency programme. The pandemic has taught us that despite the fact that in most areas the world has come to a standstill, prostitution, human trafficking and the migration crisis have not stopped. We have been confronted with a situation that, if already adverse, has been complicated by difficulties added by the pandemic, such as freedom of movement, or health conditions. This has been reflected, for example, in the transfers of victims of trafficking from the cases that were dismantled as a result of the inspection in the clubs, or in the vaccination policy in the reception centres, where we sometimes felt that the women were treated more like a piece of furniture than as subjects of rights. Despite the fact that we were considered an essential service, we encountered a large number of interventions, despite the confinement, which we attended to through the use of new technologies and the telephone, but which required us to work more proactively. All this we had to do without direct support from public institutions. Except for some occasional emergency aid and subsidies, the usual neglect of this sector by the institutions was compounded by the personal impact that

the pandemic had on the workers and the consequent increase in stress. We have felt profoundly alone during this period. We have been exposed to risks and situations that neither the public institutions nor the state security forces were willing to take on, and this led us to personally assume the risk, with what that meant for the team, or to devise new strategies so as not to neglect the victims. Our sector lacks specific programmes or structures that favour coordination and this has meant that we have had to make decisions in very complex and urgent contexts, and we really need not only coordination mechanisms, but also the development of an umbrella of work or intervention, in which all the interventions we make, all the parties involved in the fight against trafficking, have a common sense. All of this should be a lesson learned from these years of the pandemic: if it is already a complicated context, at any time, this context can become even more complicated. So, if we start from a solid working basis, it will be much more difficult, that is, easier to adapt to this new situation.

Moreover, in recent months we have had to deal with new situations, such as the difficulty of applying the rules of coexistence required by the pandemic in the centres, as young women who were rescued from trafficking situations found themselves locked up in a centre or shelter, with very limited mobility, and they identified this as being locked up again. They were very affected by the loneliness of having to be without contact and were, therefore, more likely to break the housing regulations, but because we are not considering that these people are in a situation of particular stress and trauma generated by the effects of the pandemic.

To this situation must be added the migratory crisis in the Canary Islands and the difficulties that the pandemic has posed for its management. On the one hand, procedures that were previously simpler have been complicated, such as cases of return to the countries of origin, which have been delayed for a long time due to logistical and international issues, border closures, etc. In addition, we have detected an increase in the number of arrivals of women and women with minors. The coordination of the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration has greatly facilitated the management of this crisis, but it has been oriented, above all, towards guaranteeing the right to health.

In the face of these difficulties, I would like to highlight a very positive fact, which is the great adaptability and willingness of all my colleagues. We have needed to communicate a lot, create meeting spaces and we have supported each other and shared what worked for each of us. This ability to adapt and this communication between us has allowed us not only to manage and support each other in the face of this feeling of loneliness and lack of protection but also to identify and implement initiatives that we had not thought of until now and that could have continuity in a post-pandemic context.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “we sometimes felt that the women were treated more like a piece of furniture than as subjects of rights” “We have felt profoundly alone during this period. We have been exposed to risks and situations that neither the public institutions nor the state security forces were willing to take on, and this led us to personally assume the risk, with what that meant for the team, or to devise new strategies so as not to neglect the victims.”

**Keywords:** human trafficking, lack of coordination, first responders, gender base violence, migration

**ES04**

**Title:** Professionals' responses during the lockdown

**Narrative:** "My name is Atenea, I am a psychologist by profession, and I am currently working in the Office of Equality and Attention to victims of gender-based violence. I started working in 1996, in a similar service in the town where I lived at that time and I was there for 15 years, until the service was shut down. I have been working in my current position for 10 years. It can be said that the office of Equality and Attention to Victims of Gender-based Violence is the gateway for all those women who suffer gender violence. My professional role consists of advising, informing, guiding, referring women to specialized services, such as psychological care points, following up on all protection orders and even helping the women themselves to put a name to these disconcerting situations they are experiencing. Often, these women present many difficulties to identify themselves in a violent relationship. They feel disorientated not knowing where to go. They even have complications when trying to contact their public defender. In order to help them cope with these adversities, we, as professionals in this Office, try to do our job the best as we can. Besides this kind of services, we also focus on the violence prevention sphere. In this sense, we are in constant contact with several schools in order to offer them gender equality workshops. We are also in touch with different women organizations in the city so we can advise them on gender distinct matters. We were lucky during the lockdown because the women we work with, all of them have a protection order, so none of them were living with the aggressor at the time. This was the best situation; they were safe because they and the aggressors could not leave home.

I remember the lockdown as a very stressful period. I went through very stressful situations. Such was the stress and anxiety we were exposed to that my jaw has moved or shifted. As professionals, we were left alone. We felt abandoned. We did what we could, but we did not have enough tools. My head has tried to forget, I have opted for oblivion as a defense mechanism. So much have I tried to forget that today came to my mind that a woman I was in constant contact with passed away due to a cancer she was diagnosed prior to the lockdown. Another woman committed suicide during the lockdown. Such was my necessity to forget and leave behind that period, that I had forgotten these two circumstances. There were nights when women would call me on the Service's phone because they were nervous, they needed to talk to someone... There was no end to it, the calls were endless. I could not even watch a movie or read a book. The curious thing is that, as professionals, we felt obliged to answer the phone every time it rang. In a way, we felt like we needed to justify our salary. The only thing the regional administration did trying to give a response to violent situations during the lockdown was the mask campaign. This campaign's aim was to offer violence victim's a protective space, such as pharmacies, where women could let know the pharmacist that

she was living with the aggressor and were in need of help. Although apparently the campaign seemed appropriate, its launching process was full of mistakes and inconsistencies. I feel the abandonment of the regional administrations, the local administration has been the muscle that has sustained all this in most of the occasions.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “We are these women's gateway. We provide information, sometimes giving name to those situations that they are going through because they do not really know what is happening to them..”

**Keywords:** gender-based violence, front line responders, abandonment,

**ES05**

**Title:** Survivor of gender-based violence and her experiences of mothering during the pandemic

**Narrative:** My name is Olivia, I am the mother of a 6-year-old girl, and I am a victim of gender violence. I have always worked as a waitress, it has been a profession that I have loved, but since I gave birth to my daughter, I had to quit as my work schedule was incompatible with her care. I separated from my daughter's father when she was still very young, she was 3 years old if I am not mistaken. Since then, my day-to-day life has consisted of fighting, getting by and surviving for my daughter. I have worked at anything I have had the opportunity to: cleaning, looking after older people etc. but with the pandemic these opportunities vanished. It is quite difficult to find a job in the place where I live. It has been very difficult for me to find a job but there is no other way, I must earn money to pay the bills and to buy everything my daughter needs. I try to look for jobs that I can combine with my daughter's school schedule. My parents are elder people with health problems. Besides, they do not live in the surrounding areas, which is why I cannot count on their support. I don't have much help. The pandemic has made it very difficult for those of us who worked without a fixed and stable contract. This type of work was my only source of income and with the pandemic I have found myself in precarious situations, with no money left to cover our necessities. There is an association in the place where I live that helps vulnerable people like myself. We have survived thanks to their constant help. They gave us non-perishable food and something fresh once a week, so that we could have some basics in order to survive. The lockdown period was an uncertain and lonely phase, where the only thing that kept me alive was my daughter. I had a very hard time, suddenly I found myself with a child without being able to go out. My apartment had no terrace or balcony, it was exasperating. My daughter spent the whole day looking out of the window, restless. When we could leave the house to go shopping, I had to take the child with me, but how could I take such a little girl to do the shopping? Because of her age, she is very active, she moves a lot and touches everything. I felt I could not handle the situation of going to the supermarket with her. I turned to the neighbor upstairs for help, she was nice. When I needed food, I asked her to please take care of the child while I went to do the shopping. I could not do the same

thing with the neighbours downstairs, they were not very cooperative, they could not stand the noise we made. I felt terribly lonely. I missed the help of different institutional agents who should have been more involved with vulnerable groups such as mothers in charge of minors. Also, external help that would have helped me with my daughter. She is still experiencing difficulties because of the lockdown, problems in her day to day life such as behavioral problems and changes in her sleep schedule. I didn't know what to do to calm her down and try to normalize her days.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "The pandemic has made it very difficult for those of us who worked without a fixed and stable contract. This type of work was my only source of income and with the pandemic I have found myself in precarious situations, with no money left to cover our necessities" "I missed the help of different institutional agents who should have been more involved with vulnerable groups such as mothers in charge of minors" "She is still experiencing difficulties because of the lockdown, problems in her day to day life such as behavioral problems and changes in her sleep schedule. I didn't know what to do to calm her down and try to normalise her days."

**Keywords:** gender-based violence, mothering, pandemic lockdown, vulnerability, work, consequences, lack of support

## ES06

**Title:** Living the pandemic in solitude: "I had a plan and when the pandemic came, it all fell apart."

**Narrative:** "I am a 44-year-old Moroccan woman, I have been in Spain for almost 11 years. I was working as live-in carer, first six years with a family and then I moved to another region for three years until I decided to change my life and try to start a family. In October 2019, I married a Moroccan man, who has been in Spain for 14 years. In December we rented a flat in a small town. We chose it because the rents are lower. I left my job as live-in carer on February 28, 2020, and went living in the new home alone, because my husband was working in another town at the time. And suddenly the confinement due to the pandemic came and I found myself alone, without a job, in a flat that had nothing at all and in a town where I didn't know anyone. I had a very bad time. The house had nothing, we didn't have time to paint it or buy curtains. We only had a plate and a spoon. "I had a prepaid mobile. It broke down. To buy another one or to repair it, I don't know anyone (...) I was very scared. I spent all week without talking to anyone until my husband came over the weekend (...) I thought that with this Covid we were all going to die. I'm going to die. And who do I call?"

I couldn't contact my family in Morocco and I couldn't talk to anyone. My husband told me not to go out on the terrace, because the covid is transmitted through the air. When there was the public applause at 8 o'clock I went out to see people, so as not to feel so alone. It's just that I was short of breath (...) And sometimes, at night, I would sit in bed until the next day, because I was so scared.

Covid has changed my character. I was a happy woman and now I am sad. I am another person, although little by little I am recovering. After the lockdown, I got a job at a lady's house, I go for two hours two days a week. This woman has given me trust, because now I know who to turn to if something happens to me. The girl has given me work and has also given me hope. I already have someone to call if something happens to me. Before, I had no one to turn to. She is the first person I talked to in town. I think I've been lucky. We have been able to furnish the house and have crockery, sheets, towels and curtains because of the death of the mother of some friends of the lady I looked after. They told me that they were going to sell the empty house and that I could take whatever I wanted because they were going to throw it away, I was embarrassed to ask and I told them this I also want, but they told me, we are going to throw it away. So, we took a lot of things. It came in handy for us.

And now we have almost everything, so we can't complain. My husband is now without a job and his unemployment benefit has run out, but he receives the subsidy. I would like to work a few more hours, but it is not a good time to find other jobs yet.

The friends I have are because of work. They are the relatives of the women I have cared for, who have since died, but the families continue to worry about me. In the town I don't interact with anyone, I don't have friends from here. You can't go down the street, and connect [with people], just like that.

I met my husband at a police station, when he was processing the change of residence. I didn't want to feel alone and I wanted to relax a bit. Share the responsibilities, but my husband has no studies and, in the end, everything falls on my shoulders. My friends tell me that I've gone from worrying about myself to worrying about both of us, but it is what it is. I didn't have much of a choice either. I got married so I could live my own life. I was tired of being alone. I'm older, I no longer have the ability to care for somebody. I need to feel alive. If you live in other people's houses you live their life, or you live for them. And I decided to make a family. And I would like to be a mother, but at my age they told me I would have to go to a private gynecologist, and we don't have money. Maybe I'll do that later.

I have a university degree, a Bachelor's degree in Arabic, and when there are public examinations in Morocco, I have applied, but they don't call me. I have never requested the homologation of the degree in Spain. I don't know how to do it or what to pay and I give up. But I'd like to do it.

I have not experienced racism in Spain, the people I have met have treated me very well. Only one woman has treated me badly and made me see that racism does exist. It was the primary care doctor, an older woman, who made me feel very bad. This doctor has treated me as if I were not a person.

I don't see my future in Morocco because starting from scratch would be very complicated and I'm already old, the family that I have in Morocco (two sisters and three brothers) live with their families and they live with minimum resources. I haven't been to Morocco for four years. Not only because it is not possible to go, but because economically we can't go either."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I spent all week without talking to anyone until my husband came over the weekend (...) I thought that with this Covid we were all going to die. I'm

going to die. And who do I call?"

"When there was the public applause at 8 o'clock I went out to see people, so as not to feel so alone. It's just that I was short of breath (...) And sometimes, at night, I would sit in bed until the next day, because I was so scared".

"The girl has given me work and has also given me hope. I already have someone to call if something happens to me. Before, I had no one to turn to. She is the first person I talked to in town. I think I've been lucky".

"You can't go down the street, and connect [with people], just like that."

"I was tired of being alone. I'm older, I no longer have the ability to care for somebody. I need to feel alive. If you live in other people's houses you live their life, or you live for them. And I decided to make a family".

"Only one woman has treated me badly and made me see that racism does exist. It was the primary care doctor [...] an older woman, who made me feel very bad. This doctor has treated me as if I were not a person".

**Keywords:** fear, loneliness, deprivation, gratitude, conformism

## ES07

**Title:** You have to take things as they come: "I join my friends and live a normal life".

**Narrative:** "I am an 87-year-old woman, I live in a small village in Spain, where we all know each other. I have been a widow for more than thirty years.

I have worked all my life, first in a factory, then in the port buying fish and later I rented a bar because my husband had lost his job, and told him I found him a job.

My mother always lived in our house and took care of everything. In the village, they say that there was a "matriarchy" because men spent a lot of time at sea while women were in charge, but we also worked a lot. "Men had their life, their jobs, their friends. They came home, and they always found the meal cooked. My husband used to live with women who did everything for him and it was the same when we got married. It was like that. Women manage the house, the children, the job, everything..." (...). I am ashamed to say it, but I have purchased things without asking my husband for permission. I went to the bank and bought a flat, and I told my husband where to sign and he signed".

I have been a very happy woman, but I have also experienced sad things. My brother died at a young age, my father died too... "but we have helped each other, and everything turned out fine. I have been able to overcome difficulties".

When they ask me how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected me, I have to tell the truth, it has not affected me, I continue to live my life: I haven't stayed at home, I had my friends, everything turned out well for me. I am concerned about what is happening in the world and I comply with all the rules, but personally, it has not affected me. "I feel fine, I live my life: I get up, take a shower and do some odd jobs". "I'm not missing anything, I live life on a whim, I can't ask for more. I help as much as I can at home, I cook a little. Last year we could not celebrate Christmas, but it's fine. We will celebrate another day. You need to comply with the rules, wear the mask, not go to places you can't go to".

"I interact with everybody in town, I go out on the street a lot and talk a lot with people. I get together with my friends and lead a normal life." "You should always make friends, that is the most important thing." Friends accompany you and are always there. I meet my friends every day and I have known them for all my life.

I am very lucky and I can count on the support of my wonderful family. I live with my son with disability, and my eldest daughter joined us, since she lost her job due to the pandemic. My other daughters live in the same building, so I am never alone. "I have a wonderful family, they all help me, the grandchildren too".

In 2020, during the hardest confinement, we had a good time, we played cards, sang, chatted every day. I got infected with Covid but "I didn't feel anything. We had a great time."

A friend of mine died of Covid. The last time we saw her we were playing cards, the rest of friends did not catch it, but she did and she died. "That of taking the pandemic badly depends on each person". I have another friend who is having a hard time due to the pandemic, she is alone, with no family. I try to cheer her up and I tell her "be happy, why are you going to complain about the pandemic, if it did not affect you?".

Of course, I would like all this to end, so that my daughter can go back to work. I understand the sadness of the people but I can't do anything about that. Life has not changed for me, I am still the same. I did not get sick, and I feel positive".

My son has a disability. The day he was born, I left him in the incubator and went to work at the bar. Later, the doctor told me what was happening and I decided, from the first moment, not to hide it, to act normal. The doctor told me "the boy is not sick - and it is true, he is strong like a bull - just take him to the beach to enjoy. He received so much care and love". I am more concerned about the future, but my daughters love him very much and they will look after him when I am not there anymore, just as they do now. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "When they ask me how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected me, I have to tell the truth, it has not affected me, I continue to live my life: I haven't stayed at home, I had my friends, everything turned out well for me"

"During the hardest confinement, we had a good time, we played cards, sang, chatted every day".

"I got infected with Covid but I didn't feel anything. We had a great time." "

**Keywords:** happiness, sisterhood, family, work and effort.

**ES08**

**Title:** Education experiences of a 17-year-old teenage girl who lives in a shelter home

**Narrative:** "I am a 17-year-old teenager who lives in a foster home for teenagers in a city in Spain. I have lived in this shelter for four years since I cannot live with my parents. In March 2020, when the pandemic started, I was 15 years old and I was in the third year of Compulsory Secondary Education. Although I am not a very good student (I do not usually get very good grades) I always end up passing all the subjects.

The year of the pandemic, however, I ended up repeating the year because I became very unmotivated after we were unable to attend class. At first, they asked us to follow the classes online. At the house, we only had one computer that other children needed, so my social worker brought me a personal computer of hers that was a bit old and did not work too well. However, I was able to follow the classes from the house, in my room. Although at first I tried to connect because educators forced me to attend classes in the morning, I soon lost motivation and did not connect to classes. The teachers also followed me up at the beginning, but then, as the weeks went by, they did not tell me anything. So, when the year ended, I did not pass most of the courses, and I finally had to repeat the school year.

The following year, when we returned to class with a mask, it was like coming out of a cave. I did not know how to relate to my classmates, giving hugs and saying hello, for example, was a bit strange. In any case, the worst thing was that I was no longer with my classmates because they had passed the school year.

In that year, it was very difficult for me to recover the rhythm of classes, the habit of studying, handing in assignments, etc... but the social workers enrolled me in an academy that helped me in some subjects (mathematics and science). With that help, and making an effort, I recovered the habit of studying and in the end I passed the school year. Now I am in the fourth year of Compulsory Secondary Education, and next year I want to attend the first year of high school."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "When the pandemic started, I got discouraged and didn't connect to classes";

"When we were sent home, I spent all my time with some roommates from the shelter, there was only one computer and my teacher tutor brought me a computer that she didn't use and that was a bit old";

"at the beginning the teachers followed up, but when I started missing classes and did not submit my homework, they didn't tell me anything";

"I did not pass the course and the following year I had to repeat third year of Secondary School";

"I feel that by repeating the course, I have lost contact with my classmates from last year, there are things from day to day that I have lost and now we share fewer things"

**Keywords:** abandonment, teenager, woman, basic education, pandemic, technology, digital divide, inequality, academic support, shelter home

**ES09**

**Title:** Migrant woman looking for a job: "I took care of an old lady, but she died right before the pandemic breakout, and I found myself without a job and a place to live"

**Narrative:** "My name is Sara, I was born in Morocco and I am 40 years old. I came to Spain more or less 10 years ago and I have always worked as a domestic and care worker with elderly women. Ten days before the lockdown was declared, in 2020, I lost my job

and found myself without an accommodation, since the woman I was caring for died. Since the lockdown, I have not been able to find a job, but at least now I have a home, thanks to an association that works with homeless people.

When I left Morocco for Ceuta [a Spanish enclave in southern borders] I did not speak a word of Spanish. I started working for an old lady who lived alone and little by little I learned the language. I lived together with her during 7 years and when she died, at the age of 90, I decided to leave Ceuta and travel to the Spanish peninsula. Her niece offered me stay in the house as long as I needed, and also to take some stuff, but I didn't.

First, I went to Barcelona, because an uncle lives there. In the city, I found another job with an old lady and I stayed there for more than a year. However, the lady got heart disease and her son decided to move her to an elderly care center. He told me that she needed more attention and I could not stay in the house. At that point, I went to my uncle's house, but her wife did not want me there and since I had to leave, I decided to go to another city.

I travelled with a friend, well, a woman I know, and I found a place to stay. The landlady had a neighbor who was looking for help and that's how I found the job. I worked for the lady for one year, than she got sick and died at the hospital, ten days before the lockdown was declared, in February 2020.

Back then, I had some money and I paid for a room to stay, but when I run out of money I left, because I felt ashamed and I could not stay there without paying. I contacted my friend asking for help and she allowed me to stay with her for some months, after that, she told me I needed to leave and earn a living.

We went together to a centre for adults training, and there I met a guy, also a foreigner, who saw me crying and told me about a municipality service for social exclusion. I went there and told them my situation, but they could not help me, because I had no residence certificate. I told my friend "there's nothing to do, I am going to sleep in the street". But there is still nice people out there, and the next day a woman from civil protection called me and told me there was a place for me to stay, in a hostel-pension, and she gave me a card for eating at the canteen. I took my pajama and went to the hostel, where I stayed for about a week. The hostel was managed by an association, I told them my story and they offered me to stay there. It was a former touristic building that was converted into a shelter for homeless people during the pandemic, with the help of the municipality. Now I live with other four woman, in an apartment run by the association and I feel good.

I attend Spanish classes to learn the language, but I want to find a job, it does not matter the type of job. I can take care of an old lady or children, I don't know how to read and write, but I know how to cook, do the cleaning and all other household chores. I am asking people and looking for a job, but it has become even more difficult with the pandemic, people are afraid of having a person in their home, there is no trust. All I want is a contract and to arrange my papers.

I don't want to get the vaccine; I am afraid of nothing and I prefer taking care of myself through natural remedies. It is true that because I am not vaccinated, I could not participate in some activities organised by the association after the covid breakout. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I am asking people and looking for a job, but it has become

even more difficult with the pandemic, people are afraid of having a person in their home, there is no trust”.

“I went to a municipality service for social exclusion and told them my situation, but they could not help me, because I had no residence certificate. I told my friend “there’s nothing to do, I am going to sleep in the street”.

**Keywords:** migration; gender; domestic work; immigration law; homelessness

## ES10

**Title:** We hardly had time to analyse in depth the impact at the educational level, because we were consumed by management tasks and increased workload due to the constant changes in protocols.

**Narrative:** “My name is Nuria, I am the director of an early childhood education centre. My experience during the pandemic has been strongly marked by my personal experience at the beginning of the pandemic. I became ill with Covid in the first months and was hospitalised for a week, and that made me live the first moments of the pandemic with great fear. Later, as headmistress of a nursery school in a neighbourhood with a high level of social and economic precariousness, I was faced with a reality in which the school had to cover many needs that went beyond the merely educational, due to the lack of assistance from the social services.

In the school’s neighbourhood, there are many single-parent families and, in addition, most of the parents work either in the care sector (formal and informal), cleaning houses and hotels or in informal work, all of them sectors strongly impacted at the time of the pandemic, so during the first moments of the crisis, much of the centre's activity was focused on how to help families, to maintain contact with them by telephone, and to send them activities such as stories and songs to entertain the children. However, I soon realised that we had to go further and the school started to assist families, by providing food and clothes, thus covering some functions that are not proper to the centre but to other social services.

There was also a lot of controversy over the management of the canteen grants, which the Regional Government decided to manage through fast food chains. When the families protested, the government decided to cancel this programme and send the food to the families, but as it meant an increase in cost, many of the families were excluded. From the centre, we assisted the families in denouncing the situation to the media and finally they could regain access to meals.

If we analyse the impact of the pandemic crisis and confinement at an educational level, I would highlight the psychological impact it had on children. They have been suffering from a growing sense of fear of many different things: fear of going out in the street, fear of noise. Now these children have valued very positively the return to socialisation with their classmates and with the educators. A study conducted by Save the Children in the neighbourhood also identified fear of death or fear of homelessness among children.

During the pandemic we have become aware that a very significant number of families

in the neighborhood are living in flats, which means that during the extreme confinement they had to live and do their whole life in rooms, not only in a flat, but inside the rooms.

We have also noted delays in the development of language and autonomy, both in the children's autonomy in different areas and in autonomy in feeding. Problems in facial recognition of the children, due to prolonged use of the mask. Also, vaccination policies have been designed based on the need to protect adults, and not focused on children's needs. There has been also an increase in absenteeism.

We have also encountered the digital divide, not so much in terms of lack of means, as almost all families had access to at least one smartphone, but in terms of means to pay for internet or telephone tariffs. However, we hardly had time to analyse in depth the impact at the educational level, because we were consumed by management tasks and increased workload due to the constant changes in protocols.

Once we came back from confinement, we kept bubble groups and although we did not join together between classes, we wanted to reinforce group contact and socialisation of the children in the group. There is no doubt that the impact of the pandemic in schools such as the one in my neighbourhood has not been the same as in higher class neighbourhoods, and I have seen this in conversations with head teachers in other schools.

As a teacher, seeing the reality of families has caused me a lot of anxiety and stress. In addition, as headmistress I have had to face changes in protocols that are difficult to comply with (e.g. strengthen hygiene and other procedures within the centre and the classroom) and which increased the workload, without any support from institutions.

If I had to highlight one learning or good practice from this situation, it would undoubtedly be the mutual support between the people who make up the teaching staff (27 women and 3 men) and with the families, as well as with some of the social institutions in the neighbourhood. Together we have set up different initiatives (distribution of food, clothes) and in these tasks the women have been fundamental.

However, I feel very sad and impotent because once again, after the hardest times, those women who have been so important in the first line are forgotten. Despite everything we have lived through, it seems that individualism and social anesthesia are triumphing. I am very affected by the lack of mobilisation and the lack of concern and, above all, by the loss of democratic values. Now that the recovery plans are starting to be implemented, education is once again not at the forefront, and in fact, we have not been consulted on important decisions, such as the elimination of the second cycle in infant education centres.

**Specifically telling quotes:** As a teacher, I have been affected by the stress of seeing the reality of the families in the centre, and this has caused us a lot of anxiety and stress. In addition, as headmistress I have had to face changes in protocols that are difficult to comply with, since they involved forcing hygiene and other procedures within the centre and the classroom, which increased the workload, and we have not had support from the institutions to face these changes and these adaptations to the different protocols.

**Keywords:** education, lack of resources, psychological impact; stress, impact on

children

## Finland

FI01

**Title:** My dance studio faced many challenges, and my artistic career was put on hold

**Narrative:** "I am a 47-years old woman and an entrepreneur; I own a dance studio. I work as a dance teacher and dance artist. The pandemic has changed my life and the life of my family in many ways.

My work as a dance artist was very much put on hold during the pandemic. We had a dance show that we had performed few times in the beginning of the year 2020 and were supposed to perform few times more but these were cancelled. Performances for the summer were cancelled, too. During the pandemic, I've only got to do one performance about a year ago, in the autumn 2021. This was in a festival that I appreciate a lot. It was a dream come true but also a weird experience because, due to restrictions, there was not much audience and they were seated two meters from each other, wearing face masks.

My work as a dance studio owner has continued throughout the pandemic but changed a lot. I could say that my job changed from a dance teacher to an office worker. It has been very laborious to re-organise our activities all the time, and to develop online booking systems and to provide online lessons.

When the pandemic spread to Finland in March 2020, I did not understand the seriousness of all of it. I remember this one lesson, which turned out to be the last face-to-face lesson during the spring 2020. I was kind of joking with my students whether we could meet the next week or not. The very next day we had to cancel all our lessons for the spring. It was not an official restriction but there was a strong social pressure to not to organise anything where the virus could spread. The guidelines and restrictions were always announced for the next few weeks and, at first, we thought this would be over in few weeks. It was a good thing that we did not know how long this would last - I think we would have closed down the company if we knew.

Rather quickly, we began to organise online lessons, which was very laborious in the beginning. Also, we organised a virtual dance weekend together with other dance teachers and agreed that we would divide evenly all the money that was made with this virtual event. All dance teachers were facing hard times in finding income and this way we could work together fairly. This was a really good experience.

We were lucky to have some extra money on the company's account so that we knew we would survive for three months even without any income. Also, we applied for funding from Business Finland and got 10 000 euros for re-organising our business during the spring 2020. We experienced our worst economic situation in 2021 during the complete shut-down, when we had already used most of our buffer money. At that point the government was providing some compensation for companies, but it was very difficult

for dance studios to get this because you had to prove that your income had decreased significantly in comparison to a reference period, which happened to be February-March. Dance studios don't typically have much income that time of the year since most of the invoices for the spring are paid in January.

For almost the whole time, we continued providing private lessons and dance space for couples who wanted to book a room to practice on their own. I noticed that I had to change my way of teaching because I normally teach by dancing with my students and touching them. That was an interesting experience, but it was scary, too. I remember that one day I felt I might have a sour throat and I was very worried that if I had Covid-19 I might have transmitted that to my students I provided private lessons for. When we were able to continue providing group lessons during the summer 2020, I remember that this felt rather scary as well. Not all the clients took our Covid-19 instructions seriously. It took some time for me to relax and understand that I could not be responsible of everything that adult people decided to do. My personality matters here as well; I am very caring and concerned. I think this is typical for women in my age.

During the autumn 2020, we could continue group lessons, although with smaller groups than before. This was possible until the restrictions began again in December 2020. During the spring 2021 there was a complete lockdown of the society at large. The regional officials become familiar to us at that time. I called and asked whether private lessons could still be arranged, and this was granted since they were categorised as private events. However, many were not asking for private lessons. This was very hard time for us.

Summer 2021 was still rather quiet but the autumn 2021 was better again. The vaccinations made the situation easier. Also, Covid pass was introduced. However, its usage was not easy since this meant that some of our clients called and told that they could no longer participate in our lessons. It was not emotionally easy for me to hear. And then, at this moment, we are again restricted for organising lessons since the pass has been put on hold. Luckily, this happened during the holidays and economic impact might not be that devastating for us.

In some ways the pandemic has been a positive thing, too. For instance, this has been the first time in decades that I suddenly had free weekends and could have a dinner with my family on Saturday. We have also learned in my family that you really do not need much money to survive. We haven't spent money on going to restaurants or ordering food, we haven't bought anything except some very necessary items, such as new shoes to be able to walk to work. I feel that some unnecessary things have been cleaned out of my life and the pandemic has given me time to re-think how to better live up to my values."

**Specifically telling quotes:** I remember when I came home from work one Saturday - at that time the face masks were not in use yet - and I felt I might have a sour throat. My thoughts escalated and I began to think that I might have killed all the private students I had met during that day. Although of course it was not true. But that was the situation back then, and nobody had much information on the disease.

**Keywords:** cultural workers, entrepreneurs, emotional labour, economic difficulties,

positivity, green values

**FI02**

**Title:** I haven't been as active as before

**Narrative:** "I'm a 66-year-old man, living together with my wife, children have already left from home. I retired half a year after the pandemic began. This meant that for the last half a year I had to do remote work. This was not voluntary for us; everybody was required to work from home. For the last month before my retirement, I would have been allowed to work from the office but there was no one there so I just continued working from home. They wanted to organise a farewell coffee for me, and I agreed to do that. However, a day before the event we were restricted from organising anything face-to-face and the coffee was arranged online. That was interesting in a way but not so much fun.

Overall, the pandemic has made me more passive. It's hard to find things to do outside home. I've been reading a lot, and of course it's possible to ski or cycle if the weather is nice. However, normally I would do lots of things that haven't been possible now. For instance, I would go to concerts a lot, and I would visit museums more often. All that hasn't either been possible or has been more complicated. Currently, even the movie theatres are closed once again. Some of the museums are open and there is this one exhibition that I'd like to see, but I'm not sure if I will go. And the shops are open, but I don't feel like going for shopping.

It hasn't been very easy to meet my friends either. There have been different kinds of guidelines and restrictions, and then one has to consider all the time if it is possible to meet or not. The vaccinations helped the situation somewhat. Most of my friends have now taken their third vaccinations. I've been going out for a lunch every now and then. If there was no pandemic and remote working, I would probably have been going out for a lunch with my ex-colleagues a lot more. I've also observed that several lunch places that I used to go went to bankrupt during the pandemic.

I worked as a voluntary worker for the Redd Cross, guiding people who came to take vaccinations. In the beginning, people had to wait for a while before they were called in and we told them where they could wait. Also, after you've been given the vaccination, you have to wait for 15 minutes. We guided people to the waiting area and observed them to see if somebody would get an anaphylactic reaction. Currently they are organising new vaccinations again and I'm waiting to hear if voluntary workers are needed this time or not.

My parents are rather old already and I've been somewhat worried about how they are doing. However, they have not fallen ill, and now they have their third vaccinations, too. They live in another city and my mother lives in the elderly home. I visit them every now and then. The pandemic didn't change this so much because my mother is able to leave the elderly home and we can then spend time at my fathers' home.

I think the political decision making regarding the restrictions and other measures during the pandemic has been rather messy. We've got a very complex system of who

has the power to decide on what. I can understand that it has been difficult for many people to follow this, and this is reflected in debates in the media and elsewhere. I think wearing a face mask is unpleasant for a longer time. Also, seeing people not wearing the mask in the shops is annoying though. For instance, I've noticed that many of the construction workers do not wear face masks in the grocery.

I have some things planned in the future that I'm very much looking forward to. We are planning to travel to Lapland and Åland, and I'm planning to participate in a music festival. I don't believe that they will announce a complete lockdown anymore and I'm rather hopeful that I can do these things."

**Specifically telling quotes:** Possibilities to go somewhere have been narrowed down. One could go for skiing or cycling but one cannot be around people that much. I don't feel like going to the centre to walk around although it's time for seasonal sales currently. Not that I would need anything special, but it would be nice to leave home for awhile to go somewhere. To do something else than just wake up, make coffee, and read. And, for instance, currently it's raining, and I don't feel like spending time outside.

**Keywords:** lack of things to do, less social contacts, remote work, elderly care, voluntary work, frustrated, hopeful, cultural events

### FI03

**Title:** I've lived as normally as possible and even got some new friends

**Narrative:** "I'm a 72-year-old woman and I live alone, I'm not married, and I don't have children. I am rather healthy. I've tried to live as normal life as possible despite the pandemic. Even in the beginning of the pandemic, I did not obey to this recommendation that over 70-year-old people should stay at home, although many did and there was social pressure to do so. I have been afraid of getting Covid-19 at times but, despite that, I haven't been afraid of going out and doing some things. I don't think it's very likely to catch Covid-19, for instance, when meeting someone outdoors.

I've even got some new friends due to this pandemic. A friend of mine invited me to this closed Facebook group which was founded due to pandemic. We've been meeting online once a week with the group, and we have also met face-to-face. For instance, yesterday I went to eat in a restaurant with two of the friends from the group. We've also been going to various cultural events and we travelled to Tallinn last autumn. Some of the people in the group are more hesitant to meet face-to-face but some, like me, are more willing.

I have some friends and relatives who have been living a very isolated life due to pandemic. I feel sad for them. And now that we've got vaccinations, I think we would need to trust them somewhat, although they do not prevent getting Covid-19 completely or spreading it. I'm happy that the officials have not forbidden people to go out at any point of the pandemic, although the recommendation for over 70 years old to stay home in the beginning of the pandemic was interpreted like that by many.

Information provided by officials has been rather unclear at times, and many people overdue recommendations.

I go to concerts, opera, musicals and visit museums both with friends and alone. In addition, I participate in a reading circle. Those have been very important for me during the pandemic. Sometimes it has been annoying when many of the events have been cancelled, though. I have two tickets to opera for the spring, we'll see if they cancel them or not. Some of the restrictions have been annoying. For instance, I used to go to Taiji but now that is organised online, I don't feel like participating. At the moment, I don't have the energy to meet people online. I prefer any other media, that's why I preferred to do this interview with phone rather than in Teams.

I don't have a car, so I use public transportation. At some point, I was trying to minimise my time in the tram or train because there was this guideline that less than 15 minutes is alright. Also, it's rather annoying to see that some young people don't wear face masks in the public transportation. They cannot all have illnesses that prevent them using masks.

I've been protecting myself from getting Covid-19 by using face masks and washing my hands. Otherwise, I've tried to live as normally and active when it has been possible."

**Specifically telling quotes:** I live on my own and, for me, it was very important that I was invited to this Facebook-group - there was this one friend of a friend who founded the group - and we've met once a week online. I got many new friends because of the pandemic! For instance, yesterday we went to eat in a restaurant with two women from the group.

**Keywords:** new friends, unofficial support groups, over 70 years old, active life, social pressure, cultural events

FI04

**Title:** Life experiences, sense of security and my close ones help me to stay positive

**Narrative:** "I'm a 70-year-old woman, I live together with my husband. Also, my daughter's family lives rather near to us and we see each other often.

The pandemic has narrowed down things that I have been able to do. I'm retired, which means that my life is rather home-centred anyway, but the pandemic has made it even more so. For instance, I'm active in some NGOs related to my profession but most of the events have been cancelled or organised online.

I think it's rather sad that theatres, concerts, movie theatres and different kinds of public events have been cancelled and restricted for long periods of time. Normally, I would have enjoyed participating in them much more. For instance, although I'm retired, I'm involved in many groups and organisations related to my profession. We've got interesting programme and many speakers in these meetings in the past.

I've met friends and relatives every now and then. Sometimes it has been possible and sometimes not. We've met in small groups, been cautious, and during the summertime

we've met outside. One graduation party was organised in the autumn although graduation happened in June. My own 70th birthday passed without much celebration. Many people sent congratulations and said it would be great to do something together when it is possible again.

In the beginning of the pandemic, it was all very scary. There were no face masks in Finland, and no vaccinations, of course. We made a deal with two of our neighbours that if we fall ill, they will take care of our practicalities and the other way round. However, later we got used to live with the pandemic. It hasn't felt that scary anymore. My close ones have not fallen ill with Covid-19. However, we still haven't, for instance, travelled abroad during the whole time. Normally, I enjoy visiting cities in Europe.

I'm a person who wants to plan and organise things well ahead. My husband sometimes says that I shouldn't organise so much and then be disappointed when things do not happen. However, I think it's important to do plans so that time doesn't just pass. Sometimes patience has paid off, too. For instance, it was possible to visit this exhibition of a famous Russian artist, when I just waited for the right time to book the tickets. Also, theatres have organised shows for smaller audiences.

I think that patience, life experiences, sense of security, common sense, and the fact that I live together with my husband has helped me during the pandemic. We have our daily routines, waking up, making coffee, going out for a walk, friends calling to us, and our daughter living nearby. She's expecting a baby, too, and this is very exciting for me as well. All this has helped me to stay positive during the pandemic."

**Specifically telling quotes:** When you've got through a long life and learned that sometimes there are catastrophes and sometimes happy times, that teaches you patience. Patience and peacefulness, and the fact that I'm not alone but with my husband [has helped me during the pandemic]. We have our daily routines, making coffee, cooking our going out for a lunch. His friends calling, or mine. Every summer we go to our summer cottage and there are many things to do. Our daughter lives nearby and currently I'm very excited also because she's expecting a baby.

**Keywords:** neighbourhood support, active life, cultural events, less social contacts, positivity

**FI05**

**Title:** I'm missing solidarity and annoyed that it's not discussed that life has become more expensive due to the pandemic

**Narrative:** "I'm a 73-year-old woman. I live on my own and my children live very near with their families. I'm retired, but before the pandemic I used to work sometimes when extra workers were needed in kindergartens. I'm an educated professional but in a low-paid, women-dominated sector. Due to that, I have a modest pension. Overall, I think the pandemic has changed the society to a direction that I don't like. Society has become even more individualistic and there is less solidarity. Inequalities

have increased, and life has become more expensive. Many Covid-19 related recommendations and restrictions cost. For instance, buying face masks costs, ordering food home costs more than buying it from the grocery, and it is more difficult for many to get food aid. In the beginning of the pandemic, there was help available for getting groceries, and the city provided home deliveries that costed three euros. After that, those services have not been available. Also, many of the free cultural events and meetings have been cancelled.

At the same time, many people like me have lost their sources of additional income. I used to do some extra work in kindergartens, but this ended when the pandemic began. They are more hesitant to employ extra people, and particularly people who are older than 70 years.

I feel that media portrays mainly very middle-class or upper-class experience of the pandemic. For instance, at some point it was discussed a lot whether one should or should not visit their summer cottage. Also, it has been said that people have a lot of extra money because they haven't been able to travel abroad. However, money problems that many are facing due to pandemic are not discussed. This is rather alienating. I am currently watching the national news once a day and reading the newspaper in the morning. In social media, I only spend time in friendly groups. There, I have even met some new people and developed new hobbies. I've been reading more and taking care of potted plants.

The information about different restrictions has been messy and confusing. In the beginning of the pandemic, it felt like the government worked together to get us through this but, later, they have been arguing a lot and the message that comes out has been very confusing at times. For instance, the guidelines regarding the usage of face masks changed completely. I understand that our knowledge on Covid-19 has increased gradually but seeing how politicians argue about different measures is depressing. Currently, we get a lot of contradictory information from different officials. This doesn't motivate to follow restrictions. Also, opening the society even though 80 % of people had not taken vaccinations, which was supposed to be reached before opening society, did not probably encourage not vaccinated people to take the vaccination.

In the beginning of the pandemic, people over 70-years of age were discussed as vulnerable people who need protection. That talk easily impacts one's feeling for self-worth. Also, sometimes I could sense in the grocery that there was aggression towards me due to my age. I think some people were annoyed that they had to limit their lives in order to protect us. This doesn't happen anymore, probably because age groups are not discussed so much. When people over 70-years of age were recommended to stay in quarantine in the beginning of the pandemic, I did that, although I did go out for walks. My daughters helped me in that phase. After the beginning, I have been careful, but I have met my children and their families, and I have met my friends. I have a group of friends and we meet each other in our homes.

I'm worried about children. Children in general and my own grandchildren, too. If there are no activities for children, some of them will misbehave in addition to feeling bad. This pandemic has been very hard for many families. I've helped my daughters, for instance, by cooking for them when they had to simultaneously work remotely and take care of their children who were studying remotely from home. One of my grandchildren

is currently in his last year of primary school and his grades have gone down during the pandemic. We have a goal to get the grades up again because the grades are important for getting into the general upper secondary school in the capital area. Also, I have noticed that the pandemic has ruined some of the community spirit that we have in this house. This house is owned by the city and we pay rent for the city. I've been active in representing our voice for the city. I realised that in the last meeting, people were organised in separate groups, such as based on ethnicity, which hasn't happened for a long time. Some of them were angry that common spaces had been closed due to the pandemic and it was not clear to everyone that this was an order from the city.

I have lost my ability to sleep properly during the pandemic. I worry so much how some of my close ones are coping that thoughts go around in my head and I cannot get sleep. I have accepted this. I fall asleep in the early morning and sleep then for as long as I can. It is very difficult to get an appointment in the community health centre. I have tried few times due to different problems and it takes a long time to get the appointment.

The pandemic has also made me think how many years of active life I will still have ahead of me. I think this is probably very common experience for us older people in risk groups. We count how many years of active life we might have and then we count how many years we are losing for the pandemic. I think it's important to be active, and to do things that I find meaningful to do. I want to help out, spend time with my children, grandchildren and close friends, and to be active in the local community. Also, I like to do things, such as visit art museums. I'm a people person, I want to be around people, even if I would just take public transportation on my own and visit a museum."

**Specifically telling quotes:** Personally, I'm not in a serious trouble, but I think it is very unfair that one is supposed to have these home tests and a bunch of face masks, and nobody distributes these for free. In the beginning some did this, although I didn't have to get them from there. The pandemic has become very expensive for poor people.

**Keywords:** active life, communal values, reduced income, expenses, care work, emotional labour, health problems, insomnia, cultural events

**FI06**

**Title:** The pandemic hasn't exacerbated my problems

**Narrative:** "I'm a 52-year-old, non-binary gender person. Overall, the pandemic hasn't affected me that much. In the beginning of the pandemic, when there was a complete lock-down, I didn't go anywhere and realised that I didn't get enough exercise. Normally, I go out to eat in restaurants and to meet my friends. When the restaurants were closed, there was no reason to go anywhere. I gained some weight, and it has been very difficult to get back to the original weight.

Last autumn, however, I started going to the gym, for the first time in my life. I was surprisingly persistent in going there - until the gyms were closed a while ago. Since I have many problems in my life (that are not related to pandemic), I'm not sure if I have

the energy to start going anymore when it's possible. I will try of course.

The good thing that I observed in the beginning of the pandemic was that people stopped going to bars to drink, and all problems related to that disappeared. Later, people started to organise parties in their homes but in the beginning it was very quiet, in a good way, too. However, when I sometimes visited the centre of the city, I could see that there was no one else there but the drug abusers and people, who have big problems in their lives. I think they have always been there but when there was no one else, they became more visible. That was sad to see. I'm sensitive to these issues due to some of my life experiences.

When the pandemic began, I was unemployed and received basic social assistance. They raised the social assistance with 80 euros for the first year, so that people were able to buy face masks, hand sanitizers, and so on. That was very nice. After the first year, this stopped. I think that's OK because face masks are now very cheap, and I'm rarely using hand sanitizers anymore. I regularly get food from two projects, a waste food project organised nearby where I used to live, and a food charity project, where I also work as a volunteer. These two projects continued throughout the pandemic. The waste food project is rather self-organised by the shopkeeper and us who receive the food. In the beginning of the pandemic, we were trying to keep two meters distances while distributing the food, but it took so much time to share the food that way that we decided not to keep distances. We agreed to use face masks and otherwise act as always, as we meet outside anyway. Some of the people in the group became rather close friends, I think partly because of the pandemic. I'm sad I had to move away from the area as the landlord suddenly increased my rent so much. In a charity food project, we began to pack food to bags that are ready to simply be picked up. I've been helping in packing them. I suppose that practice will continue, and I will continue volunteering there.

I've had friends to meet throughout the pandemic. Also, I've been able to visit my relatives in Sweden a few times. Currently, the restrictions are rather similar in both countries but, during the first year, Sweden and Finland had very different strategies to deal with the pandemic. For instance, they do not use face masks in Sweden. It's been confusing at times, but I've mostly done as people around me do. Both strategies have their strengths, I suppose. My mother lives in a Finnish senior house in Sweden, and there many of them follow Finnish news. In there, they have required face masks.

I haven't been afraid of falling ill. Also, I've got already three vaccinations. I took the first vaccinations quickly because I got a special written invitation due to belonging in a risk group, and because I thought I would need them to enter Sweden. I was never checked though. Currently, I've also got my third vaccination.

I think the funding for companies wasn't organised very well, although lots of funding was given out by the government. In my opinion, they should have provided some funding for small companies to make bankrupts gracefully, so that entrepreneurs would not end up living with money problems for the rest of their lives. Instead, funding was mostly provided for new investments only.

At some point, I realised that I was watching a lot of gigs and big concerts from YouTube.

These events seem to have happened in another life. I'm wondering if stars like Madonna will ever do world tours anymore. Also, now that movie theatres are closed, I would very much like to go to movies. Not that I normally go that often, and tickets will probably be very expensive when they open again."

**Specifically telling quotes:** I talk about food a lot. [laughter] I haven't suffered because of the pandemic. Well, it's annoying that it's currently difficult to know which restaurants are open and which not, and many of them do not update their websites.

**Keywords:** unemployment, food deliveries, social assistance, gaining weight, active life, no problems related to the pandemic, restaurants, cultural events, country comparisons, traveling

**FI07**

**Title:** My home feels like a prison

**Narrative:** "I'm an artist, a 46-year-old man. I live together with my husband and our cats. During the pandemic, our home has begun to feel like a prison to me. Home has always been an important place for me, a safe place that protects me from the world outside. I'm a collector and I have carefully decorated our home so that it's a special place that reflects my personality, too. However, during the pandemic my relation to our home changed. I don't enjoy it anymore. I want to be anywhere else but home. I've become an innocent prisoner.

I have an ADD diagnosis, meaning that my mind is very active and it's sometimes difficult for me to get my mind to stop. When I was forced to stay at home all the time, this activity turned into a negative force. Nothing at home could inspire me anymore, and everything I did and thought at home blurred in my head. My brain reacted to this by paralysing completely. There were times when all I could do was to lay in bed my brain paralysed. Also, time lost its meaning. Everything was blurred timewise, too, and that did not help my brain either. Summer provided a short relief, because then it was possible to go outside without planning it, but that lasted only five weeks last summer. Since then, I've been a prisoner again. Or eternally a 17-year-old, who cannot go anywhere and only waits that life one day begins.

I've been working from home all the time. However, my art exhibition in London was cancelled because of the pandemic. I organized it in Finland but there were only a few visitors. It was as if there was no exhibition. Also, I organized one more commercially oriented exhibition in Finland, and there were very few visitors, too, and I only made one sale. I've applied for pandemic related funding for artists and got it. It's easy for me to write plans in the applications as I plan something all the time anyway. However, I don't think that it was fair to make us to write plans and compete for funding. Every professional artist should have simply received funding. Instead, money was provided for many big companies that did not even need it.

I feel like I'm waiting for something all the time. I'm waiting for this pandemic to end, and not sure when I could believe that it really has ended. We are currently going for a short vacation abroad and in addition to really wanting to go I feel somehow anxious. I think it is because we all have been under an additional stress for such a long time, it's difficult to stop stressing. It's sometimes difficult to even tell what is my personality, and what is caused by the pandemic, but I don't think I would have been anxious in this situation before the pandemic.

I've been very disappointed to see how our government handled the pandemic. It's been a very political process in which fierce illogical debates have been done in publicity. I can understand these debates with the opposition, but not with the officials and politicians in the same government. It's been very sad to see, and it diminishes my trust to this government and Finnish government in general. There should have been more epidemiologists leading the situation. Some of the mistakes include the fact that Finland was not able to control its borders on crucial moments. Thousands of people arrive with ferries, for instance from Estonia, and they are not even forced to use face masks. Also, after the football match in the St. Petersburg in 2021, the new wave hit Finland sooner than expected when the Finns returned from the game without testing and quarantines. It would have been better to restrict more on the borders and less inside the country.

One of the problems is that the government has provided many recommendations and "strong recommendations" instead of clearly restricting people. There's always this one third of people who don't follow recommendations. This has divided people and made us hate each other. I think this is also one reason why we have so many people that oppose vaccinations. It's become an issue that one can decide oneself. And there is a lot of propaganda out there, it's like a religion. I once years ago used myself as a bad example to show through my art what happens when you believe in conspiracy theories regarding a virus, in that case HIV. I've learned from that, but most people have not learned that, of course. They still believe the shit that goes around.

I hope that my feelings towards our home will be normalised at some point. I don't know how long that will take and what I need to do to accomplish that. Moving abroad for a while might help."

**Specifically telling quotes:** I have an ADD, the form of ADHD that does not include physical hyperactivity. That caused that, when I'm closed within four walls for too long, I lose my mind. I paralyse. My mind tries to do something desperately, but that is not possible because nothing inside here inspired me anymore, and the activity turned against me. My brain could do nothing else but paralyse. I laid in my bed, paralysed, feeling that my mind was expanded.

**Keywords:** relationship with home, relationship with government, ADD, artist, cultural sector, lack of things to do, mental health, weather, frustration, divisions between people

FI08

**Title:** I hope people would still find the energy to be cautious

**Narrative:** "I'm a 68-year-old woman, I live alone and am retired. My children are grown-ups, and I don't have elderly parents to take care of anymore.

Overall, the pandemic hasn't affected me that much. I retired just when the pandemic began, so I was lucky to escape the problems it caused at work. Although I had to be very social at work, after the retirement I've enjoyed being at home. I always find something to do. I've been able to see some of my friends but some I've seen less because they've been very cautious due to belonging to risk groups. I trust that these friendships last and that we can meet again at some point. I'm cautious and I use face masks in public spaces. However, I'm not overly scared, I use public transportation, visit library, and go to movies, for example.

I've been annoyed to notice that when the restrictions were lifted, some of the people stopped using face masks. For instance, in this football event in St. Peterburg in summer 2021. After that the cases started going up again in Finland, too. Also, just recently, I went to see a movie shown in a small room, and half of the audience was not using masks there. I chose a place at the back and continued wearing my mask. I suppose that was alright, but I wish people would still use masks as we continue to have many cases. All the cases are not even registered anymore.

I haven't taken the vaccinations. At first, they would only give me and people at my age AstraZeneca vaccinations, which I didn't want to take due to some thrombosis that have happened in my family. Then, I began to think that maybe I can survive without taking vaccinations, as I do not belong to a risk group and mostly stay at home. I have experienced some problems with medications before and am in some ways sensitive. I'm not against vaccinations as such. It's good to remember that there are various reasons for not getting the vaccinations.

I've noticed that some people fear persons, who haven't taken vaccinations. In my opinion, this is strange since also people who have taken vaccinations can transmit the virus, even without knowing it. If you say something like this to some people, it can even cause a conflict. Currently one person I know is not communicating with me after we discussed about this.

In my opinion, it hasn't been discussed enough that also vaccinated people may transmit the virus. Although vaccinations protect you from the severe versions of the Covid-19, vaccinations do not prevent in getting milder versions of it, and do not prevent you transmitting the disease. That's why I don't think Covid certificates and passes are a very good thing; they may provide a false feeling of security, and make people act incautiously. I wish people would still find the energy to be cautious and use face masks as the virus is still here. And I am hopeful that this pandemic goes away some day, like other serious pandemics have done before."

**Specifically telling quotes:** I haven't told everybody that I haven't taken vaccinations. Some people fear those, who haven't taken vaccinations, as if they were they beginning or reason to this. Although, this kind of normal unvaccinated person, who cares about other people and tries to be careful, is not a problem. I've felt that some people think

unvaccinated people automatically carry the virus.

**Keywords:** active life, enjoys spending time at home, less social contacts, annoyance, disagreements, divisions between people, hope

## FI09

**Title:** I haven't been able to visit my family as much as I wanted to, and I've missed out many networking opportunities at work

**Narrative:** "I'm a 27-year-old man, I'm Dutch and I moved to Finland first time in 2019 and then again in 2020, to do my PhD here.

The pandemic has affected me in many ways, although I've also been very privileged and not faced as hard time some others. When the pandemic began in 2020, I was in the Netherlands finishing my master's thesis. I had just returned from abroad, and I would have wanted to meet my family and friends often, but this was mostly not possible because of the pandemic. Also, I was gathering data for my thesis in a hospital environment. At that point, there was a shortage of face masks and other hygiene products, and I was not allowed to come to the hospital anymore. This of course affected my data collection.

Later in 2020, I moved to Finland and began my PhD studies. It's been a weird time to begin working in a new organisation. We are allowed to work from the office, and I have done it, but there are very few people around there. I know most of my colleagues only through Teams meetings. I think I've missed out a lot of informal talk, which could lead to very important conversations and connections in the field of research work. I haven't participated in any f2f conferences either. Also, as a PhD student you don't have a boss telling you what you should do; it's your PhD. This freedom combined with not seeing other people working around you makes the job challenging. I have a good self-discipline, but still I do work better and am distracted less if I can see other people working around me as well.

During this year and a half, I have accomplished almost all my course work. All the courses have been organised online. I would have preferred f2f teaching because that is more engaging. However, I have managed through making study and work schedules to myself and sticking into them. I've also had a nice office, and a nice home, and I've already had an experience of enjoying social studying life when I did by bachelor's and master's programmes. For these reasons, the situation has been alright for me.

The pandemic has made travelling and moving to another country a lot more complicated. When I moved to Finland, they had just introduced a new system which had to be used to book a time for a meeting in the Finnish immigration service. However, all the times were booked. I had to check every week if there were cancellations to finally be able to book a meeting with them in time.

Travelling has been restricted and made very complicated. I travelled to the Netherlands to see my family and friends in the summer 2021, when I had been here for over a year already. At that point, I had only got one vaccination as the vaccinations were given

based on one's age. This meant that I had to get tested for Covid-19 all the time to be able to do anything in the Netherlands. I visited the Netherlands again during the Christmas break and that was much easier as I already was fully vaccinated at that point. I like sports. I do a lot of strength training, and in summertime I practice football. Going to the gym is an important part of my life. It was thus rather annoying when the gyms were closed in Finland for a long time. As the weather is very cold in Finland, it is not easy to do the kinds of sports that I like outside. Also, it was frustrating to see that bars were simultaneously open.

Overall, we haven't had very severe restrictions in Finland. I think Finns are in general rather obedient and trust their government. That's why complete lockdowns and curfews have not been necessary here. In the Netherlands, people have resisted restrictions much more, and that's why stronger restrictions have been necessary. Also, if I look at the news of the Finnish parliament, they always wear face masks and show good example to people. It's convincing in comparison to some Dutch politicians, who tell people to use masks, but do not use them themselves."

**Specifically telling quotes:** It hasn't been very easy to see people, and also people who are very close to you. Because you don't want to just go there and risk bringing corona to your parents. [...] During the last four years I have lived in the Netherlands for four to five months, but even during that period I could not visit my family. I fully understood the situation and the necessities, I was not resentful in that sense. But it's a shame, and of course it influences me.

**Keywords:** distance to family, new job, lack of networking, online courses, self-discipline, sports, weather, country comparisons, traveling

**FI10**

**Title:** I've been able to work well from home

**Narrative:** "I'm a 28-year-old woman, a PhD researcher. Overall, the pandemic hasn't affected me that much, at least if I compare with many other people.

I started my PhD studies in 2019, meaning that I had been in the programme for about a year when the pandemic began. I've mostly worked from home since then. That's not a problem for me; I do most of my work alone anyway. However, of course this means that I haven't met my colleagues very much, haven't had lunch with them and so on. I was planning to attend conferences abroad, too, and this was not possible. Also, I'm gathering data and I had to conduct interviews online instead of meeting people f2f. I think I've lost some of my PhD experience due to the pandemic, but I've still been able to continue working rather well.

In the beginning of the pandemic, I did not meet my family at all for over a half a year, because some of my family members belong to risk groups. This was a big change in my life, because before the pandemic we would meet weekly. However, after we all got vaccinations, we have been able to meet more often again.

In 2020, I had to visit hospitals often due to some health problems. There I could see how much the pandemic was affecting hospitals. My boyfriend could not come to the hospital with me because of the restrictions. Also, I could see how difficult everything was there already at the time. I would have taken the vaccinations anyway but seeing that was an extra motivation. I wanted to do what I can to ease out the situation in the hospitals.

Before the pandemic, I used to be very active in going out, eating in restaurants, visiting theatres, and meeting people. I haven't done those things that much anymore. Also, I haven't been traveling. These have been big changes in my life, but I haven't suffered from them much. In a way it's better to travel less. And I've realised that I do not necessarily need that much social life, although I do enjoy meeting people when it is possible. I've been participating in many online gatherings, too.

Although the pandemic hasn't affected me much, I've sometimes been annoyed and worried about others, when they have described their difficult situations. Also, the pandemic has in some ways changed my thinking. Just seeing that this kind of a pandemic is possible has changed my view of the world and how we live in here. For instance, that we are so connected to each other due to international travelling. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Emilia: The biggest change has probably been that socialising at work partly decreased, and partly transferred online.

Interviewer: Right. How do you think it affected you when the socialising decreased?

Emilia: Well, I have to say it hasn't affected me that much. The change was not as radical as it was for many others. I'm perhaps in some ways introvert as a character - which I didn't think before this - that it was not very challenging for me. In the beginning of March 2020, I was worried what comes out of this, but in the end the transition [to distance work] was rather easy for me."

**Keywords:** distance work, distance to family, enjoys working from home, no travelling, less social contacts

## France

### FR01

**Title:** Sadia, 37, of North African origin, was confined with her husband and two children, one a new baby born under lockdown - and was trying to finish her thesis

**Narrative:** "I am a doctoral student; I come from North Africa and now live in France. I gave birth to my second child during the first lockdown.

I started my thesis at the end of 2017, and I need to travel for my fieldwork. I've always done that while pregnant, I've always enjoyed it. During my first pregnancy, I was able to do this very well. The first 6 months, babies sleep a lot, I took the opportunity to read, write... In August 2019, I became pregnant again, I said to myself, I'm going to take advantage of it to do the second part of the fieldwork since my older daughter was going to nursery.

My husband had a small business offering services for company employees: leisure travel activities. The lockdown blocked everything, so on the bank account, zero. We were afraid for my husband, I told him to stay at home. The priority became survival, so everything that concerned me, concerned my thesis - that I consider real work - became secondary. I'm not a stay-at-home person at all, it was really hard for me, really, really hard, I think that was the hardest part, having to focus on domestic life. I was very tired, my daughter was small, she was getting to the age where she was starting to move around a lot. So I was very, very bad.

And I don't have any family here, all my family is abroad, so I have no help, I have no support. My husband's mother lives in the same city, so we decided to go and stay with her. At least I wasn't going to worry about all the cooking, cleaning, because I was at the end of the pregnancy. But the flat was very small, there were five of us, plus the little one, plus my big belly, so it was a lot! I'm an only child, I'm not used to being with many people. So it was mentally very heavy for me, very frustrating.

I gave birth on the 17th of April, one month after the lockdown started. My husband was not allowed to stay with us except during the delivery. We arrived at the hospital at night, he had to stay outside in the car park until the midwives said it was time for me to go into the delivery room. That's when he came in, I gave birth, everything went well, he stayed with me for an hour or two and then he left and couldn't come back. So there I was with my baby, my suitcase that I had to carry up to the room by myself. It was really tough. The nurses couldn't look after my baby when I was showering... On the other hand, I was very happy to have some solitude, it was quite relaxing. I just wanted to have my husband with me... Thank God it was my second baby. I wouldn't have liked to experience that with the first one.

Then there was the transnational family aspect. When the covid started, we were terribly afraid for our families. They live in countries that are economically unequal and structurally unequal. The hospitals are in a very bad state, there are no resources, so people die outside on the steps. So, I imagined my father or my uncles or my grandmothers... We were really worried about this. And, in France, it's becoming a bit

complicated to feel good. There is always the suspicion of not being a good citizen, the good immigrant... I like living in this city because it's a good compromise between who I was and who I am. It's a city that totally corresponds to me. But I don't want my children to stay here.

My husband is a man who is totally committed to our life, he's really 100% for equality. But he had to go to work. I had a very, very bad time, I couldn't take it anymore, it was hard. I couldn't do any fieldwork until September. For me, it's mainly the schools. I think that the majority of mothers will say that. Because that's where equality is really at stake. When you get a call from the school, from the nursery, the couple look at each other and in a non-verbal communication, they are gauging who is going to sacrifice themselves. And if the other person doesn't sacrifice, there's resentment.

In September, I took my suitcase and left. I said, you're doing fine, we have childcare, the children are fine, they're healthy, I've finished my mission! So I went back onto the field, I attended conferences, I was very happy. My thesis work is really my comfort zone, my power zone, it makes me feel good, I feel alive. Many people suffer because of their work, I chose to do it, I love it. The lockdown was hard but it allowed me to write.

I have no choice, I'm in a rather delicate situation. I arrived in France in 2015, I'm a foreigner, I queue at 5am at the prefecture to get my papers. There is a lot of uncertainty in the world of research. As I made a rather risky choice, compared to the rather comfortable career I was in, I don't want to fail. That's what keeps me going. I absolutely have to succeed. The pandemic has changed me actually, it has changed us totally. It's strengthened me and my husband, it's brought us closer together, because ... I know a lot of couples that haven't survived. (...). We were lucky, we didn't lose anyone close to us, that's good. We didn't get the covid, that's exceptional."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I'm not a stay-at-home person at all, it was really hard for me, really, really hard, I think that was the hardest part, having to concentrate on domestic life."; "The priority became one of survival, as my husband's business was no longer going to work and we could suddenly find ourselves in a very precarious situation. So everything that concerns me, that concerns my work, goes out the window, it becomes secondary."; "I don't have any family here, all my family is abroad, so I don't have any help or support."; "[My mother-in-law's] flat was very small, there were five of us, plus the little one, plus my big belly, so it was a lot!"; "We went to the hospital at night,[my husband] had to stay outside in the car park until the midwives decided that it was time for me to go into the delivery room. That's when he came in, I gave birth, everything went well, he stayed with me for an hour or two and then he left and couldn't come back."; "Luckily it was my second baby. I wouldn't have liked to go through it like that."; "I was stuck, I had plans, I had things to sort out, I wanted to do some fieldwork, I wanted to start writing [my thesis], I had two articles that I was writing. And I was with my children all day. My children are small, you can't work on the side, it's just not possible, I was going to spiral. There was a lot of pressure, a lot of guilt. There was always one [member of our couple] who took on more than the other. It was hard, it's indescribable."; "It's complicated, between my son who is at nursery and my daughter at school, there's always one, or both, in the week, that closes so you have to stop everything to adapt. It's not possible, we don't exist anymore."; "It changed me, in fact,

it changed us completely. It strengthened us, my husband and I, it brought us closer, because ... I know a lot of couples who didn't survive."; "It's hard to be alone too, I don't have a mum, I don't have an aunt, I don't have a cousin, I don't have friends, I don't have a dad [in France], I don't have anyone, anyone. There's not a single moment when you breathe, when you rest, when you leave the children with the grandparents and you go out, it doesn't exist."; "So, I imagined my father or my uncles or my grandmothers... We were really worried about them all the time. Because it's not the same thing at all, people were really dying, not because they couldn't be saved but because there were no means."; "In France, it's getting a bit complicated to feel good. There is always the suspicion of not being a good citizen, the good immigrant."

**Keywords:** childbirth, relations within the couple, defending work, frustration, lack of space, discrimination, borders

## FR02

**Title:** Sandra, a social worker, couldn't keep in touch with the people she follows

**Narrative:** "I am 49, I am married and I have two daughters, 12 and 17. I am a social worker in a CSO and I live in France.

What impacted me was not so much the announcement of the disease - we knew we had to protect ourselves - but I wanted to reassure my family. I have the image of a great emptiness because we were no longer in contact with the people we were accompanying. Because we didn't have access to our offices, we no longer had the telephone numbers of people we knew were in difficulty. We should have reassured them, guided them for food, for the lack of resources.

In our CSO, we follow people on minimum benefits. We also put people looking for work in touch with CSOs and companies who might employ them. On the social side and the work side, it was obvious that a permanent presence was needed. We closed strictly for 15 days and then we set up a telephone watch. There were between 40 and 50 messages a day, it was unimaginable! Four or five colleagues stayed in the office, either obliged or voluntarily. So our head of department would contact us and for situations where the family's history was needed, we went there.

A network was set with various structures and CSOs that were created to collect and distribute food. The family allowances files were no longer processed, there were breaks in the process. It was a difficult time for families, everything was on hold. Finally the minimum benefits were maintained, and even if everything was not clear, the department and the family allowance fund found a tacit agreement. Then there was the psychological aspect, with the children at home who were no longer getting school meals, which meant significant additional costs. And the question of children in small, run-down flats. Families with young children suffering from asthma. Normally, it is already extremely time-consuming to have mold samples taken and to file applications for rehousing. The management of the school work too...

Hotels were requisitioned, a holiday centre was also opened, but it closed afterwards.

People occupied houses left vacant by owners who had left for the countryside... Being locked up for two months must have been extremely difficult. Unstable husbands... I think there was a lot of violence too. For months after the lockdown, we treated the most fragile, but communication was still poor! I am also thinking of extended families with relatives in other countries who were affected by the disease. The deaths of people who were close but geographically distant, for whom it was not possible to mourn properly. Referral to professional psychologists or psychiatrists was complicated, they did not always receive people. We had people who were no longer heard from... We had people who died, I think of a man who died of isolation. Suicide? Or something that physically broke down? He was very active, walking around the city all day. He died from staying at home without moving.

Knowing that everything was closed during the lockdown, maybe some people didn't dare get in touch with us. We should have given them better information so that they could contact us. I didn't have their phone numbers, I didn't have a way to check my email. It was my colleague, my head of department who looked at them for me and called me when it was really important. We were really cut off. Then, when we reopened, it was only partly satisfactory: we couldn't receive everyone, we had to avoid having too many people on the premises. We kept the phone lines and when there was a need, we received people. Each referent follows 140 to 150 people! This figure is imposed by the department. Ideally, and even more so in confinement, it should be reduced to 70 people. This is regularly requested but...

In the department offices, there was only one social worker, almost always the same one, and the director. The others were teleworking but they didn't have what it took to telework. The department's social workers have to be in contact with the minimum benefit reception centers for questions of health, housing etc.... We have the possibility of asking for financial aid for children from the department, but the service was closed. I remember a man who permanently was out of work before the lockdown, but who worked as a volunteer distributing food aid. He was so proud, he said: "I worked during the confinement". He revealed himself, we needed him. Little positive things like that came out, it was very amazing. But now he's back like he was before.

I really appreciated being able to slow down, to be together at the beginning, with my husband and daughters, in a decent house with enough to buy food. The CSO made sure to pay our salary in full. But among the people we follow, no one has said they were happy, it was not possible for them, because of their financial and housing problems."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I'm thinking of a lady who saw her family members dying as they went along. The first few calls she couldn't speak, she was calling me to say that she had a relative who had died and that couldn't talk."

"I think a lot about the children. I have seen many women in great difficulty with regard to the school for their children. The children are supposed to have the right material to follow lessons. It's impossible to manage when there are several children..."

"I have had cases of psychological violence. When the husband is psychologically unstable and shut in. You can't blame everything on him, he's having a hard time. It must

have been extremely hard for the wife and children, if the husband has this way of being a bit violent with his words."

"I kind of liked the fact that we were together and that we could slow down the pace. It was extremely necessary in fact!"; "Psychologically, it's impossible to carry everything... I put a lot of things aside because I didn't have the means... I turned the page and was more into the concrete day-to-day... We thought a lot about people without housing because then a lot of people were going to be homeless."

"At that time a lot of people went to the countryside or to secondary homes. So when people saw unused houses, it was a chance for them to take shelter. For one lady, there was an eviction afterwards, the case went to court, but the holiday center [temporary accommodation] had closed and she had no other solution."; "Many did not pay their rent because eating was extremely necessary."

"I'm thinking of a young man with a mental illness who was stuck abroad with his family, despite his French nationality, he went to the airport every day, he was on waiting lists."

"Maintaining the minimum benefit as a support, at least, I think that was very important."

"Ideally, it would be good if we didn't cut the link at all and continued the work... We texted for all the appointments we had. But that didn't mean they could call us. When it's not made clear, do they allow themselves to call us? I don't think so."

"We work on a software program, we don't have a list of telephone numbers, so without a computer tool, we couldn't do anything."

"We exchange a lot by e-mail, for some people it has become a way of expressing certain things. I had no way of reading my emails, it was my colleague who looked at them for me."

"We were at home, together, we couldn't work and at the same time when there was even only one case a week, it invaded me because I don't have what I need at home. It was paradoxical, it totally invaded me."

"Sometimes I preferred to cut myself off, saying to myself: 'they'll find resources... Pffff!'"

"Many people didn't dare to go out, it lasted for quite a while, even after we got back to normal. Also in relation to relatives, those who had relatives in poor health."

"We took stock of the situation with a practice analysis, and we went back over this period of confinement. We talked a lot about our personal and professional feelings."

"We are happy to see the families again, to see them and that things are calming down. Afterwards, there are certainly wounds that will take time to heal."

**Keywords:** bureaucracy, lack of means for teleworking, poverty, death, powerlessness, disorganisation

**FR03**

**Title:** Sam, age 25, runs a CSO that supports trans people

**Narrative:** "I am a 25-years-old trans man and I live in France. In 2018, I created an association to defend the rights of trans people for administrative, social, legal and support accompaniment to people and their families. We have a public of all ages, very heterogeneous: from the very precarious and marginalized to people with no socio-economic problems and people from very privileged backgrounds. We provide training, information and awareness-raising activities for the general public, professionals and other organizations on trans identity, to combat exclusion. We have group or individual meetings, social services, discussion groups that offer a safe environment for non-binary trans people to share their experiences and help each other. We receive families and relatives who can talk about their fears and difficulties. We do family mediation.

Individually, they talk about their difficulties, get information about gender affirmation, changing their first name, social housing, links with the medical sector, psychologists, etc. We have a health centre, and cultural activities (theatre, dance, cinema, debates) and care activities (art therapy). We work with volunteers: people affected by transphobia (peer helpers) and volunteers who are not affected but are qualified (health, legal, social, etc.).

When the pandemic was announced, I refused to give up or put the activity on hold, it would generate great distress and demand would increase. Except during the first lockdown, the activity remained unchanged. We were even able to organise an international day against transphobia, with an outdoor dance performance because the theatres were reopening only for professionals. These were ambitious projects and we succeeded! I made certificates to say that we were meeting to support the most precarious people, so that people could move around and we did everything in person. It's more dangerous not to meet because you see an increase in depression, suicide and transphobic violence.

That gave us energy to deal with untenable situations, on a daily basis: confinement, with no possible strategies to avoid meeting non-accepting, rejecting or violent parents or partners. We lost contact with people who were forced to stay in a transphobic environment so as not to be alone. Several people had to change accommodation frequently to ensure a safe space. Several reported family members attempting on their lives! It says something about what was imposed on people.

Housing is a big issue. We have always had people who live on the streets and there are some people who are not even aware of their rights. For people on the street who were already living in the alternative community system, it hasn't changed much. A lot of people are in that situation! The pandemic has also had an impact on people who are integrated and who depend on all sorts of things that stopped: loss of income, loss of

social ties, having to live with their parents, their spouse. They said: "We're going to end up fighting", or "My family is abusing me", or they heard "You're not my son anymore, I'm going to kill you!". We need real, specifically designed accommodation.

Last year we had a drastic drop in attendance, and also a drop in voluntary work, as in all CSOs. The management of the CSO has been difficult, everything has become more complex, people are afraid or discouraged, and it is difficult to find the necessary resources. Because of advocacy and growing media presence, the institutions have become quite receptive (rectorate, city, the regional health agency, department, the ministry of health...)

The department supported us a lot during this period. But with Social Security, things got tougher, with totally unreasonable demands: requests for certificates from endocrinologists, psychiatrists, additional administrative procedures compared to cis-gender people. During the pandemic, did they tighten up access for budgetary reasons? It is unacceptable to consider that gender affirming care is not essential!

We kept going as much as possible online. The Messenger group became a battleground, everybody was on edge. And then, while many younger people were able to go onto Discord vocal, the over-35-year-olds ...

In these situations, we need clear instructions from the State, so that we have full legitimacy to pursue our activities. For a trans person who comes out, nothing else matters. They will drop everything to do their thing, and if they have to take risks to do it, they will. The person needs access to the care they want, whether it's hormonal, surgical, whatever. And now everything has been cancelled: appointments, operating theatres. It really made things worse. We gave out hormones for free. They were the same hormones that they would have got at a pharmacy with a prescription. What changed was the lack of medical surveillance. And pharmacies, for long-term treatments, renewed people's prescriptions, to avoid them going to their doctor and cluttering up the waiting room. That was a good move on their part. There should be no cessation of activity for us, and no cessation of care, no discontinuity, as well as provision of accommodation for people in situations of intra-family violence. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "We now also work with volunteers who have qualifications: there are certain legal procedures, for victims' rights, social security rights, or housing benefits... These things are quite complex. There is community knowledge in terms of care, but after a while you miss out on a whole range of issues."; "If a person is ready to return to a violent environment because they can no longer stand solitude, it says something about what confinement has imposed on people in terms of forced isolation."; "People from very privileged backgrounds can find themselves in an emergency situation but it's not exactly the same emergency situations as disadvantaged people. It's going to be: "my family stops supporting me, there's a rupture, what do I do?"; "Cutting the social link would have been dramatic!"; "I attested to everything and anyone so that people could move around without any problems. When you are in a situation where you are trying to affirm your gender identity, almost the whole of society is not going to allow you to affirm it. So it's vital to have places where you can assert it!"; "I have been on the verge of spectacular civil disobedience actions! Transphobia doesn't stop because there's a virus!"; "People were threatening to 'throw

themselves out' if they didn't get hormones, so they were given them. They were told to lie, to go to a GP and say they had lost their prescription..."; "When you listen to trans people, what comes back is that when this thing comes out, it has to be resolved at that point"; "I was very lucky, I had my operation just before the first lockdown!"; "Because of the health context, there is a climate of mistrust and this adds to the climate of mistrust that already exists regarding the care of trans people."; "The people who can have access to care are the richest, because there are private surgeons who agree to operate."; "We need to create specialised emergency shelters for the most disadvantaged, people in emergency situations, migrants, homeless people, or people who need trans-identity."

**Keywords:** perseverance / mobilisation / resourcefulness / isolation / distress / illegality / transgression

#### FR04

**Title:** Andrea, a Brazilian dancer, but more and more disabled, lost social benefits during lockdown and survived thanks to solidarity

**Narrative:** "I am Brazilian dancer and costume maker. I am 49 and I have two daughters in their twenties who are students. I left my husband who was violent and sought refuge in France about 10 years ago. I have polyarthromyalgia.

At first, I was afraid of the situation in general. My daughters came down to spend the lockdown with me. We didn't know what could happen the next day, it was really difficult, and I didn't have a job. The girls were scared and worried about catching it, especially for me because I have respiratory problems, health problems, so without the vaccine, it was fatal for me to get it. We were really confined at home, the three of us, without being able to go out. At first it was very complicated, I had no more orders for costumes, they were all completely cancelled. I was also afraid because my older daughter is studying to be a nurse. I saw doctors and nurses dropping like flies, dead because of covid. She was summoned, she was forced to go and work with the patients, in the hospital, she saw everything. She took the vaccinations of course, I had to also, because of my disease.

In Brazil, we lived well: no money problems, no residence permit, no need to ask for help, I was a homeowner, I made a good living. When I arrived here I thought I could find the same job I had in Brazil, specialised educator. My application for the recognition of my diploma was rejected every time. I had to work to feed my daughters, to support them. So I became a capoeira and dance teacher, I had no choice and as I have a dance diploma... I gave classes from Monday to Friday, Saturday and Sunday I did shows. I was always on the run, I never stopped. That's why the confinement...

With my illness I couldn't work like before. I have polyarthromyalgia, it's degenerative, I can't do anything about it, nor can the doctors. With the psychiatrist, we had teleconsultations. It was a bit complicated, but he was always there, by phone, he was great. The other treatments could wait. I stopped doing the shows and I compensated

by sewing costumes. I had quite a few orders for clothes for shows. With the covid, this was no longer possible: the galas, the shows, everything was cancelled.

During the confinement it was impossible for me to be well. I took the medication and everything like I was supposed to, but during the lockdown it was impossible for me to be well. I had bad thoughts, bad ideas, you could say that.

During the lockdown, the Family Allowance Fund suddenly stopped paying my benefits. I spent two months in the doldrums, I was really desperate. I had to prove that I and my daughters had been here for five years, that I had a residence permit to validate my rights. I provided all the papers that prove this, that I have paid taxes, that I am legal in the country. But I needed a certificate from the prefecture and it was closed. All my orders had stopped, my savings were gone. I had rent to pay. I had to ask a social worker for help. She gave me food vouchers to get by with my girls. That's all we had, and what's more, not all supermarkets take the vouchers!

What saved me was a man who collected the masks that I made. He helped me a lot at that time. I am grateful. He even brought me milk, bread, vegetables because he knew I had nothing left. He paid me for the masks because he knew that I was not well off financially. It affected the girls a lot too! He spoke with a lady he knew, he told her about my problems. I didn't know her at all. I went to the appointment she gave me with the certificate and all that. She gave me lots of food because I had nothing left at home. It was a miracle! It was good timing, the moment, the day, the time, everything! Another Brazilian called me, who had made contact with someone else who told her about my difficulties, the unpaid rent, no money, no work and that I was afraid of ending up on the street. She had gone shopping for me too and she said, "This is for you".

I saw people who didn't care about skin colour, nationality. They just wanted to help a mother stuck with her children. I will never forget that. Nobody accepted me as an educator because I was a foreigner. With the racism in Brazil, we are used to fighting, me and my daughters. I thought it would be completely different here: no racism, no prejudice... The covid, it's as if we foreigners had brought it here. People in the social sector told us: "If you left your country and you're here, it means you're sick... You have brought the variant from Brazil ". I imagine that for Asians, it was even worse. Finally I managed to get an answer from the prefecture, after the lockdown in May 2020. Fortunately, the estate agency understood that my rights were not respected and did not kick me out!

The lockdown is an excuse. For the institutions, we are foreigners, illegal. They create problems and use covid to justify that. They took advantage of covid to deny us our rights. We are living beings too. We know that there is covid, everyone goes through the same thing but that doesn't mean that we don't have rights or that we have fewer rights than others. I kept the same social worker, before, during and after covid. Now I need the Disability Agency to accept my file so that I can work with a disabled status. Even now, we are still fighting against the system. It's not complicated to understand how it works but it's very complicated to get aid."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I was really afraid of what would happen next, of the uncertainty, I had a bit of a breakdown there... "; "From the first confinement on I was more tense. I don't understand why, but the second lockdown worsened my

depression.”; "I was on the verge of falling, let's put it that way..."; "I still don't understand about the family allowances, because I've been here in France for ten years, without leaving, without moving in fact. So, it was strange for me to have to prove that I had been in France for five years.”. "I was afraid of ruining my daughters' studies, it's the first time we've had difficulties like this. With their studies they can't work either.”; "My daughters didn't want to go to a vocational high school to learn nail art or hairdressing, things like that. Every time they said "I want to do the baccalaureate, go to university". They didn't accept that little Brazilian girls wanted to be in a good place to study. My daughter had to repeat her three years of high school here! She had to prove that she was smart and could go to college and do her chosen profession. The little one is doing chemistry.”; "When it started to slacken off, the covid, we thought 'well we can breathe, we can take our everyday, ordinary battles. But again, it was not possible. Because we are still foreigners. It's as if we, the foreigners, were the ones bringing the covid shit to France.”; "I reply "we didn't even go to Brazil so we didn't bring anything back. We are like you here, we are also afraid.”; "It's still hot but we're going to resist”; "I had residence permits for one or two years. After that I had to get a ten-year card. I don't know why the card was refused. I have friends who live in Nice, Lyon, they got it even though they've been here for two or three years. They don't respect the law here!”; "The card is expensive: the first tax stamp is 560 €, and then 200 € to renew.”. "I have pain all over my body, I forget things, I have no more saliva, it's complicated to eat. I don't have tears anymore because of the disease too, I use a eye drops every day, and now I can't see like I used to.”. "Fortunately, my daughters were there otherwise I don't know what I could have done...”; "I'm still fighting to be accepted as I am, to be given a job that I can do. Not to fill the small spaces that the French don't want.”. "The problem was to be listened to by someone who didn't want to listen to us in fact.”; "I need the disables status. Every four months I go back to the hospital and I do the perfusions at home. If a boss sees me with a catheter, he'll say: "but you're sick, you've hidden this from me" and I'll be fired for sure.”. "I think of the people who helped us, only to help us, who didn't expect anything at all.”; "I met people with a big heart, they were decent! That's what was positive.”; "We're going to make it, because we're persistent”; "I'm still fighting for acceptance. To be accepted as I am. For them to give me a job that I can do, for example. Not just filling the small spaces that the French don't want. So now, after all that, the confinement and everything, because they took advantage of covid to deny us our rights, to tell us you don't belong...”

**Keywords:** Solidarity, family, handicap, bureaucracy, depression, suicidal thoughts

**FR05**

**Title:** Alexander, a specialized educator, protected prostitutes during lockdown

**Narrative:** "I am 53, I have a son who lives with his mother. I live with my partner and, in the beginning of the pandemic, I worked in a CSO as a specialized educator with prostitutes. I am French, of African origin.

When I think back, I think of the agonizing mess it was for everyone. Nothing was clear. The contradictions of the experts, the doctors, the misinformation, it added fear to the disease. The first people to return from China were quarantined... The ministers and civil servants said: "Move along, there's nothing to see, we've got it under control". They should have swallowed their pride. Fatigue was beginning to accumulate for the hospital workers. I had to continue working outdoors, I was beginning to be afraid. I painted a lot during that period and wrote a lot in the evenings. Since I worked with people who had greater needs than I did, that helped me put things into perspective. With one of the girls I was following, I found myself in the hospital emergency room when we didn't yet have any clear information about the disease.

During the lockdown, prostitutes could not continue their activity. Most of them are in furnished hotels, some in their own homes. Very quickly they accumulated debts, had no food to eat. I had the phone numbers of all these people and the CSO asked me to telework, to call them one by one to make a social assessment: those who have minimum social benefits, and the foreigners, without papers, who have nothing at all. I was annoyed: I don't know how many I had to call, but the CSO had nothing to offer them. I had to shout at my manager - they were adding violence to violence. Finally it accessed food aid and we organized a distribution once a week. And state service vouchers, but the CSO wanted to impose limits: people with minimum social benefits, or not... I also had to respond to requests for information on the disease, reassure, remind people of sanitary gestures, even help them to fill in the certificates [mandatory to go outside during the lockdown], it was complicated. Some people had to organize school assistance for their child.

What struck me during this period was the violence. Four Nigerian women were raped, over a whole weekend, by fifteen Nigerian men confined to the same building. I was the one who took charge of them when they called on Monday morning. My head of department had just arrived, she didn't know how to work on these issues, so she put me on the case. I took them to the emergency room. During the journey, the aggressors kept calling them, threatening them. They organize human trafficking here for sexual exploitation. These acts of violence, of rape, are part of the hold, to submit you. That's how they took advantage of the confinement. There have been other cases reported. With this number of aggressors, we had to be vigilant ourselves.

Afterwards I accompanied them to file a complaint. The police first said that we had to wait until the end of the lockdown - and my director was going to accept that! I contacted a policewoman I knew, and finally another director of the police said: "You're going to take the case, and moreover in flagrante delicto". Afterwards, we rehoused the girls in emergency accommodation and made sure they had food. Then one of them was spotted, towards the end, so I had to find a shelter in another town that was able to take them in and give them food without asking too many questions.

There were no facilities for women victims of violence at the time, although their numbers were exploding! Other women were victims of violence from their partners. One of them called us, but there were no shelters... Sometimes I'm afraid but I know what I have to do, I know how violent these guys are. But we did it, we are tired but we did it. These are very strong moments that I won't forget.

When the head of the department with whom we did the confinement resigned after a

year, the new manager changed our work, without discussion, from one day to the next: we had to take an interest in minors because there were subsidies to be had. She sent us to raise awareness, to inform other educators, to sell the CSO's training courses! In April I caught covid, it lasted a week. When I came back, the occupational doctor told me: "No, you are not going to go back there". All my colleagues were on sick leave, we all resigned. I was depressed, taking medication.

My girlfriend also worked at the CSO, we were face to face, teleworking, talking about the same situations, in disagreement sometimes, sometimes things flared up. I said we had to stop this. We also supported each other. If she hadn't been there, I don't know how I would have got through the year alone, with more alcohol than usual in the evening. I didn't see my son much during the confinement. His mother sometimes wanted to take a breather, but I couldn't see him, my girlfriend and I were working.

Finally, what made me feel good was that the girls' aggressors were arrested, there was a trial, and the girls started to work on reparation. I think I was present, useful, a lot, for these people."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "The contradictions left room for everyone to improvise, it was a messy time with a lot of anxiety, between the anger of the misinformation and the reality, whatever it was, that seemed serious, really."; "Between the stories of masks that weren't there, the scrubs... We heard it all."; "War broke out very quickly among the doctors, particularly Didier Raoult. There was no collegial thing. It became clans." ; "I would sometimes paint even while teleworking. I would answer phone calls, write a few pages of restitution, while a painting dried somewhere... I started to paint things that were directly related to what we were going through." ; "During this period I took in a lot of the difficulties, even getting into fights with the leaders." ; "We were made to go on marauding trips even after curfew hours to see if some of them went out anyway, despite the ban and because of hunger, but they didn't go out." ; "Imagine a client being fined for breaking curfew and on top of that for buying sex... So there was no one [in the streets]."; "I received calls for help on the phone: "There's no food, what's going to happen to us? The hotel owner thrown my stuff out, I can't find any help..." And I couldn't even tell them to come to the association, that we would help them out with a few bags of rice or anything."; "How can you ask someone 'Do you need anything', and come empty handed?" ; "I sent the forms by phone so they could copy them, until the director woke up and people could come and take them from the association. But you are already afraid when you leave home: to have to tell the police that you are going to an association to get the famous certificates!"; "For a year the Nigerians have been asking one of the girls to prostitute herself for them. They never accepted but this confinement was an unfortunate opportunity for the girls to undergo this."; "I took the girls to an association where they could only sleep and have a coffee, but nothing to eat. [It was hard] to find relay associations... Everything was closed."; "You had to accompany them physically. But you were waiting outside. I waited for hours for a deposition interview for rape qualified as human trafficking and aggravated because it was a group. And you're outside and you can't come in, everything is closed."; "The association has put in place a discriminatory measure: there are regular people who just come to use the space, drink coffee, eat. And others who don't want to come in because of the image. We see

them outside, we know them, but to get them to benefit from the association's food aid, it was a lot of discussion and battles. The regulars seemed to have more priority."; "Today I speak about all this with more detachment, but at the time... We experienced a lot of institutional violence."; "My boss wanted me to ask Bulgarian women on the phone if they had thought of going home. Because the question was raised by the authorities, for example with the women's rights delegate at the prefecture. I said, "No, you can propose it, but this question will never come out of my mouth!"

**Keywords:** Violence, rape, depression, prostitution, absurdity, alcohol, perseverance, support within the couple

## FR06

**Title:** Marie works in family planning and describes the impact of covid on her work

**Narrative:** "I am 33, I'm a single woman, and I work in a CSO on family planning. On the whole, it was a period that made me realize how privileged I was. I was confined to a very pleasant environment, a shared rental. I was able to continue my work both teleworking and face-to-face, so I kept in touch. I found it very comfortable not to have children, to be very autonomous. There was a lot of talk during this period about people who live with their families, with several people in very small spaces, and about issues of intra-family violence.

I'm a bit overwhelmed by these issues and at the same time I'm also angry because of the implementation of control tools like the health pass. I had quite a few moments of sadness and anger and powerlessness in relation to the massive state policies. But there have been good moments when I was able to go to demonstrations where questions of politics and struggles were still important. But it's true that this is a complex period.

I'm quite happy that we were able to keep on receiving people in my CSO. During the first week of the lockdown we were completely closed and after that we opened in a very limited way: one afternoon a week, maybe two, but we still were open. We wanted to maintain the activity as much as possible. We have an email address, and we extended the chat rooms. All our school actions were cancelled at that time.

Then, in 2020 and 2021, there were major difficulties in terms of funding because we were unable to implement actions. Some funders wanted all the money to be reimbursed, whereas a lot of time was spent programming and re-programming actions that did not take place. And so it was a difficult period for the structure and the management and the Board of Directors.

The people who come to the family planning service are mostly women, and they come to us because of the risks of pregnancy, for contraception, abortion and pregnancy tests. I've been working here for five years and we've noticed that over the years the question of violence and situations of great insecurity have become more and more present, so it's difficult to see what is specifically linked to covid. There are also more and more people in migrant or exile situations who have great difficulty in accessing care, but it's difficult to quantify.

During this period access to abortion was difficult. I had people on the phone who said to me "but I can't... people go to hospital to die, the hospital is overloaded, we can't burden them..." Some people felt difficulty in asserting their freedom, their rights. It was also very difficult for minors because they didn't go to school. Coming to the planning office or having an abortion or getting contraception works when it's on the way to school or college. But when there's no school or college, it's not possible. What excuse is there to leave the house? It was complicated. Access to health care was really difficult during this period. Covid reinforced inequalities and situations of poverty and precariousness, so it also plays a role in the issues of menstrual precariousness.

There was less solidarity among CSOs, because we couldn't see each other, that we limited meetings, that we limited group things. What was most lacking were the links among victims of violence or people in a precarious situation. It is difficult afterwards to create a community, or support or just to create a link. Some groups have had to stop. There are also sanitary protocol issues, so how many people can attend? And the difficulty for people to return to the social center for fear of covid. That deepened forms of isolation. After the lock-down, people didn't come back immediately. It took a while. This absence was super scary: what is not being said? What requests for help can't emerge because people are confined? There were few people because people just didn't go out at that time. On the other hand, the number of calls to the national helpline increased enormously.

The Social Security offices are still closed and only available by telephone. They are difficult reach. For people who have little command of French and who are in an irregular situation, it's really very complicated! I don't see why they don't reopen. This raises issues of public policy and of the investment in public services. This is really a political choice. The same goes for the Departmental Council where it was also a disaster in terms of access. It was closed for a long time even though it has decisive social missions. Nevertheless, we have tested our ability to adapt and seen that we manage to adapt to a lot... "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "On the whole, it was a period that made me aware of the extent to which I was in a privileged position in the world in relation to the constraints"; "So I think that there are also quite a few moments of sadness and anger and powerlessness in relation to the power of public policies at that time, state policies that were massive. And at the same time there were good moments in the last two years which were admittedly less important, but I was able to go to demonstrations where the question of politics and the struggle was still important to me."; "And that made me angry, and I understood why teachers were setting this up, to keep a link with the children, with the families, so that the children could be stimulated by activities, and at the same time it's certain that the social inequality that makes school accompaniment ... Between a parent who masters French or not, a parent who masters computer tools, has access to a printer... "; "... I've been working at family planning for five years now and we've noticed that over the years the issue of violence and situations of great precariousness have become more and more present, so it's also difficult to see what is specifically linked to covid"; "more and more people in situations of migration or exile are really having great difficulty accessing care. And as a result, they come to us with

sexual health issues, but in fact often in these situations, it's also about access to accommodation, access to food, access to administrative support"; "From the moment we talk about sexual health, the issue of violence necessarily appears as a possible risk to relational and sexual life."; "I know that there are schedules, depending on where they are located, for example if they are in town hall premises where there are access issues, for example having the health pass to be able to access them. We haven't asked, fortunately, for a pass for the people who come"; "But it's the nature of the period, it's that the difficulty of meetings between associations or between structures meant that the ways of dealing with this situation were isolated and that as a result there was a lack of linkage, due to the fact that we couldn't see each other, limiting meetings, limiting group stuff, limiting gatherings. And for example, I know that in order to intervene in social centres there are groups that have had to stop. There are also protocol issues, so how many people can come? And the difficulty for people to return to the social centre because of fear, because of the fear of the covid and therefore the fear of returning to collective group spaces. And that also does things, to deepen forms of isolation at that time"; "In situations of violence, the planning office is not a resource centre, and yet I had a call from a person in a situation of domestic violence in an emergency situation"; "And I find that in situations of listening and connection, the mask is still very hard. At one point, a colleague and I were saying to each other that we were going to say hello... try to take off the mask to say hello to the person and put it back on. Meeting people without the whole of their face and in situations of great vulnerability, it's really... It's hard! "

**Keywords:** Family planning, adolescents, sanitary restriction, funding, public policy

**FR07**

**Title:** François was finishing his thesis, looking for work and had a baby girl during lockdown

**Narrative:** "I am 32 and I was finishing my doctoral thesis when covid appeared. I lived at the time in a small village in France with my partner and our baby girl, born during the first lockdown. I had finished my doctoral contract and I was on unemployment benefits until September of that year. So, from March onwards, I was looking for work. I hadn't found a teaching position, so I was a bit discouraged about going into research. And as the funds were running out, I wanted to find a job to feed us. I had worked in sales before, but with the coronavirus, there were no offers. So I was a bit stuck. I had made offers in other fields, but they told me that they were getting rid of staff rather than hiring them. So my partner and I got a bit worried. We were very lucky. Just before the crisis started, she had trained as a nurse. Before that, she worked in the restaurant business. For nurses, at least during the coronavirus, there was work. So that reassured us. Fortunately, I had almost finished writing my thesis in February, I was well advanced. In fact, the coronavirus crisis slowed down the organization of the rest of the work: the time for proofreading, for setting up the jury and all that. Then I had a few cosmetic changes to make during the summer but the main part was done in December. That wasn't a big

problem but was a bit stressful.

The additional element that complicated things a little bit, but also made them more beautiful, was that my partner, in March, was eight months pregnant. So we were expecting a baby girl who was due in April. The lockdown complicated the delivery. It was very hard for her because, at the maternity hospital, I couldn't stay with her. It was forbidden. I was able to stay only 4 hours after the birth. Afterwards, she spend five days alone. For me it was hard, but you could say that it's classic. But for my partner, it was really difficult because she was all alone. Then in hospital, there are doctors... let's say that kindness is not always there. I also felt a bit guilty, so these feelings were a bit complicated.

Luckily, we were in the countryside, so we had a very low rent, we had 615€ rent plus 50€ for electricity. But with 1000€ income between the two of us, with the little one and everything, we didn't really see how we could manage. But we were really lucky. First, the government voted to continue unemployment benefits. That really did us a lot of good. The second piece of luck was that we lived in the countryside, not very far from my father, who is a retired bricklayer. He's 75 years old but a bit addicted to work. He proposed that I take on some small projects with him where there was physical work that he couldn't do and that I could do, under the table, of course. I'm all for paying social security contributions, but there are times when you can't really do anything else. So we were really lucky, it was great.

Originally, we had decided that my partner would stay at home for a while, maybe take a year's parental leave, while I worked. But as I didn't have a job, and she could find a job in a flash, she went to work in a small country hospital that was 10 minutes away from our house. I was able to keep the baby, it was really great, we really wanted to keep her at home. From an economic point of view, it was more or less the same cost as putting her in a nursery. We had thought about it for a long time because we are both partisans of a constant reflection on gender issues because we realize that there are always... that we reproduce mechanisms so we try to watch them, but we can easily fall back into them. In fact with the coronavirus crisis she was the only one who could find work. So there was quite a strong feeling of failure that was a bit complicated to deal with. We had the impression of having failed. I don't know if it's a factor, but we have a family model where my father was the one who earned the most money when we were... It's good, it allowed me to think a little bit about these things that ruin your life. It caused me some anxiety on that side. It was the change of plans that was difficult.

There was a general uncertainty that was not improved by the context, and people were not in a very good mood. There was quite a lot of anxiety in fact. I'm not naturally very anxious but I was worried about the expenses...Some problems got worse with covid. We often talked with friends, for example from North Africa, who had problems finding work even before covid. And during the covid they found themselves facing a kind of closure and hostility. It's complicated. My partner... as she is from the Philippines, she looks like a person from the Philippines... There was a kind of sino-phobia. At that time we got all kinds of remarks... But also support, people who said: "You hear what they say about the Chinese, I don't agree". She's not Chinese, but she's labelled like that. In crisis situations like that, sometimes people let go of their inhibitions. When I think about it, I wonder what can be attributed to the coronavirus or not... "

**Specifically telling quotes:** “That first year, we were lucky. It's luck that was independent of... it's not a question of getting moving, of being motivated - we were lucky. Because when you think about it, in crises like this... You hear about people who don't move, that you have to find a job. In these conditions, there are sometimes social conjunctions, I was lucky to have a family and social benefits. Without social benefits, I don't know what we would have done.”; “We had planned just before the coronavirus that my partner would stay at home with my daughter and I would go to work. We had thought about it for a long time because we are both in favour of a constant reflection on the gender condition because we realise that there are always... that we reproduce mechanisms so we try to watch them, but we can easily fall back into them, we had said to ourselves that this was what we wanted eventually. We had worked on it a lot before and in fact, with the coronavirus crisis, she was the only one who could find work. So it was quite a strong feeling of failure that was a bit complicated to deal with. We had the impression of having failed, of having failed.”; “Well, in fact, the surveillance [of not going out during the lockdown] at home is very much oriented towards young people because the police think that young people are the most dangerous. From the moment we were parents with a child, they didn't care at all. You could walk around.”; “This policy, which consisted of continuing unemployment benefits, was really a success. It made us comfortable, but if we hadn't had it we would managed all the same. The people who were in more difficulty, who only had this, they would have fallen. Debt...”; “We were afraid for the baby, but at the time they said it wasn't really bad for babies, so it wasn't very scary. My family was very anxious but ....”; “I think we were contextually lucky, like the stars were aligned.”

**Keywords:** Uncertainty, luck, unemployment, birth, hospital, couples, family support

**FR08**

**Title:** Solitude hit Adrienne hard and made her realize she was getting old

**Narrative:** "I am 76, I have no children and and I live alone. I am retired but I used to work for a medical journal.

The impact of the lockdown was more about my age, and about being alone. It was the year I turned 75. During the first lockdown, I really slipped... With two friends who live alone not far from here, we sometimes saw each other during the time we were allowed out, we walked a bit. But to be alone when I used to have cultural and physical activities... Before covid, the group, the exchanges helped me a lot in terms of energy. Then everything was cut off all at once... At the beginning we couldn't even be in each other's homes. It was hard because being like that, when you're not used to being alone, without any activity, just feeding yourself wasn't enough. I started to take refuge in reading. I've never watched so much television, I started to close myself off a bit, to shift my mealtimes, to shift my sleep times and I gradually sank into a kind of depression.

I only have a narrow balcony. I walked in the streets but that's not a walk. I compare with

my friends who had a house, a garden, who were not alone. They told me about their lives and that also depressed me because I was really feeling solitude. I had to go to the doctor, I had to take medication. It made me realise that I hadn't solved all my existential problems and my childhood problems too. It made things come up again. I was really unwell. I really went through a process of .... closing in on myself. There are quite a few of us. Two friends had the same thing. A lot of people took it in their stride though.

It was scary. We saw ourselves going into old age with all that it entails. It's as if you no longer have any autonomy. I used to go to the swimming pool, but I haven't even been back since, no way. I don't even feel like it anymore. Even with my close friends I didn't feel like talking for long. Everyone saw it, everyone understood it. Even now I'm more fragile, I've remained more fragile.

I must also say that I used to work in the medical field, so from the beginning I had all the information, even what was not on television. So I was a bit more freaked out than other people. My former colleagues talked about what they experienced in hospital on a daily basis and it's true that at the beginning it was absolutely... they were really... They were afraid, they didn't say it, but they were afraid! They were afraid that their teams would give up and leave, and that they would end up with an influx of patients who were dying like flies during the first month. They didn't even know what they were dying of, at first. The information from China was only partly true. I was more aware of it maybe than other people, because my ex-colleagues were seeing the most serious cases. They were telling me: "Be careful, be careful". We didn't have masks, so I put on a little scarf but given my age... Afterwards I went shopping with a mask. We didn't have FFP2s at the time. Some German friends sent me some, which was very nice. They were really FFP2 masks because I could hardly breathe with them. When I went into a place, into the pharmacy for example, I put it on, not for very long.

Now it's fine. I got a bit more organised afterwards. I think it was during the second lockdown that I went to a friend's house. This virus played tricks on us: we believed that this was it, that we were getting to the end. And now we know that we'll have to live with it, that we'll always have variants. I'm vaccinated, but I won't see the whole planet completely vaccinated in my lifetime.

I really missed seeing the younger generation. Especially children, it's true that .... WhatsApp is OK but it doesn't replace meeting them. I prefer the telephone, hearing just the voice, you can hear well. But not not being able to kiss them...It was better once I was vaccinated though. The vaccine was a bit of a disappointment, but for the severe forms, if we hadn't had it, it would have been a massacre. I also thought of myself as contributing to collective immunity, so I did it right away.

I don't want to get into arguments about vaccination, especially with the people I love, but I have old friends who are stubborn about it. I have a good friend who is a GP and even her children are not vaccinated. I joke about it with my godson who isn't vaccinated, because I know I'll never get really angry with him. Life is really... At my age you think "I've seen it all". But I didn't know it was so hard. Or else it was abstract. So there you are."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "At the beginning we couldn't even be in each other's houses. It was hard because to be like that, when you're not used to it, all alone, with no

activity, just food and... It wasn't enough."; "If I'm alone, it's for other reasons, but not because I want to be alone, and I told myself that it couldn't go on like that. I am not made to live alone, I live very badly."; "Speaking with friends... they put me in "very old age". I heard some people say: "very old people", for example, start from the age of 70. 65 years old even! Maybe that's how they classify them at the hospital, I don't know, but..."; "There's also age, probably, and I see myself slipping into old age. Because practically during a confinement you live like in old age."; "I have a friend who used to live almost like that, he doesn't like to meet people at all, only his few friends. So we used to phone each other and he was fine. But he used to go to the cinema a lot, he's a photographer and he likes pictures. He goes there much less..."; "Nobody knows with this virus, so it could also play a good trick on us, that is to say... but as it has played so many bad tricks on us, we are rather suspicious and think "won't get a variant again?"; "I have a special relationship with two children of friends who have had cystic fibrosis. My godson was the first one I took care of, and there is now a very strong bond. And his little sister, I also took care of her a lot, so not being able to kiss them..."; "S. had a new baby during the confinement... I would have gone straight away! I couldn't go."; "Arguing about the vaccine... At first I didn't take it well because it seemed so obvious that it made me a bit angry, but then I got used to the fact that everyone has their own beliefs and now I'm more tolerant. I sometimes try to say a few words about it but some people around me are hopeless!"; "My boss said to me one day, 'On Monday I'm going to a pandemic meeting in Brussels'. And I told him "Pandemic! But there's a risk of a pandemic? "Oh dear, it's not that we risk having it, it's that we will have it". So it's true that I wasn't extremely surprised, and I immediately got in touch with them to get news. But you don't believe, you don't believe that it can happen!"; "Some of my friends have also had side benefits, those whose children had left home and now came back. Others worked for the hospitals, making overblouses, masks: one who cut, one who sewed and one who ironed. I wouldn't have been fit enough to do it alone. Maybe there are people who have that temperament. I couldn't do it."; "It depended on the family structure and the place. When I saw the people from the provinces again, I asked them how it had gone, everyone said "it was great, no work... Holidays like that, when you get on well at home. They had space, a garden. They did some DIY. Everyone had painted their shutters, they were cooking."

**Keywords:** depression, loneliness, death anxiety, loss of autonomy, housing conflicts around vaccination

**FR09**

**Title:** Barbara is a nurse and a mother of a baby born under lockdown

**Narrative:** "I am 33 and I am a nurse. I have a partner, François, and a small baby born during the first lockdown. I now work in a nursing home outside a city in the south of France.

I was working in a small hospital at the time of the first lockdown. I was on a one-year

contract and I had just found out that I was pregnant when it started. I worked until the 7th month, when the lockdown started. At that time, there was still no sign of covid in my area. A month later, it started to appear. So I avoided that stressful moment at the beginning. When I stopped work, things went well for me. François and I lived in a small village in the countryside, so we were more or less naturally confined. There are 2,000 inhabitants in the village, so apart from shopping at the bakery and the little supermarket on the corner, we were confined. And with the pregnancy, I was a bit more careful too. When the baby was born, with the hospital health protocols, her father was allowed in during the birth but not afterwards. I felt a bit helpless, because I was on my own. I had to stay in for five days, which was a bit longer than usual because the baby lost weight. And Jean couldn't really visit me, not even for half an hour during the day. It was complicated. I felt very alone. Jean couldn't come and enjoy the first days either. Breastfeeding was a bit difficult at the beginning, I didn't really know if it was going to work or not. At the beginning, I didn't know if I could leave her for a few seconds to go to the toilet. In the beginning, you don't know at all. It would have been nice if François had been there, he would have watched her while I went to the toilet. I didn't take a shower for 3-4 days because I was afraid to leave. I had Jean on the phone, but it wasn't the same.

I breastfed the baby for 7 months, so there wasn't the expense of infant milk. I had bought cloth nappies from Vinted, so I didn't have any nappy expenses either. Now I'm no longer breastfeeding her but she's still drinking milk - it's expensive. We didn't see much of François's family after the baby's birth because we were afraid for them. We went to see his parents but we stayed in the street and they stayed on their balcony.

François was looking for work, but he received a lot of rejections. We wondered what would happen to us. That affected our morale a bit, we said to ourselves, well, what are we going to do? So I went back to work at the hospital. When I went back, my colleagues told me that it had been a horrible time, very stressful, you could feel that they had been through something. They said to me, thank God you weren't there at the time.

When I got back, they were on 12-hour shifts. Before, we were doing 8 hour shifts. The worst thing about the 12 hours was that instead of 3 nurses, we only had one nurse working all day long. We were short of nurses and the atmosphere in the team was degraded because the nurses' aides wanted to stay at 8 hours. And the manager had put us on 12 hours - all the nurses but not the aides, to avoid conflict.

It was new for us nurses to do the 12 hours. There is a day shift and a night shift. There was no longer a junction between teams. And the cadies came in at the old time because they had kept their 8 hours. We arrived afterwards and we didn't know what had happened during the night, obviously. And with the 12-hour shifts, we're not there all the time, we'll have 3 days of work and then 3 days of rest. We have to catch up on all the information we didn't get during those three days. And there was a bad atmosphere between the manager and the employees because they didn't agree, that created camps. I was happy to leave at that time because I didn't expect to find an atmosphere like that.

Things are really not back to normal and I feel that the teams were a bit broken by this, by the covid, by the health protocols, by the fact of changing to 12-hour shifts precisely during the covid. In fact, they took advantage of the circumstances to pass everyone to

12 hours. Before, there were still some areas in the hospital where people were fighting to avoid that."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I breastfed my daughter for 7 months, so I didn't have all the expenses for baby milk. I had bought cloth nappies from Vinted, so I didn't have any nappy expenses as well. Now I don't breastfeed her anymore but she still drinks milk - it's expensive. And [the father], he couldn't really visit me, even for half an hour during the day. So it was complicated. It's true that I felt very alone. All I wanted to do was to go home and experience parenthood with my father. It was really complicated. "

"When I went into the hospital, we had to wear masks, so doing the breathing exercises with the mask was complicated, in the end I took it off because I couldn't stand it anymore. I said, I can't give birth if I have the mask on my face."

"Because I was quite tired from the delivery and I was the one who had to give the bath, I was the one who... Breastfeeding was a bit difficult at the beginning, I didn't really know how it was going, if it was going to work or not."

"[The nurses] used to come to my room but they were rushing through. I think that there were cases that were a bit more serious than mine and so... It's true that I didn't dare to take up any space because I thought, if I don't say anything - I think it's the same for all patients - I'll leave the hospital more quickly."

"The nurses used to tell me that they had to go to such and such a sector because there was a lack of staff. With the protocol, we have a lot more work, we have to reduce some teams to reinforce others. I felt that it was stressful in the hospital."

"No, it's not really back to normal and I feel that the teams have been a bit broken by this, by the covid, by the health protocols, by the fact of going into 12 hours shifts precisely during the covid. In fact, they took advantage of this time to pass everyone to 12 hours shifts. There were still some sectors in the hospital where people were fighting to avoid going to 12 hours because..."

"We didn't have huge financial problems or a psychological impact. More during the [baby's] delivery, then this problem of finding work for [her partner], that was rather anxiety-provoking but that's life."

"Yes, I was vaccinated. As soon as I went back to work, I was vaccinated. That too created tension in the care team. - Did you get vaccinated? Did you? Yes. Ah, so you were vaccinated. - It was complicated."

"What changed me during that confinement I think is that... before I wasn't too bothered about being [isolated]... we didn't know too many people, we lived in our corner with [her partner]. But now I've moved , we've moved also because I missed [seeing people she knew]..."

"[Her partner]'s parents, we were a bit scared at first, we couldn't see them. It was complicated because the mother didn't want to be vaccinated and we were afraid for her, so there you go."

**Keywords:** staff shortages in hospital, birth, loneliness, financial worries, fear for parents, vaccination

FR10

**Title:** A scared woman who has to take care of her 38 year old disabled daughter

**Narrative:** "I'm 74 years old, a widow, I live with my disabled daughter, age 38, who has myopathy. I had a stroke in 2016 and breast cancer last year. I mustn't carry weights. I used to be a worker in a textile factory, then the factory closed and I got a job as a cleaning woman at the police station.

Just before lockdown, I lost my dad, I lost my mum, I lost my dog... everything was gone, we were scared, that's for sure, no family, nothing, but friends yes... We're strong, we're really strong, we've never sunk. I've had trouble crying since all that, but sometimes when my daughter wanted to cry, I'd let her cry, it would do her good, but I didn't want to, she'd make me sink.

We have a home care service. It's an association we've been with for six years. There are people who come for the night, to look after my daughter, since my stroke in 2016, then in the morning, there's a person from 8.30am to 1pm and from 2pm to 8pm. That's in the best case, because we don't always have the people we need. In the summer we go out if the weather is good, but since Covid we've been isolated, we've been very isolated... Normally, we have someone 24 hours a day, but, the day before yesterday and yesterday evening it was me who did the nights, eh, there was nobody... I've got someone tonight and tomorrow but on Friday I've still got no one and then on Saturday and Sunday I'll have someone. Not on Monday and Tuesday because one of them left without giving notice or anything...

There were already a lot of stoppages, - people not replaced, - but I've never seen stoppages like now. And it's badly managed. When they need someone urgently in another sector, they take my daughter's help since they don't have enough staff. They say, well, her mother's there, she's going to do it... - Yes, that's the big problem... it's badly managed and as soon as we say something, they threaten to drop us and tell us to look for something else. The last young girl who came, she's 19, she's as thin as my little finger. She was a waitress in a McDonald's before. That's it, they put in people who have no experience, no training, so there you go. She's all self-effacing, all embarrassed, I can't see her lifting Emilie. She was only shown the apparatus to lift people once, then they told her, well, on Saturday and Sunday you're going to do it on your own! For a disabled person, what is she going to be able to do? It's nonsense, it's putting her in danger, she's in the wrong position, and then the disabled person is put in danger too, it's a responsibility. They're told to do the tracheotomy, without training... Since Covid it's even worse because so many people have left, they haven't been replaced and they can't manage to recruit people for both day and night shifts. And between us, they only find foreigners because the French don't want to work.

At first, they didn't even talk about protective measures for covid, it was up to us to train them in this, it was up to us to provide the masks. They thought we were a nuisance because we just asked for protective measures... we were too demanding. We were afraid to have someone at home at night, so we said, well, for two months, I could do the job... We were so afraid of having someone come to our house at night, that we said they could come for 2 hours, put my daughter to bed and then leave. But they were paid in

full. Another time one girl spent a day at our place, and the next day she had Covid! We had to change everything, clean everything she had touched, get tested, have the nurse come, it's taking risks for us... But during the 2nd lockdown, they arrived in gowns, goggles, gloves, overshoes, the whole shebang, and they stayed 6 hours like that, like the Miami Experts.

We don't go out any more, like going to a restaurant, we don't feel safe. We say to ourselves that it's not going to last forever, it's going to end, but we don't dare go out too much. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "We have a home care service, we have people who come to sleep at night, we have someone to look after E., since I've had major health problems. In the morning we have someone who comes in, it's from 8.30am to 1pm and from 2pm to 8pm, that's the best thing because we don't always have the right people"; "Already a lot of stoppages, people not replaced, I've never seen stoppages like that... and then it's badly managed... So when they need someone urgently in another sector, they take it from our people and they say, well her mother is here, she'll do it... that's the big problem..."; " Since the Covid it's even worse because a lot of people have left, they haven't been replaced and they can't manage to recruit people during the day or at night. During the 2nd lockdown, they arrived with gowns, gowns, protective glasses, gloves, completely exaggerated, with overshoes, and they stayed 6 hours like that, which was a show! After 3 days they had taken everything off because the CSO had no more clothing. I took it like a punch in the face, I had the pest"; "We asked for extra hours to have pairs of people. I mustn't lift weights, but it's difficult because there's this problem of personnel. Now they put in staff that they've just hired, who don't know anything about disability, and then they're put in to do the tracheotomy, without training..."; "We had received recommendations from the French myopathy association, when you have staff, pay attention to such and such a thing. But the CSO [who provided the help], I had sent them all that, it wasn't the regional health agency that said that, for them the myopathy association didn't count, they didn't understand. As soon as we said something, they threaten to drop us and we would have to look for something else. But elsewhere it's the same, they can't recruit, and the people they recruit are not trained, don't know anything."

**Keywords:** Loneliness, fear, disability, family support, resilience

## Greece

### GR01

**Title:** Young adult and gender transitioning

**Narrative:** I am a 21 year old transgender man. I am in the process of transitioning. I always felt that I was male although I was born female. I have a twin brother and I live with my mother. My mother raised me as a girl and still calls me with my girly name. Most of the people in my family call me by my girly name, but my friends they have accepted me as a man. I have spent the first lock down in my house. It was my last year in high school and I had to study to pass the exams to enter the University, I wanted to study sociology, social policy or anthropology, but I didn't write very well in the exams. All my generation was really unlucky because we had to do online teaching both for school and for private tuition classes. It did not work for me very well. I could not concentrate. Being in the house all the time was not possible so I was going for long walks with friends who live in the same neighbourhood of Athens. We were all tired all the time and we missed bars, dancing, parties, fun in general. I passed the exams and started studying at the University in a smalltown outside Athens. I did not move there because the year I started the University, I only went there to register and a new lock down was announced by the government. All classes were online and it was very difficult it meet other students, make friends, meet the professors. It was all online. The only good thing about this was that I did not have to travel or move there which reduced the costs. However, I did not do very well during the exams. Now that the lock downs have been lifted I have rented a small room near the University and live there. It is much better for me although there were still some classes that were done online. I have met some students and know what my professors look like fully not just their faces. WE can also go out for coffee or drinks and meet in houses to watch movies, play games, drink, have parties. I am mostly interested in other LGBTQ persons and I like girls. I identify as a man but I have not transitioned fully yet. I have not done a surgery but I am taking hormones and I am hiding my breast. I think I look like a boy or a man. My female looks are gone. I have been doing psychotherapy for the past six years, ever since I told my family. My mother was socked but through therapy she has managed to understand a lot of things. In Greece, the parents are not very supportive. Also, my brother is not very supportive. My friends are very nice about it and very cool about it. It is a generational issue. In my age group if you are not a fascist, you are part of this culture even if you are not gay. I had a girlfriend when the lock downs started but she lived far away and we could not see each other often. We were not allowed to move outside the area where we live and she lived far away. Once I cycled to her place. But it was not possible to keep that relationship and so we split up. Since I started the University, my life has improved a lot. I didn't like the isolation. Especially for a person like me who has a difficult relationship with their family it was difficult to be locked inside a house with my mother and brother. I didn't really talk to them a lot and just spend a lot of time online. But we didn't have fights, we were fine with each other. It was not pleasant, but it was not difficult either. I am thinking that the greatest problem that I had was all this online teaching that made me feel really tired

and missing my friends. I am hoping that from now and on I will not have to relive lock downs again.

**Specifically telling quotes:** Covid 19 is a virus for older people. They are the ones who are mostly in danger. For younger people it is unfair to be locked inside their houses with their parents. For young children it is fine, but for teenagers and 20somethings it is unfair. We were bored and wanted to leave our houses but were locked inside like prisoners.

**Keywords:** gender transitioning, gender identity, school, university, youth, conflicts between children and parents

## GR02

**Title:** Single mother's increased workload

**Narrative:** I am a 52 year old single mother. I have two children and a dog. I am twice married. I divorced the first one after a year, and the second one died. I am a widow. My second husband was great, I was really in love with him, but got cancer and died within a period of two years. My son was 5 years old at the time and my daughter 1 year old. My son was traumatised, and I had to take him to a child psychologist. I had three difficult problems to deal with during the pandemic. First of all, my son was at his final year in school during the second year of the pandemic and he was preparing for the University. He was a very good student and wanted to study maths. However, the lock downs forced all children in Greece to do classes online and after Christmas he collapsed and told me that he did not want to study or pass the exams. I got really upset; I didn't know what to do with him. He drove me crazy, we had a lot of fights. And when you are a single mother you have to be in charge of everything, take decisions on your own and deal with the children's problems without support. My boyfriend has a good relationship with him but he could not help us. My son managed to pass to the university but in a field that he does not really like. He is not sure if he wants to study and wants to start working instead. But for me this is not an option, so I am trying to convince him to try and go to the town outside Athens where his university is. But it is a struggle and we fight all the time. He prefers to be at home, sleep all day and go out with his friends at night. The lock downs in Greece were very hard. We were not even allowed to move from one area to the other. My work had to move online. I am teaching English and I was used to be outside the house all day. The fights with my son were intense and made me want to leave the house but I was not allowed to. At the same time, the government changed the law for the entry to the Universities and made it harder, leaving many schools without students. This was a blow for us. He would have passed in a better school if it wasn't for this government that punished students who went through the lock downs. The second problem that I had was my boyfriend who has a weird attitude towards the virus. He is not afraid to catch it and he is careless. During the first year of the lockdowns we split up because of this problem. I was really scared because my daughter's health is fragile, has an

autoimmune disease. I was afraid that she would be infected. We split up after the fights and I was really depressed for a while, but then we got back together and spent the second year of the lock down together. This was helpful. I did not have serious financial problems because my classes increased during the pandemic. When teaching in schools went online, it got worse and parents sought private tuition to ensure that their children did not stay behind. But my biggest problem was that I had all these issues to deal with on my own, while I was locked inside a house without being able to leave. I had all these fights and I am not sure if it was me because of the menopause or if my son and my boyfriend are the problem. My daughter is great, we never have fights, she takes care of herself, is independent and really nice to me. But she too is caught into these fights. Family relations become too complicated when you are in house without being able to go out with friends, to have a nice time. I drink a lot and try to stay calm by doing yoga, but it is difficult. I have started one month ago to go to a psychologist because my nerves were very tense and I was unhappy. This helps me deal with disagreements with my son and boyfriend. The third problem is that we got a dog in the house. She is sweet but it is not something I wanted. It was a present for my daughter and it worked out fine during the lock downs because she would wake up and take her for a walk and then come back and start her classes online. But now that she goes to school normally, I am the one who has to take care of her and it adds to my workload. The dog needs training, but we cannot afford it. Before the lock downs, there was a lady that came to our house three times a week, cleaned, cooked and took care of the children when I was working. She was very important for us, like an aunt to the children, but I asked her to stop coming to the house when the pandemic started. The children are old enough to take care of themselves, but for me this increases the pressures because I have to cook, clean, and take care of things. Doing the work that she did is difficult. This is my life and it has worsened a lot because of Covid.

**Specifically telling quotes:** When the lady who came to our house stopped coming because of Covid I was in despair. I started asking the children to help, but they were used to having someone else doing these jobs for them. I had to do most of the work that she did and I felt tired and depressed. I think this contributed to me being irritated all the time and having fights with my son and boyfriend.

**Keywords:** single mothers, school, children, care, domestic work, conflicts between children and parents, work-life balance, motherhood

**GR03**

**Title:** Dangerous working conditions for migrant domestic workers

**Narrative:** I am from Albania but live in Greece for many years now. I was an engineer in my home country, but when the regime changed, the factory closed and I was left without a job. I had worked all my life ever since I finished the university. I had a young son at the time and so we decided with my husband to move to Greece. When we moved

here, I started working as a cleaner in houses. At first the salary was very small, but then I got good clients and loyal ones who pay me well. At first I was disappointed to work in this area, but in Greece there is no other type of job available for us Albanian women. Merdaughter in law does the same job although she was born in Greece. I have a grandson who lives with us and is in the lyceum. he is a very good student and my hope is that he will have a different life because he has Greek citizenship. I will work for the rest of my life as a cleaner in Greek houses. My husband worked in a factory in Greece, but he got asthma from the fumes and couldn't work anymore. He never got compensation or anything else. So in the house we live with my son's family, the two of us, my son, his wife and my grandson. We have a very large house in Piraeus. We bought it few years ago with all our savings, and also have a house in Albania, where we go during the summer. I will probably move there when I will no longer be able to work. I will get a pension from Albania because I pay national insurance contributions there. I also pay here in Greece for the Greek card. When Covid started, I got really scared because I was afraid that if I catch it I will pass it on to my husband who has asthma and he might suffer. I was very careful and always took care to sanitise everything, wear a mask, make sure that I am not in the same room as my employers. However, my greatest problem is that my employers are not as careful. They expect me to wear a mask and keep everything sanitised, but they do not wear a mask. The worse is one of my oldest clients, who is a 76 year old woman with health problems (cancer), who does not want to get vaccinated. Her son convinced her that it will be bad for her and so she doesn't even listen to her doctor. This is completely irrational and makes me feel really insecure. I keep telling her, because now we are friendly, that she needs to get vaccinated but she does not listen. She even organised dinners for her friends, who are the same age but vaccinated, and asked me to help her. I refused. For me being in a house with a large group of people is risky and I don't want to risk it because of my husband. If I catch it, he will too. During the pandemic, we were all in the house one day because it was the lock down and we were not allowed to move and he felt bad. We took him to hospital because he couldn't breathe. We thought that it was asthma, but it was his heart. He had a heart attack. Now we are even more careful, but my work makes it very difficult to be careful because the clients ignore us. They do not care about our health. They only protect themselves. When the lock downs started, all five of us stayed at home. My son who works in an office workers remotely, me and his wife couldn't work because we are both cleaners, my husband is unemployed and ill and my grandson was still at school doing remote work. Most of my clients did not pay me during this time, but there was one client who put money into my account regularly although I didn't go to clean in her house. Just because I was working for her and did a really good job, she thought that she should put money in my account even if I wasn't working. But she was the only one. Also, I could go and work for this client that was unvaccinated and went there once a week because she lives close by to where I live. So I would send a message "support to a person in need" and would walk to her house. But was unlucky because she was the only unvaccinated client that I have. All the others are vaccinated and their children are too. For me this was the biggest problem. It gave me a lot of anxiety because I was thinking of my husband. I didn't want to be the one who would bring Covid to him. Now that the lock downs are over, I am in more danger because clients are not careful. I also take the bus and it is

very crowded and this is another sources of anxiety for me. I regret that I never took a driver's license because we have my husband's car but we never use it because he is ill now. I usually go on holiday in August for two weeks in Albania, but last summer my husband said to me "Just leave them and let's go to meet our relatives and our friends". So, I left for two months and many of my clients were disappointed. But my husband had this operation and wanted to do it so I left the clients without cleaning. It was good for me because I relaxed, spend time with relatives in Albania. It was really nice after all this time that we were isolated in our home. I am lucky because I have a family that we support each other. I never felt that we lacked anything, although me and my son's wife were not working. My son could take care of us. Because we live in the same house, it is easier to share and we spend less money because of that. My grandson got addicted to video games and was sleeping all day and playing all night. He never went out and now that's schools started he got ill and we had to take him to hospital too. He got appendicitis and missed many days from school. He has missed a lot of classes and cannot wake up in the morning. He is a good kid but he is no longer doing well at school. I speak with one of my clients who has children of the same age and she has the same problems. But again we share a lot and we go through all this together with my daughter in law. So I took time off to take care of the kid or my husband when they were in hospital. In Albania the relationship between mother and daughter in law is very important and I am lucky to have such a nice daughter in law. And my son is great and I appreciate him even more now because he worked and supported us all during the pandemic. And he told me not to worry about the money and so I could go to Albania in the summer and have a vacation with my husband after so many years.

**Specifically telling quotes:** If you ask me what the greatest problem that I faced during lock downs was, I would reply that it was health. The health of my family and mine. Clients do not ask you about your health. They do not wear masks, they do not keep distances because I am cleaning their homes. When you are in your home, you take the mask off and it is the only place where you can do it without being afraid. But I am very careful because it is not my home. It is very difficult for me to tell them to be careful or in the case of this client that I have to get vaccinated.

**Keywords:** domestic work, cleaning, migrants, family, school, employers, health concerns, social insurance, vacation, vaccination, residence permits

**GR04**

**Title:** Migrant Domestic Workers during Covid-19

**Narrative:** I am a live-out domestic worker from the Philippines working in Greece since 2000. I am 45 years old and I came to Greece because I needed to find a job to support my family. I have a son who lives the Philippines. He is an adult now and studies. My husband raised him. I was not there for most of his childhood. At first, I was a live in in a very rich house in Athens. Only recently I have become more independent. I rent my

own apartment and clean different houses, including a former boss' house that I clean three times per week. I am glad that I was not working as a live-in during Covid-19 because the pressure was tremendous for domestic workers. They had to be there for their bosses working continuously, cleaning and sanitizing the house, taking care of the kids and many of them were not even aloud to have days off. At the same time, I am not happy with how I ended up being without work and without an income during the lock downs. There were restrictions of movement in Athens and we were allowed to move only if necessary. We had to send a message and the police was checking if this was valid. For a period of time we were not allowed to move outside the area where we live. I ended up without an income during the pandemic because most of my bosses are located in the North of Athens in rich areas. I live in the centre of the city. When I started working again after the lock downs were lifted, I was afraid that I would get the virus. I had to take the train with a friend of mine who works in the same area, but it is too crowded. Then I would go into other people's houses to clean, but they would often be there because they worked from home. I could not do the same thing. My bosses never paid me during lock downs because they pay for the service provided each time. If I do not provide the service, there is no payment. This was the greatest problem I faced during the pandemic. I got the virus in November 2021. I am not sure where I got it from, probably from the train because no one else that I had met this week had a positive test. For me this was an additional blow because I had to stop working again and it cost me a lot. I am not a rich person. I had fever and it took me two weeks before I tested negative and could go back to work. It was hard. I cannot afford that and in addition, I have to pay for my own national insurance contributions to get a residence permit. So this was a cost I had to pay, while there were lock downs, when I was ill and had no income. Covid 19 was a crisis for me and for many people like me who are in domestic work because we lost a lot and now we have to start all over again and recover what we 've lost. In Greece, there are many migrant domestic workers and nobody talks about us and what we have been through during Covid-19. We have our association KASAPI and we are in a better position than other domestic workers, we support each other, we are stronger. For us this was important during the lock downs because even when we couldn't go to work we had each other. I now feel strong again to work and regain what I lost, but I am thinking of looking for a live-in job again because the rent and electricity are very expensive. I did not have heating because it is too expensive and the residents of the block of flats that I live in decided that they could not afford the petrol to hit the place. So I use electric heaters. We have a good network and I hope I will find one soon to move in with a family and make up for the income that I lost during Covid.

**Specifically telling quotes:**

**Keywords:** domestic work, migration, income loss, social security, residence permits

**GR05**

**Title:** Disabilities during Covid

**Narrative:** My name is Emilia and I am 49 year old. I am divorced live with my son, who is 12 years old and with my partner. He has two children from him previous marriage who also live with us occasionally. One daughter who studies and one son who is in school. I live in suburb in the North of Athens and I work in an area near the port of Piraeus. I was working for many years as a substitute art teacher in primary schools, but in 2020 I got a job as a public servant doing clerical work. I have a disability in my arm from birth. I wear a prosthetic arm and only use the right one. But I am used to it and I am able to do most things with my functional arm. During the first wave of the pandemic, I was fine. I worked in schools and everything was moved online. It was extremely difficult for me to keep them concentrated because they were small children but we managed to play some games and do some art. However, many years ago I had passed an exam to become civil servant. I needed that to get a full time job with regular salary. I had passed the exam in 2015, but was recruited in 2020. I started working in my new office in September, but the job is terrible. It is very bureaucratic and it exhausts me because I have to sit in an office all day and use my arm. Because I am afraid that I will catch Covid if I use the public transport, I have to drive to the office everyday for one hour, which is very bad for my arm. When I arrive at the office, I am already too tired to use it, but I cannot rest because all my work is in front of a computer. The result is that my functional arm has began to become dysfunctional. I get cramps and it hurts a lot when I type. If it wasn't for Covid, I would use the public transport to escape this problem. But public transport is too crowded: there is a greater risk of getting the virus and also I face other issues with my hand as I cannot stand easily without the support of one arm. Apart from this problem, I did not face any extra problems compared to my friends and colleagues who do not have disabilities. I am informed that people with more severe disabilities faced a lot of difficulties during lock downs, when their carers couldn't support them properly. Lock downs were a challenge for me mostly emotionally, but I was really much happier to stay at home and work from home because I could avoid commuting which are difficult for me given my disability. I think that for people like me it makes a lot of sense to introduce remote work programs permanently, not just during lock downs. It helped me a lot not only in terms of avoiding to put pressure on my functional arm, but also in terms of taking care of the children who tended to spend a lot more time at home because of the lock downs. For example, I could not cook or help my son with his homework when I returned at home tired and with my arm hurting from a day's work and one hour of additional driving. What people fail to understand is that for people with disabilities it is much more difficult to do everyday things because it takes twice the time needed and it is much more painful. Because my disability is not a severe one, at work they tend to think that I am complaining too much. So in fact the quarantine was for me a positive experience in a sense because it showed me that working remotely might be better for me. I actually become more productive when my hand is not tired. My partner and his children got the virus but self-isolated and I and my son did not get it. I am vaccinated and I really believe that vaccination protects us from getting seriously ill so I am not worried about getting the virus now as I did in the past, but still avoid overcrowding. I have a colleague at work who doesn't care and brings her mask down all the time. This drives me crazy as it is really irresponsible. I have applied now for a

transfer because of my disability but I have not yet received a response. I think that if I transfer to an office which is closer at home, I would be able to be more productive and also be calmer and happier with my life. Also from my perspective working remotely at least 2-3 days a week on a permanent basis would have solved my problem. The Greek authorities are not very sensitive, however, and I am afraid that this might continue for a long time. My problem is more long-term as you can see and it does not really have to do with gender apart from the fact that I have to care for others and this makes my day longer and increases the tiredness of my arm. But I guess this is a problem that all women with children have -the double burden-. At least I am lucky because my partner cooks, cleans, takes care of children. He is very nice and unlike many Greek men of his age. He understands that I have a disability and supports me whenever I need it. My ex-husband was the opposite and this was one of the reasons why we divorced. He considered me as a typical working woman and he did not do any housework because in his mind it was my responsibility only. I was glad to get a divorce. Covid 19 I think has made us all think of what we can and cannot do. It has shown us our limits and our weaknesses. Disability increases the weaknesses of women who care for others.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I am disabled but it is only to a limited extent. My superiors at work do not realise that this is an issue that they should take into consideration. While I appreciate that I am not treated as a vulnerable person, I find it really unfair that they do not take into account the specificities of my condition. If we were in another European country, I would have had a much better treatment

**Keywords:** disabilities, commuting to work, remote work, care, work-life balance

**GR06**

**Title:** Energy precarity during the pandemic

**Narrative:** I am a student, currently living in Thessaloniki. I come from a small village in the North of Greece from an agricultural family. My parents have a farm. They have experienced many blows with the crops during the pandemic because of the bad weather (snow, ice, rain). I am extremely worried because I think that climate change would change everything. I was worried about this issue before the pandemic, but now it has become more and more important. I am part of a group in my University that deals with environmental issues. We are mostly women in this group, students in science. We are a very small group. Most students do not care about the environment, they care about politics and gender based violence. My interest in the environment started when we had a presentation about climate change at school from a teacher that was really good explaining us these issues. I then joined a group he created at school. This made me think of my life in a different way. I started to recycle, use the bicycle to commute and avoid plastic straws. I am not sure how the pandemic is linked to climate change, but there were some positive things that I experienced during lockdowns. I am staying in an apartment with my flatmate and we realised that the cars stopped moving and there was

no more noise and pollution. For me using a bicycle is much better because I exercise too, but for most people it only takes a pandemic to stop using their car. At the same time, however, the increase in extreme temperatures is a result of climate change that is much more important than the pandemic. We do not use central heating in my apartment because we cannot afford it, and this is also in a sense about climate change. Being cold is something that I don't like and it was worse when we had to stay in the house all day because of the lock downs. In my opinion, women are more sensitive to environmental issues and are more aware of how climate change can affect our everyday lives. Most of the students in my group are women. I have two brothers and they are both living in Thessaloniki. At first when I arrived here, my older brother asked me to go and live with him. And I did. Because he was following my father's behaviour he was very controlling and wouldn't let me leave the house easily. He wanted to make sure that I was safe, he told me. But it was oppressive. In January 2020, just when the pandemic started, I managed to leave his house and find an apartment with my friend and this saved my life because if I had to share a house with my brother, I would feel trapped. My brother is very judgmental. However, it is very difficult for my parents to support me so I work in a coffee shop to get money for my rent. I am not vaccinated and this causes a lot of problems in my university and at work because I have to get a negative test each time I go there in order to get in the lecture rooms or to get to work. Also my brother is pushing me to get vaccinated. He thinks I am stupid. I don't believe in a vaccine that has not been tested for many years, I also don't like the fact that it is compulsory. I believe in eating well, exercising, taking vitamins and being outdoors. I also do yoga and I want to get a license to teach yoga to get an extra income because my parents are struggling. I study to get a license in Iyengar yoga. Most of the people in the studio where I go are unvaccinated. Maybe the vaccine is helpful for older people, but why should I do it? During the first months of the lock downs, I've spent a lot of time reading about environmental issues and now I think I am not too bad on this topic. I want to do a postgraduate course on these issues too. I think we should be closer to nature as women. I believe that our bodies are made for this as our menstrual cycles follow the earth. I am worried about climate change though, which affects also women and our bodies. What we put in our bodies is important and it all derives from the earth.

**Specifically telling quotes:**

**Keywords:** agriculture, university, environmental movements, wellness, anti-vaccine, climate change

**GR07**

**Title:** LGBTQ community support during lock downs

**Narrative:** During the pandemic I became very aware of how important my LGBTQ friends and community are for me and my life. I live with my girlfriend and we have a two year old son who couldn't go to day care centre. I worked from home because I am

teaching English, but I could not take care of the two year old when I was teaching. My partner is working in a coffee shop. When it was closed because of the lock downs she was taking care of our daughter, but when they opened again and day care centres were still closed, it was very difficult for us. We received a lot of help from friends from the lesbian community. One friend who lives close by would come and take her for walks with the stroller while I was working. When my partner got tired she would meet with friends in house which we were not allowed to travel to because it was far away from where we live. She would send a message that she was commuting to provide help to someone in need and would go to our friends' house to spend some time there with our daughter. It was illegal but these meeting made it easier to go through the pandemic. Once she was stopped by the police and said that she was going to her mother to help her because she was old. She had a baby in the car so they did not question her and did not give her a fine, because if you were travelling unnecessarily outside your area you got a fine. She could not say that this was because she was going to a friend's house for her own psychological health because such relations that are not blood relations are not recognised by the Greek police. I think that cis people do not have this sense of community that we do. I am saying this because I have lived both ways. I am 42 years old and I was not always a lesbian. From 15 to 34, I was with men and it was only when I met my current partner that I switched to being a lesbian. My family never approved of my partner and so we are not in good terms. Now that they have a granddaughter, they might saw some interest, but because they are old, we did not meet at all during the lock downs. They were afraid and were locked inside their home. They have each other but no one else. They are two old people alone. I have a brother who lives in the UK. Because I became a lesbian quite late, I did not know many people from the community, but my partner did. She was very much part of it because she was clear about her sexuality from an early age. So, I came to know many wonderful people through her and I feel really blessed for it. Especially during the pandemic when we were all alone, having this sense of community, that someone would help you if you need it was really important. I got infected by the virus one day after the first lock down, I am not sure it was Covid because it was not possible to get a test at the time. I was calling EODI (the government health protection agency) all day but all the lines were blocked. At the time, the government announced that to get tested you needed you have an approval from EODI. So I was locked inside my room, while my partner slept on the floor in the baby's room. She would bring me food, medicine and drinks and leave them outside the door. It was not very hard, but I felt fatigue for several months afterwards. Our friends again helped us a lot, bringing groceries and medicine when we needed them. If it wasn't for them I don't know what we would have done. My parents are very judgmental of my change so I do not want to ask them for favours. Also they are very old and couldn't help us a lot. They only called me once when they found out from my brother that I was ill to tell me to get well. But it is a very formal relation. The measures that the government took were only about the physical aspect of Covid, i.e. not to get the virus, but there was no consideration for community and psychology. Many of my students who are in their teens felt depressed. I could see it when I was talking to them online. They were feeling isolated from their friends, and their families didn't do anything to help them. Some of them just gave up on studying and only wanted to go out. My daughter who is still very

young was not as affected by Covid as teenagers were. But again, not being able to go to the playground and meet with other children was a problem. We were lucky to have a community around us so we wouldn't become insane. For me the psychological aspect of the pandemic was more important than the physical maybe because I got it early on and went through it. I have seen many people who became depressed: teenagers and older people, like my parents. They wouldn't admit that they are depressed because this is a about for their age group but they were and there was no one there to help them, no community, no nothing.

**Specifically telling quotes:** My friends would come everyday when I was ill, bringing cooked food, medicines and other supplies that we needed. One of them would even put a little card with a drawing in the pack that she would bring to us as a present. I felt safe being in this circle where I could be protected and protect others, when I would get better of course. I did the same when one of them became ill. And we didn't even have to ask. When they found out, they would organise and take turns to come everyday in our house. My partner was expecting it from them, because they knew that she had to take care of our daughter and also me and she was afraid that she would also become ill. These are the things that matter. So it was definitely a relief to be part of a community, which is in my experience much better than a family.

**Keywords:** LGBTQ, care, community support, family, children, work-life balance, conflicts between parents and children

**GR08**

**Title:** Orthodox Religion and Gender

**Narrative:** I am 30 years old teaching religion in a Greek high school. I am very religious and very close to the Church in the area where I live in a suburb of Athens. I live in the same building as my mother and I take care of my mother who is 75 years old and has cancer. My sister also lives in the same building. She is doing chemotherapy right now but all her life she took care of us. She was a single mother because our father left us and she was working as a cook in a kindergarten for many years until she got her pension. She is still cooking for us. I have not been married yet but I want to and I also want to have children. But so far my relationships did not go very well in that direction. Men in Greece do not want to commit and have children because of the economic crisis. I was with my ex boyfriend for four years and we split up because he did not want to get married and have children. He did not have a lot of money and did not want to spend the rest of his life poor. He felt that if he had children he would be poor, but from my perspective you become rich when you have children. I am very religious. I go to Church every Sunday and also try to teach children about religion in a way that is modern. I do not preach, I just tell them the basics so they know and then they can decide for themselves. Many people, young people turn to religion now in Greece. My mother was not religious, and I have found religion on my own. I wanted to pass to the school of

literature but I did not make it and went to the religious school of the University of Athens instead. That is where I learnt more about it. During the pandemic, I had a lot of problems because the government was not very supportive of the Church. At first they closed the Churches and it was very difficult for us who are Christians to get in touch with our communities. We couldn't even go to Church on Easter. I live near a Church and I could hear the chants, but couldn't go there to light a candle. Then the Churches opened but with limitations that are not good for the Church. I know many people talk against sharing a teaspoon to get the communion, but for me this is not an issue because it is the blood of Christ. We even have scientists who said so in the scientific committee for Covid. I am against vaccination for religious reasons. In my congregation, the priest does not talk about it and most people are vaccinated, but I read online and I don't agree with compulsory vaccinations. I do not want to judge people but this is a poison that they put into their bodies. This is another reason I split with my boyfriend. We split during the summer of 2021. We were on vacation and we were always fighting about vaccinations and children and family. He was religious but not with the Church. For me not being vaccinated makes my life very complicated because I have to do testing for everything. Even to go to a shop, you need a certificate of vaccination or test that you are not Covid positive. The same if you want to go to work or the Church, although this is not actually implemented. One of the problems I faced during the lockdowns was protecting myself and my mother who has cancer from getting infected. We had to be careful, although I believe that God protected us. Now I am going to school and I am afraid that I will catch it from one of my students and bring it back to my mother. It makes me anxious but getting vaccinated is not the answer. During the pandemic I had to cook, take my mother to hospitals and doctors for her treatment, clean her house and be with her whenever she needed me. My sister did the same and we were together in this. For me giving to the elderly is a rich experience and by giving to her I give back things to myself, I become richer by taking care of my mother. It is not at all a burden for me. This is what daughters are for. I do not think that men and women are unequal and that there are gender inequalities. I think that men and women are different and we should respect those differences. I believe that women should work but also have the time to care about the children more than men. I don't think that care should be shared between men and women. I am not a feminist. But I think it is terrible that we hear now in Greece about rapes and biting and femicides. It is all over the news. I think during the pandemic people got depressed and angry and this led them to turn against their wives. I did not grow up with a father so for me this is not something I have experienced. And with my boyfriends it was the same, we did not live in the same house. I am against violence as a Christian.

**Specifically telling quotes:** Vaccination is against our principles as Christians. We do not believe that vaccines would save us, we believe that we will be saved by our faith.

**Keywords:** religion, family, motherhood, care, elderly, vaccination

**GR09**

**Title:** Loneliness and isolation of older women

**Narrative:** I am 78 years old, I have a son who is in his late 40s, who lives with his wife and his son. I also have a granddaughter who studies Art in the Netherlands. I meet my son once a week now that we are allowed to move freely in the city. But during the previous lock downs when we were not allowed to move outside our area, I spent most of my time alone in my house. I do not have a financial problem and I could hire someone to stay with me to take care of the house but I do not like strangers in my house. My husband died in 2019 just before the start of the pandemic. He was ill for tow years, in bed and I had to take care of him. I got really tired because of that. There was a woman who was coming in the house to help, but I got really tired. I was tired before that during all our years to gather because he always wanted me to do what he wanted. He was not a bad person but I had to follow him other wise he got angry. I worked only part time for short periods of time but overall I was at home. It was not a problem at the time. Many of my friends did the same. It was his second marriage and had two older sons from a previous marriage. I had treated them as my own children but when he died they turned against me for the inheritance. They wanted more and wanted to sell the house where I live so they could get more money. I stopped talking to them and now I feel really disappointed because I treated them as my own children but they treated me as a strange women who was with their father. I never see them anymore although when my husband was alive we used to see them once a week. I love my two grandchildren especially my granddaughter who has the same name. There were two problems with Covid. First I became very lonely and couldn't meet my friends often, couldn't go to the cinema, theatre or exercise. These were activities that kept me going. I feel lonelier now. I tried you walk everyday in the neighbourhood but most of my friends are not there. It is not the same. I got really depressed at some point. The second problem was the examinations about my health. I had to postpone most of them because hospitals did not offer these services. This was at the beginning and also now (January 2022) because there are many Covid cases and deaths. My doctors advised me to go to private centres to do the examinations for my health otherwise I would have to wait for a moth. I am a bit worried that I might get ill because of my age and I will not find out early enough to get treatment. Third, One of the problems I faced during Covid was that I stopped taking vacations. I spend most of the time in the city because I do not want to go into the means of transport where a lot of people gather, like ships, coaches or trains. I only go outside the city with a car. The first summer after the pandemic I took a boat with my son, his wife and my grandson to go to the island where I am from. It was horrible. The ship was packed and although we were sitting outside, I was too afraid. A t my age, I am in a high risk group. I am fit and thin, but I smoke and my lungs are fragile so I am high risk. I cannot go there again and I am already in panicky because my brothers' daughter is getting married in the summer on the island. I am not sure if I should go. This fear is very difficult for us older women who are alone. If my husband was here, I would see it differently. Or if I could meet more often with my friends.

**Specifically telling quotes:**

**Keywords:** elderly, family, care, health concerns, means of transport, vacation, medical issues

**GR10**

**Title:** Gender equality and gender care

**Narrative:** I am 65 years old. I am a retired nurse. I am very active in labour unionism and I continue to support the actions of labour unions of healthcare workers in Greece. We have been hit severely by the economic crisis. The sector is understaffed. It was understaffed before the pandemic but now the situation has become explosive. There are no occupational doctors to check the health of nurses. They are under a lot of stress and exhausted physically after so many years fighting against Covid. Our society should react, should protest. It is not right to cheer and clap for medical staff and then do nothing about the over exhaustion of healthcare workers who have no government support. And this is a feminist issue because most of the nurses we are women. I am a feminist and have been in feminist groups since the 1980s. For me this is very important to be active and follow a cause. I have spent most of the pandemic dealing with the labour issues of nurses, trying to support and spread the word. But also, I have been very active in the me too movement, since it has started. For me gender based violence is equally important to the virus. The me too movement has brought this into the news, the TV channels and the newspapers. But for as a feminist this was always there in the darkness. I have been to all demonstrations about this and I feel that I get strength from this. Women in Greece are oppressed and many of them are victims of violence. I am divorced and I have not been a victim of violence but I feel that I have to struggle for all the other women. I have been also in demonstrations outside courts that were dealing with cases of GBV during the pandemic. For me this did not stop because of the virus. I kept going. I am vaccinated, I was wearing my mask and I did something I believe in. For me it is not important to go to the bouzoukia (Greek traditional music) or to eat in a restaurant. For me this is important, it is what kept me going and I never felt lonely during lockdowns because of these feminist causes: the nurses and gender based violence. I have also two cats that keep me company. I do not need men. I am divorced for many years. I have to say that the virus worried me mostly because I was thinking about the women who work in hospitals and about the women who were locked inside houses with violent husbands, fathers, or boyfriends. This is what worried me and I felt that I had to do something about it. Feminism is about care and about violence. Both are important. During the pandemic, I had spent some weeks when I didn't leave the house at all. I was inside the house online most of the time, having meetings with the groups I am working with. This was important because I am that kind of person, I feel stronger when I struggle about causes I believe in. I think it is not the same if you care more about your family. But I do not have children and my cats are not something to worry about. I feel old and at the same time young because although there were lockdowns, I feel like I managed to keep doing what makes me active. I think that feminism has gained a lot during the pandemic. We have gained strength because we kept struggling to get things right.

Younger women have joined to struggle and we are now a lot. We do not always agree older and younger feminists but we are together and this is what matters. So I think overall although the pandemic was a very dark moment for women and women's freedom, it was also for Greece at least an important moment because feminists have gained strength.

**Specifically telling quotes:** Feminists in Greece are today stronger than ever. On the 8th of March we are expecting large crowds of women to make a big march in Athens and in other cities. This wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for the me-too and the awareness that it brought about violence against women. Survivors came out and spoke about it and now it is much harder for the system to ignore us.

**Keywords:** feminism, healthcare workers, labour unionism, gender-based violence, metoo



## Croatia

HR01

**Title:** LATE DIAGNOSIS

**Narrative:** "To sum it up, my name is Luna, I am 69, retired after working as a librarian with an MA degree, fighting cancer, and recently married. As you know how miserable the pensions in Croatia are, I can tell you that mine is 3500 KN (475 EUR), and I could hardly survive if I were living alone. Especially now, with this devastating diagnosis. Even both our pensions do not cover all the expenses. The house is quite big, we have 5 pets, and, as we live in a village near Zagreb, we are lost without a car. We nurture it like a baby - it is 20 years old and needs regular visits to the mechanic. We now buy less expensive food, and also grow our own vegetables.

When I think of Covid 19, I have mixed feelings. Without the pandemic, I would perhaps not know what health issues my body is hiding, but on the other hand, the pandemic makes my healing quite difficult and challenging. My problems started several months before the pandemic - high temperature, fever, but showers and medicine did not help. My partner called an ambulance, and I had to stay in the hospital overnight. In the morning, as I felt better, they sent me home without any diagnosis. And then a similar situation happened almost every month - me with a fever, hospital, laboratory, back home. I remember once, the night after the earthquake (March 22, 2020), I was taken by an ambulance to the hospital as my temperature would not go down again. The situation was chaotic - half of the hospital in ruins, people running around. The gynaecologist did not have proper gloves and space to perform a regular check-up. But, in the end, they helped me reduce my temperature and feel less feverish. However, there was no diagnosis again, which was quite logical as they had to deal with the consequences of the devastating earthquake. First rumours about some virus could be heard, but I did not understand what they were talking about.

And then the pandemic arrived in its full capacity. When I called my doctor, a general practitioner, she told me not to come to her office, as, due to the pandemic, she does not admit patients. She also told me to go and get vaccinated. I went to the place where they organized vaccinations in tents. As there were many people there, I walked around the courtyard, I spotted on one door sign Roentgenology. I knocked, and asked the guy if I could have an X-ray of my lungs. Why I did that, even today I do not know. And, luckily, he agreed. He told me that he detected a shadow on my lungs. When I called my general practitioner again, she told me that I could have a CT scan in three months. Exhausted, without knowing what to do, I finally remembered that my good acquaintance works at one of the hospitals. I called her, and she immediately invited me to come. She organized a CT scan the same day. When she came back with the scans, I knew something was very wrong. She told me I have cancer in my abdomen. She immediately redirected me to a specialist. This oncologist was the best doctor I have ever met. Kind, explaining every detail, and full of empathy. Unfortunately, two months ago he moved to Denmark as many doctors and nurses had done before him. Finally, I knew that I have

colorectal cancer with metastasis on lungs and liver. I could not open my mouth and produce a sound for three full days. Empty, motionless, shocked.

Then my therapy started. The first time I have received chemotherapy, I stayed three days in the hospital. Covid 19 was widespread, and half of the hospital was organized as a so-called Covid unit. We have been separated in a small wing, but could hear patients scream and call for help. The first night, also, two cancer patients I shared the room with, died. Today, I don't know how many chemotherapies were administered into my body, and do not know how many more I need to take.

Transport to and from the hospital is a huge problem. We only have one bus line which takes us to the first tram station, and then I need to change to another tram, and then again take the bus to the hospital - at least one and a half hour. And I hardly have the energy to survive a ride in a car. There is no organized transport for cancer patients. NGO You are not Alone - Ride with us secures transport to and from chemotherapy for women, but not for other medical exams. They collect money from private donations, and not from the state or local government. My partner drives me to the hospital in his old car. But, only to the hospital. I often feel like I am a prisoner. Thanks for offering to take me to the pharmacy to collect my diapers - I am entitled to a hundred diapers each month through my health coverage - and then we can have a decent coffee. My partner cooks, makes sure I take my medicine on time, but I see that he is quite nervous. He sometimes shouts for almost no reason. But I am grateful for his support. I only feel sad sometimes. That's life, my mother would say. I long to see the sea, I would give anything to go to my island of Vis, but I am stuck here. Hope enables me to live through the day. And, day by day...maybe one day I will be my old self again.

**Specifically telling quotes:** If I have not remembered that I have an acquaintance who is a doctor, I might have still not have proper diagnosis and treatment. What about people who don't know anyone. I took two vaccines and a booster, and then also influenza vaccine, as my immune system is non-existent. I can hardly sit, and how could I travel for an hour and a half or more to get to the hospital. I am sad. He helps me, of course, but he shouts for almost no reason sometimes.

**Keywords:** cancer, diagnosis, treatment, sadness, transport, care

**HR02**

**Title:** Escape from hell

**Narrative:** "I am Mira, soon turning 49, and ending a love story in a safe house. For the first time, I may say after ages, I am feeling optimistic and looking forward to new challenges. I have two children, one already married with a small child, and the second one finishing secondary school. I worked sporadically, and at the moment am not employed, but one of the women I share this shelter with told me about a mobile company that is looking for new employees. I sent my application, and in five days the training starts. So, soon I will have a job and a salary. I don't plan to return to my former

abusive home. I have been living with my husband on a farm in a small village. After leaving the safe house, police will escort me there, I will collect my personal belongings, but then go to court to get compensated for all the things I am entitled to after 27 years of marriage.

Only now, after three months of sessions with a psychologist and discussions with other women, I am realizing how stupid I was, and what hell of a relationship I lived through. It will take time for me to forgive myself, gain self-respect and confidence to start life on my own. He was the love of my life as I knew him from childhood. We married young, and I was the happiest creature in the world. I did not care about his family who objected to our marriage as I was Orthodox and a member of the Serb minority. I was not permitted to enter their house on our wedding day or any other day before his father died. However, we moved to another place and I realized how they despised me only on weekends when we visited our home place. I had to stay with my parents, and he would stay with his family. Absurd, but at that time I did not mind it as I thought that our love is stronger than anything.

Alas, how wrong I was. Very soon he started to show no interest in me. He started drinking, going out without me, and only later I realized he spent time with other women too. He had to retire young from the military service, and, after his father's death, we moved to his home as his mother was old and ill. I forgot all the bad words and attitude she expressed towards me, and became her nurse - changing diapers, preparing meals, washing her became my reality. She died after one year.

His drinking became heavier, and during the pandemic he had to swallow at least one bottle of brandy per day. He became aggressive, started to humiliate me, deprive me of money, call me a Serbian whore...it was awful, but I continued to work in the garden, perform all the house work, support the daughters. Especially terrible were situations when he would start shouting and throwing things while my daughter had online education. She would then apologize to the professor and classmates and had to disconnect. However, last year things became unbearable, and I started to call the police. Three times they would take him to prison, then to a judge, who sentenced him to 15 days of imprisonment. And then he would return even more aggressive, and ready to attack me. Finally, the fourth time, in November, he opposed arrest, and had to be brutally overpowered. He was sentenced to 15 days of prison for attacking me, and 65 days for obstructing arrest and fighting the police. It's a little bit sad that violence against me is less worthy than disrespect towards police officers. Still, I am grateful, they saved me. When I went to the social welfare centre, they advised me to go to a safe house where they have enough space to apply the pandemic measures. My younger daughter is a good student, and plans to enrol in the university, but now has to calm herself and concentrate on learning. He is in jail, and she can now focus on her studies. She is 18, and did not want to come to the safe house. Her friends and my brother's family help her. I am finally finding support and motivation for starting a new life. My daughters visit me regularly as I am in a big city and nobody in our village knows the address. I will initiate the divorce and start court proceedings to claim compensation for my investments during the marriage. New life is smiling on the horizon.

**Specifically telling quotes:** His parents hated me and I was not permitted to enter their

house, not even at the wedding day. Only now, after talking to the psychologist at the Safe house I understand what I went through - economic, psychological violence I was not aware of. Slowly, I am gaining self-confidence. It is a process. I know I am not going back. At court I will demand to be compensated. I don't think of him anymore - he does not exist for me.

**Keywords:** violence, insecurity, hard unpaid work at home and on the farm, awareness, decision, new life

### HR03

**Title:** I miss my language and the smells of my hometown

**Narrative:** "I am Jahan, 15 years old, an asylum seeker, now living with my mother and younger sister in Croatia. I don't know how to describe the horror we have lived through since fleeing our home and country. I am trying to forget it, but sometimes it is impossible not to shiver.

I was forced to leave. If I did not go with my mother, I would have had to live with my father and that would have been impossible. He is an animal; I don't know how else to describe him. He is religious, very religious. When we started our journey, I thought it would be easy. We just cross the border and are living in peace. How wrong I was. But, when you are 12, you don't know much about the world and rules. I learned very quickly. When we came to Turkey, I started to understand that it was not going to be a happy adventure. We could not go anywhere as we had to throw our documents. Otherwise, the Turks would return us to our country. When we crossed the border to Greece, I injured my leg. It was an open wound, and it hurt terribly. It did not heal for almost two months. Fear was our only companion. We crossed the border in a group, but then separated, and continued to walk alone. We stayed for a few days in some small dirty hotels, and then would continue. Only in Bosnia did they catch us once and return us to Montenegro. The second time we succeeded. We found the camp where all the refugees were put together. It was a camp of horror. Thousands of refugees, dirty, wandering helplessly, hungry and lost. A lot of Afghans were there. We can understand their language, but we have not communicated with others often. I was a translator as I was the only one who spoke English. Food that was offered to us was horrible. From time to time the IMO people were there, and from time to time the Red Cross would bring us some food. The pandemic was blossoming. We were not offered vaccination, and many people got infected. Luckily, not us. From time to time, we tried to cross the border and reach Croatia. People in the camp called this crossing The Game, although it was everything but a pastime. Twenty-two times they stopped us and returned us back. Police in Croatia looked scary - they were all very tall men, wearing masks, dressed in black, with dangerous weapons in their hands. They were brutal. They did not talk to us, but just pushed us back to Bosnia. Once one policeman tried to hit me, but my mother protected me. They thought I was older. They were only beating males.

Finally, twenty third time we got lucky. We met a Croatian guy, and he really wanted to

help us. He took us to an empty house and told us not to go out, and he started to call journalists. He knew it was the only way we may get permission to stay. You saw what it looked like on television. We entered a police station, each of us holding a paper on which it was written "I want to get the status of asylum seeker". It took hours for them to get instructions, and, in the end, they escorted us to the hotel Porin. Two female journalists were following the police car, and waited until the door of the hotels closed behind us. We still communicate with them and became friends. After 10 days of quarantine, and then vaccination, we were allowed to go out. We just needed to be back before 11 pm. Exhausted, desperate, but we knew that our journey is coming to an end. We stayed there seven or eight months, got the status of asylum seekers, and then were resettled to the apartment in which we are staying now. My sister and I were tested in the nearby school, and now I am a student of the seventh, and she of the second grade of primary school. On our almost three-year-long journey, we lost a lot of school hours. At the Croatian school, we were entitled to 75 hours of language courses, but continued to learn it with one NGO. The Croatian teacher comes to school in the morning, but now has Covid-19. I am excellent in maths, physics and English, but the rest remains a problem because of the language. We will see how I will pass exams. When we had someone infected, we had online education, and it was nothing. I had a bad Internet connection, did not understand much. I prefer being in the class and able to see the teachers. I plan to study robotics. I also train volleyball in one club. Luckily, here religious education is not mandatory. I am not religious. I was fed up with it in my country. Schoolmates are childish, they just want to have fun and play games. But they do not discriminate me.

I miss my language the most, education in my language. We will stay here and hope to overcome all obstacles."

**Specifically telling quotes:** I followed my mother expecting exciting adventure. We were hiding, walking only during nights. We climbed mountains, we crossed fields, wandered through woods. Horror, horror, horror

**Keywords:** hiding, terrified, tired, lost, at peace, new life, plans

**HR04**

**Title:** Only man in a safe house

**Narrative:** "I am Branko, 66, retired, divorced, with a son who is 38 years old, and at the moment living in a safe house. We divorced in 2020, at her request, but had to continue sharing our small appartement of approximately 40 square meters. Selling it would not enable us to buy two smaller flats. As our son continued to live with us, we even shared the same bedroom. I don't know why, but she started to hate me several years ago. She influenced our son, who depends financially on, once our, and now only her support, and he stopped communicating with me completely. My son is entirely attached to his mother. He does not have any friends and just follows her everywhere. Whatever I tried,

it was useless. She would call me terrible names, humiliate me in front of anyone, show how she despises me. It was obvious that both of them wanted to get rid of me. Several months after divorce, I received an official letter that stated I needed to leave the appartement in ten days. From the court decision, I learned that she donated our appartement to our son without informing me. I could not believe it. At first, we had a very small appartement of 27 square meters, and when she started to work in the local government office, we changed it for a bigger one. She arranged the papers and registered it in her name. I did not mind it as we shared everything, all expenses. In my family we were always saying "our car, our house, our...whatever". My pension is 3000 kuna (400 EUR), but I have two bank loans, 1400 Kn (189 EUR) per month, one for her debit card expenses and the second one for some repairs. Immediately, following my sister's advice, I found a lawyer and he filed a complaint and presented papers that proved I should be recognised as a co-owner. Last year the court accepted my complaint, and decided that the previous transfer must be annulled as I am entitled to the half of the property. Now I am going to insist on selling it, and will demand half of the money.

I am a war veteran, but my firm was shuttered while I was on the battlefield. When I returned, I found a job with a private employer - I am a merchant with a secondary school diploma. It meant less money and more work. But I provided food and paid the majority of bills. I took care of my ill father, and when he died in 2010, I shared the inheritance with my sister. I bought new furniture and stuff for the kitchen, and the rest of the money - 5000 EUR I put in a box where I have always left cash. Soon I found out that it was gone. Both my ex-wife and son denied taking it. I quietly headed towards the door of the room realizing that they will not tell me the truth. He pushed me from the back and I fell. I just stood up and left. I did not report it. It was the first time he attacked me. In 2019, he hit me again, and then she called the police, but when they came, they just said that we were arguing and the son stood between us. I asked them to forget everything, stupid me.

After the divorce, during 2021, in the midst of the pandemic, the situation became horrible. They could not believe that they did not succeed in throwing me out of the apartment. I have always been a quiet, non-confrontational person, and they thought I would be easy prey. Sorry for the crying, but I still don't understand their cruelty. I tried to be invisible - never to be in their way. And I was raised to always think "what will the other people say". Not smart, but that's who I am. Soon they started to turn off the heating before leaving for work. I did not protest. But one morning the police arrived. They said that my ex-wife came to the police station and reported that I am psychologically torturing her. They soon left. However, it seems that she continued reporting violence, and one early morning the police came and took me to the station. I called my lawyer as I did not understand what was going on. I could not repeat what she said to them - that I am threatening both of them, trying to throw them out of the appartement... The final scene occurred in January this year. I was in my room when they came home. She shouted at me and demanded to give her back the key for heating. I was in a shock, as they were taking it with them to leave me in cold. He immediately threw me on the floor, started hitting me in my kidneys, and shouted I will kill you. He threw me on the bed, punched me and my nose started bleeding. Then he started choking me. I thought it

was the end. I tried to scream, but nobody could hear me. Again, the police came. They called them. The police took me and put me into jail. Fortunately, in the end, I spoke with an intelligent inspector, and he could not believe it when he heard my story. He decided to report both of them. I knew that this is the end. They escorted me to the apartment, I packed my life into 5 bags, and found private accommodation. In five days, I spoke with the organization that deals with domestic violence, the centre for social welfare, and finally, after five days was escorted to a safe house. Here I feel safe. And now I need to find a new place for living. I will probably go to the town where my sisters lives, and will end my days living in peace with the world.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I just cry all the time. How did I deserve it? Why? I am a quite man, never opposing anyone, trying to live a peaceful life. I have only my sister who loves me. But she has her family, a grand child too. Women in the safe house help me, support me, comfort me. I have to find strength to carry on.

**Keywords:** domestic violence, abuse, poverty, safe house, uncertain future

**HR05**

**Title:** Obstacles need to be overcome

**Narrative:** "My name is Maja. I am 22, studying social work at the Faculty of Law, third year. I am diagnosed with atypical spinal muscular atrophy, a very rare type which only affects a few persons in the whole world. However, it does not define me as a person. I was diagnosed at the age of sixteen, but first signs were visible when I started to learn to walk as a small child. As I could still execute many actions, they were not sure what disease actually attacked my body. Now I am in a wheelchair, but that does not prevent me from studying and doing hundreds of different things. I am living with my parents and a younger brother. He is only five.

After graduating from the secondary school, I was not sure whether I should study psychology or social work, and in the end picked the latter. I do not regret it. We have a lot of practical training education. It starts after the fourth semester. First, I was in an NGO that is focused on child adoption - they prepare parents who want to adopt a child and help them after the adoption is completed. Last year, I was at the Clinical Hospital Centre and spent time in the Department of Gerontology learning how the care of elderly should be performed. My grandmother is 84 and staying at a home for the elderly, so I know that they need help and special care.

I have a personal assistant four hours a day. For the last two years decision-makers are promising to pass the act on personal assistants, but we are still waiting. They do not have regulated status. Predominantly, they are students who are paid per hour. It costs less because of the lower taxes. I also have an assistant who stays with me at the faculty and helps me during lectures. She is paid by my faculty. I was without an assistant during the lockdown, as nobody knew much about the virus and how dangerous it is. During that period, I lost track of my studies, but succeeded in catching up later.

Now, I still only attend online lectures, while seminars and exams are organized face-to-face. They passed regulations that only students with Covid pass or a negative test might attend lectures. However, for many students regular testing was too expensive, and the faculty arranged for them online education again. Although I am vaccinated, I joined. Especially during winter, it was a horror to sit in a room with all the windows open. Freezing. Last winter, I caught a devastating cold. Also, as I need to book a transport two days in advance, it happened several times that my lectures were cancelled, and I had to wait two hours for my ride back home.

Now my laptop is my university. I do not like it. I prefer mingling with people, having coffee, discussing things, sometimes just gossiping, to sitting in front of a screen alone. This is not how studying should look like. I wake up, have a tea, comb my hair, and turn on the camera. Many don't listen and just exchange messages. Chat is what prevails. Some professors are boring, some make lecturing more interesting. I am different. I like to study and enjoy it. However, this way of attending lectures will influence the level of my knowledge. It is a pity. Sometimes it is funny - professors forget that we are at home, start walking, and we do not hear them anymore. At the moment, I am involved in the project that targets students with disabilities. The professor plans to research consequences of the pandemic, especially those related to studying. We have just started to discuss it. Even a draft of the research is not finalized.

I got corona, don't know anymore which strain of the virus infected me. My brother brought it from his kindergarten. At first, it just attacked my nose, which was quite funny, but then I had several panic attacks. It was not nice. I would start breathing heavily, my pulse would race, the heart was beating like crazy... After ten days, everything went back to normal. If I was not vaccinated, it might have ended differently.

I am also volunteering at the Brave Line - a hot line for children. It helps me feel alive and useful. I must be there in person. More and more phone calls are received - during last year, the number of calls has risen 80 percent. Consequences of the pandemic are visible. Sometimes they just need someone to talk to, but sometimes I need to call the police and direct them to intervene immediately. Of course, I have a supervisor and she or he helps me to decide how to act in a specific situation. I plan to work as a child psychotherapist in the future. I will enrol to Gestalt psychotherapy education. My familiarity with the legislation will help me be even more useful.

You see, I need to be active. I am an optimist. Of course, sometimes I feel stressed, sad, nervous; not because of my disability, but concrete circumstances.

**Specifically telling quotes:** Computer screen is my faculty. I caught cold after attending lectures at the faculty during winter - sitting in a room with all windows wide open is not too nice when it's cold. I decided to continue with the online education. Transport may also become a problem. I have to order it in advance, and then come to the faculty, and learn that lecture was cancelled. Then I wait for my transport for hours. They could have informed me via email.

**Keywords:** disability, faculty, online learning, assistance, optimism volunteering

**HR06**

**Title:** Born in the wrong body

**Narrative:** "I am Ivan, 21 years old, a student at the Faculty of Law. I was born as a girl, but since my early childhood knew I was born in a wrong body. I grew up in a small town. In our street, there were 10 of us, children playing together. I always wanted to act as a male, and as a teenager I found girls attractive, but did not feel as a gay person. Without knowing what is wrong with me, or is something wrong, I just dreamt of transforming my body into a male one. I saw an American movie where a person is changing her sex and I started to dream that when I am 18, I will fake my death, and then fly to the USA and be what I want - be a man. It helped me survive. Actually, I was scared. I did not have the courage to openly talk to anyone. We were quite poor, me and my brother were chubby and mocked by the other children, and that was already too much for me to handle. Telling anyone what bothers me deep inside would make me a victim of cruel bullying. I became aggressive - it was my response to fear and the lack of self-esteem. These angry outbursts usually did not motivate anyone to wonder why I behave like that. But, in the sixth grade I collapsed, ran to the toilette, and burst into tears and one girl approached me. She was nice. She told me she thought I was lesbian. I did not tell her the truth but felt much better.

In secondary school, I fell in love with a girl. It was a toxic relationship - we were controlling each other, quarrelling, but then I told her the truth, and she was full of understanding. I went to study in Zagreb, we broke up and remained good friends.

In Zagreb, I contacted an organization that helps LGBT people, participated in the Gay Pride. When we had discussions in small groups, I started to introduce myself with a male name. It felt good and nobody questioned it. Finally, an environment where I could be what I wanted to be.

After my 19th birthday, I decided to start the transition process. I called my doctor and contacted a psychiatric hospital. The meetings with a psychiatrist were ok, but I felt a bit uncomfortable when facing a commission that needed to write an opinion which will enable me to send a request to the National Council. The regulations are so stupid and I had to fight with bureaucracy. If you want to get the final opinion and permission to change sex, you need to have an opinion of a psychiatrist, psychologist, and endocrinologist. You should have results that prove you have testosterone in your body, but you can't get hormone therapy without permission. You may become dizzy while they run you in circles, but I study law, and am persistent. I waited six months for the final paper. Then, I started my hormone therapy. I had to pay two dozes myself, but then realized it should be covered by my health insurance. I protested, and then they started to cover it. I succeeded in changing my documents - ID, health ID card. Problems at the Faculty then began - how to add previously passed exams to a new person with a new opposite sex name.

I am grateful for the pandemic that started just when the changes were becoming more and more visible with each new day. You know, we even have a professor of Family law that was telling us how the people who want to change sex are sick and should be taken to a psychiatrist. Homophobia is also present among students. The lockdown saved me.

I did not have to attend lectures, except online, and was spared of nasty comments. I have not felt well in the first phase of the transition. For almost three months I was depressed, confused with the changes taking place in my body - my voice was changing, my appearance too. Hormones influenced my emotions too. I did not pass any exams and felt lost. I decided to submit an application and ask to freeze my studies and enrol to the same semester when ready. After a lot of confusion - sending papers from one office to the other, from administration to professors, then to the dean, aware that now all know what I have been going through, they approved it.

The minute I felt myself again, I started to arrange a mastectomy. An organization that supports trans people informed me that I need to go to a private clinic since the hospital where it was previously performed had become a Covid-exclusive hospital. At a private clinic, I would have paid almost 3000 euros for such an operation. Where to find one, I wondered. Persistent as I am, I found out that other hospitals perform it too, especially those where breast cancer is treated. I found one, had the operation, and my health insurance covered it fully. I got rid of my breasts, while simultaneously realizing I will be a good lawyer. It is a pity that an organization that claims it represents the rights of trans people, does not know such things. I know people who collected money for operations through crowdfunding campaigns. Why?

Genital transformation is another issue. Nobody performs it in Croatian hospitals. People who have money go to Serbia, but I am not so sure when I will have 13.000 euros. Some day I will do it, but it has to wait.

Now I am feeling great. I can focus on my duties at the faculty. We are still online. The earthquake demolished our faculty's building. I hope I will obtain my diploma dressed normally and not in my pyjamas. I started to go to the University library with a colleague, just to be out again, dressed normally, and feeling like a normal human being. I also started to walk dogs to force myself go out and earn some pocket money.

All in all, I am living in a student dormitory, like the atmosphere in it, and am ready to face all future challenges.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Once confused, moreover scared, now I know who I am and what I want to be. I will finalize my sex change, and then start helping people who do not have support. I study continuously, and will study even more, and will insist that institutions implement legislation thoroughly, without prejudiced personal interpretations. I am stubborn and prepared for all the future fights and debates.

**Keywords:** sex change, bureaucracy, homophobe, persistence, online education

**HR07**

**Title:** Where to find a job now?

**Narrative:** "I am Marija, 48 years old, jobless since November 2021, after 30 years of work at the same factory. In June 1991, I graduated from a textile vocational school, and in September started to work there. We were well-off at that time - orders were being

received on a daily basis and all the young women from my school were immediately hired.

However, it did not last for long. The factory was owned by the Croatian Government and they did not invest into new machines and did not care for us. Year after year, less and less orders were being received, and less and less workers needed. With outdated machines, we could not compete in the market. It was also strange that making uniforms for the police, army, fire workers was not assigned to our factory, but instead to a one privately owned. Then that firm would subcontract us for specific tasks. We saw all around us how oddly the privatization was carried out in our country.

During the last six years, we were receiving the minimum guaranteed wage. As we are situated in a small town, and all the once prosperous industry was dying, we were happy to receive anything. The younger women were leaving, but the older did not know where to go. And we all wanted to work and earn our own money. Stressed and unhappy, I was diagnosed with cancer – both breasts and ovaria. For two years I was on sick leave and, when I returned to my factory, the supervisor told me there is no work for me since I could not sit at the sewing machine. It was too demanding for my health condition. I was devastated, but went to the director and told him what happened. He called the supervisor and ordered her to find me a new task. I was sent to the sorting department. It was work as hard as sewing. I had to be fully concentrated as I had to pile different parts and different sizes of garments separately. If you are not focused, mistakes are almost compulsory. I did not make any complaints because I wanted to work.

Yet, last year, in April, we have not received salaries. Then in May too, then June. We were fed up. The government was telling stories of their fantastic measures that saved the employment of hundreds of thousands of people, and us, working in a state-owned factory, they just forgot. Their policies ruined our workplace and jobs. For eighteen years they kept the same man to manage the factory, did not give a dime to upgrade our machines, and now we are left without even the minimal salaries. We organised a protest, came to Zagreb, and demanded to talk to someone from the government. The minister dared to say that he is not to be blamed for our situation. He claimed in front of the media that our shirts were returned by the buyer due to too many errors in sewing, which was not true. He visited us soon after the protest, and promised that we will get our salaries soon. When I asked him how come that they can't find half a million kuna for us, while they talk about billions given to other employed people, he just turned and walked away. Still, it became obvious that the factory is dying. The pandemic took its toll too. The work would stop for ten days, then they would invite 7 women to execute some tasks, then again a week of forced holidays. Finally, we were informed that the factory declared bankruptcy and we were all fired in July. At the employment bureau, we are entitled to 200 euros per month, for six months.

According to the Labour Law, they should give us seven salaries as a redundancy package. We received only two. Today, our trade union representative held a meeting with the county mayor, and she told him that they would try to donate a one-time assistance. Thank you, and shame on you.

So, what should I do now? I have my diagnosis, who will offer me a job? My husband works and it saves us. I am growing vegetables, have hens who are supplying us with eggs. My son is still attending primary school, but how we will manage to support him

when he goes to study. I don't know.

Sad story. A once prosperous factory with four hundred women employed is now selling its machines and furniture. Thank you, my government. The minister was arrested three days ago. Should it comfort me?

**Specifically telling quotes:** It was hard work, but it was work and salary. I had cancer, like I am cured, but I am not the old one - it is difficult for me to stand for hours, I am not focused as I used to be. Shame on them, they gave work to private firm, and let us end in bankruptcy, jobless. How are we going to finance our son if he goes to study, I don't know. Minister is in jail, but it does not help me.

**Keywords:** cancer, jobless, factory, bankruptcy, compensation

**HR08**

**Title:** Final destination?

**Narrative:** "I am Darya, 35, a woman who escaped violence, probably death, now living in Croatia with the status of an asylum seeker, and trying to learn a totally strange language. At the moment, I am a happy person as my children and I have a decent apartment, we can lock the door, cook, talk, rest. After three years of hiding, walking, hiking, we are at peace with the world. I hope this will become our permanent home. I don't want to talk about the past. I was forced to marry a man who was aggressive and brutal, although I was educated and graduated from the University with a degree in business. My only option was to run and leave my country. The children wanted to come with me. We travelled through Turkey, Greece, Albania, Montenegro, and were trapped in a camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina - a disgusting place, terrible conditions, with thousands of refugees from different countries. All desperate, all wanting to go to countries where they can settle and start a new, decent life. The pandemic was blossoming, but we escaped infection. As I had to destroy my documents at the very beginning of the escape, in order not to be caught and sent back to my country, illegal crossing of borders was our only option. A difficult one if I wanted to leave Bosnia, I learned soon. Twenty-two times we climbed hills, wandered through woods, dirty, sleepless, desperate, and bumped into policemen with guns who would force us back towards the Bosnian camp. No mercy for children, no mercy for me. At one point, my daughter, exhausted and terrified, exclaimed: "Mommy, let's hold hands and jump from this cliff. I can't walk any longer, I can't, just can't walk anymore". Today, I do not know how we survived, and how I did not lose hope. On our twenty-third attempt, someone from the above felt sorry, and we encountered a man who cared, who wanted to help. He would be fined if the police found out that he helped us. He escorted us to an empty house, brought us some food, and then started to call journalists. He knew that it was our only possible protection. We spent two nights hiding there, and then two women came with cameramen. They were so nice and friendly. They gave us three papers with text: "we want asylum" in Croatian, and escorted us to the police station. After that,

everything was chaotic. The police were confused, but cameras were documenting everything. After five hours of sitting there, the police made dozens of phone calls, they put us in a police car and took us to Zagreb, to hotel Porin, where refugees are accommodated. My son speaks English and he was our interpreter. Both of them had to grow up unwillingly. Eight months passed fast. We were sleeping most of the time. Only then did we realize how tired we were. After eight months, we received confirmation of our asylum status and were transferred to an apartment. As our story was all over the media, and the public expressed empathy, authorities did not dare to reject us and send us back to Bosnia. They will cover the rent for two years, and we receive 1500 kuna (200 EUR) per month, but I am looking for a job. Food is expensive here. I started smoking in Bosnia. Everyone smokes there and I was so stressed that I needed comfort. It's not smart, but my life is not a fairy tale. Tomorrow I will go to a cake factory and see if they will employ me. I want my children to have a decent life. If I start working there, my salary will be 4000 kuna plus 500 for transport.

I do not have any connection with my family, and nobody we know is living in Europe. It is only the three of us. I have to be strong for them. They do not have anyone but me.

I am learning Croatian, but need to learn English too. One NGO is organizing language lessons for free on its premises, and the other one arranged private lessons for me three times per week. The government is not providing language lessons for adults. My teacher comes to our flat. We became friends. One of the journalists is also helping us all the time. We have become like sisters.

I would like to become a tram driver as they have decent salaries. But the exam is very expensive, and I need to be fluent in Croatian.

In the far future, I plan to be an activist and fight for women's rights.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I had interpreter, so I would not like to quote her. The only thing I did not put in a story, in order to protect her identity, is that she converted to Christianity, and was baptized.

**Keywords:** religious fundamentalism, violence, gender equality, refugee, protection, asylum

**HR09**

**Title:** I manage

**Narrative:** "I am Mario, 26, student at the Academy of Dramatic Arts, who decided to pause studying in order to find a job, and be capable of taking a loan at the bank and buying an apartment. For me, with my very hectic and chaotic childhood, to have a home is one of the most important things. The prospect of paying for it for another thirty years is not as intimidating as renting and moving from one place to the other. Both my parents died, my father a long time ago, and my grandmother lives in an apartment that is going to be returned to the owners who lost it during the nationalization in 1945. I am in love, which makes me happy, of course. And I successfully got rid of my breasts, took hormone

therapies, and from the outside look like a genuine guy. Inside, I felt that way almost since I was born, although I did not know how to name it and what to do about it. I do not plan to undergo genital transformation. I am happy as I am today and I do not have the money for such an extremely expensive surgical intervention. I am tall, go to the gym regularly, hormones support beard growth, and nobody can even think that, once upon a time, I was a girl. From the outside. I also pay for a private gynaecologist as I can't imagine the reaction of a doctor whose exams are paid by the health insurance and, even more so, of the women sitting in the waiting room.

I have not changed my documents because I am a bit lazy, but also because I know how much of a pain in the ass such a procedure is. I heard that during the pandemic it may last for up to twelve months. Still, I have to do it. It is complicated if I go to any institution where an ID is mandatory - it takes me half an hour to explain. I decided to have a mastectomy during the pandemic, as people were predominantly staying at home, I could work from my room and recover peacefully. However, the hospital that specializes in performing this sort of operations was transformed into a Covid centre and I had to pay a lot of money to a private clinic. I organized a crowdfunding campaign and raised the whole sum. I study at such a faculty that I know a lot about dramaturgy, directing, all the staff you need for creating an interesting campaign. And my friends helped me too. I did not have any problems at my faculty, no harassment occurred. They are more open minded, significantly more than an average Croatian citizen. Though, there, handsome girls have problems with sexism and inappropriate behaviour of male professors. You must have heard about it. Our female dean decided to act and I hope that the situation is going to change for the better. It was at the faculty, between my colleagues and some professors, that I started to introduce myself as male before the transition. What was unexpected, when I finally told my closest relatives, was the positive reaction of my ultra-conservative granny and my macho brother. It seems that love overpowered prejudice and homophobia. My brother would even bring his gang if anybody dared to be rude towards me. And I am not sheepish myself.

The decision to take a break in my studies was also motivated by the conditions of studying during the pandemic. If you have an online lecture on body movement, it is really strange and even grotesque. It is very different than at many other faculties. For us, group work is vital. Now I resumed my studies and in February will, hopefully, get my MA diploma.

As I am working for an NGO, I know how difficult, and opposite to my situation, can this trans condition be. Especially for people living in small settlements. They do not know who to talk to, what to do, how to start and where. It is much easier if you live in Zagreb. Everything is happening here. If you succeed in finding a friendly psychiatrist, psychologist and endocrinologist, the final approval, which opens a path towards a change of documents, must be executed in Zagreb. Now we have the organization Trans Aid that gives advice and tries to help the people who do not know whom to turn to for help. Things are changing. Slowly, alas.

**Specifically telling quotes:** You know, my father was a criminal, and was murdered by the rival gang when I was a little girl. My mother moved to Germany, and we were left

with the grandmother (father's mother). I did not go to school regularly, I did not know what I was. Only when I was accepted at the Academy, I started to learn about myself and issue I had to deal with. I did not even know that such Academy exists. I was looking for something where I can write, act, do something creative as I had many ideas on what should be talked about.

**Keywords:** gender, transition, mastectomy, positive environment, online education

## HR10

**Title:** I insist on respect of my rights

**Narrative:** "I am Aida, 58, professor at one of Zagreb's faculties. I was diagnosed with cancer in 2016, went through an operation and the whole treatment. The period before I was finally diagnosed with cancer was really crazy. I lost a lot of time and my cancer was already in the third stage. Since the intensive treatment, I need to have regular check-ups. In the beginning, it was mandatory to come to the hospital every three months, now I am there every six months.

One of my regular exams was cancelled due to the lockdown. That was something to be expected, but what happened afterwards was not acceptable. They did not contact me, and I decided to go to a private clinic and pay from my pocket several tests that should have been done at my clinic for free. I sent them results via email and there was no response. When I called them, one doctor was quite rude and she told me they did not receive anything. I organized an ultrasound exam myself and then demanded to meet with an oncologist. Twelve months have passed and I started to worry. The same female doctor met me and told me I am too demanding. She wrote in my health documentation that I am impolite and ask for things I am not entitled to. She denied receiving the test results I had sent. I was in a state of shock. Never heard that such things can be put into someone's medical history. Not being lazy, I sent a letter of complaint to the head of the hospital and the health minister. They reacted, the hospital apologized, and her text about my behaviour was removed. I don't let anyone mess with me. She was an exception, as otherwise doctors have been ok. Going through my illness was tough and I want to live. If I don't have any exam with the oncologist for 12 months, I start to worry. And my hospital was not overcrowded with Covid patients. I can't imagine what less persistent women have been going through, especially those who were not diagnosed properly before the pandemic.

As far as education is concerned, I have to say that my faculty was prepared for this extraordinary situation. Even before the pandemic, they launched a platform that could be used for online lecturing and they continued to upgrade it during the pandemic. I did not use it before, I must confess, because I prefer face-to-face education, but it did not take me long to adjust. In my undergraduate subject, I have 30 students, and know them all very well. I don't think they will lose much due to these new circumstances. As I heard that some students tend to register for a lecture without turning on their cameras and then go back to sleep, or just do not listen, I insisted on calling their names and asking

them to answer my questions. It kept them alert. The only strange thing to everyone was when they delivered lectures to primary or secondary school students online. They are going to be teachers and therefore have mandatory demonstration lectures. They survived. Now we still have online lectures and seminars at the faculty. Masks are mandatory in my classroom. Too many people died during the pandemic and I am a cancer patient. The faculty announced that passes or negative tests are obligatory for all students, but I am not sure that the persons checking at the gates are too strict, as we had student protests in September. One of my students dropped out. He left because he rejected everything - vaccination, testing, masks. But he is the only one I know of. I hope this "new normal" will end soon. I do not have small children and was not overloaded with care and house work, but many women were overloaded with too many tasks as they were stuck in their homes. But I think that students lost too much. They need to meet, talk, have fun, and personal contacts are very important for their age.

**Specifically telling quotes:** It is difficult to explain what was going on and why when I insisted on having regular and otherwise mandatory check-up. If I were not so determined to make wrong behaviour of a doctor right, I might have lost even more time. And who knows what might have been happening in my cancer body. On the other hand, I was lucky to teach at the faculty where technology was regularly updated, and I, without significant pre-knowledge, could jump into online teaching without too much stress.

**Keywords:** medical care, doctor's arrogance, complaint, faculty, education

**HR11**

**Title:** Workaholic nurse

**Narrative:** "I am Greta, 60 years old nurse, divorced long time ago, with two adult sons, working with a general practitioner in one village. We have 700 patients, some living alone in remote areas, predominantly older population, but also with several young families engaged in agriculture. Most of the time I am alone, as my doctor spends only 30 per cent of her working hours with me in the infirmary. There were periods when I was left alone, without any doctor. Rarely anyone wants to work in this part of Croatia, famous for its poverty and depopulation. I have also patients from other towns, Zagreb, villages.

The pandemic ruined health care system, and consequences are to be witnessed in the near future. Diagnostic procedures were halted, treatments were postponed, and many doctors and nurses left Croatia in a quest for better work conditions and salaries. I love these people here, I love to live here, and plan to retire here. But I have always been a bit crazy. I know I am sixty, but my energy deserves hardly 30 years of age. However, I feel pity when I see people standing in the rain, and waiting to be let to a doctor. Majority even rejects to see patients in person, but communicate via phone or email. Nurses who

have 2000 patients are half crazy – they are overloaded with work. They need to answer phones, respond to messages, talk to patients in person, and then cover all administration demands.

And we had hundreds of earthquakes that accompanied the pandemic. I was in the infirmary when the strongest one hit us. I ran out, and then saw how the roof and half of the building crushed. To tell the truth, it looked horrible before the earthquake. Now I am working in the container given by the private donor. And I had to find him, and arrange everything. It was not done by the local or national government. If we waited on them, we would be camping in a tent today. Its chaotic and bureaucratic to the bone. Even with our donation we had problems – papers for deconstruction of the ruined building, papers for the container, papers for electricity, papers for water pipes...It went slow, and then I called a doctor who is member of the ruling party, and then things went smoothly. That's how things are done.

I work extra hours, actually, never look at my watch. I see how people are devastated – the pandemic and earthquakes are too much for too many. Left without homes, living in fear, they need support continuously. Very often I work 10 to 12 hours per day. I also started to volunteer, and help people in need with finding temporary homes, writing requests, collecting documents. I have a car and very often give them a ride wherever they need to go. On one hand, I help others, but also help myself. I do not have time to think, to be depressed, to stop functioning.

What makes me sad is seeing old people left alone. Their children are living abroad, and do not care about their parents. Before the earthquake, I was responsible for one home for elderly people. As their building was hit hard, they were resettled. I think the Government should do something about it. The Family law prescribed that child is obliged to take care of its parents if they do not have enough financial resources.

My salary is not worth mentioning if I count my working hours and distances I have to cover – it goes up to 900 euro due to my experience and home visits I execute. If I were young, starting to work, without any extra hours and travel, my salary would be 650 euro. I will grow vegetables when I retire if I want to survive.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I work 70 per cent of working hours alone, without any doctor. I should be happy as I have this one. There were times when nobody was there. I am experienced, but still, certain things must be performed by a doctor. I work sometimes up to 14 hours per day - apart from my job, I volunteer people who do not know how to write an application, how to look for reconstruction workers...The pandemic and the earthquakes, hundreds of them, made life a hell. It helps me to help others, as I do not have time to be depressed and lost.

**Keywords:** underdeveloped area, earthquake, neglect, overload, work, caring

## Hungary

HU01

**Title:** 24-year-old Budapest girl who studied sociology at a foreign university

**Narrative:** I'm Aliz, a 23-year-old girl from Budapest who achieved my BA from sociology at Warwick University in 2021. I've been living in Budapest again since last spring, but I arrived in London a few days ago because I want to work here until I get accepted for an MA program. I was a second year Sociology BA student in England when the Covid caused the first closures, and the university went online. It came at a bad time because I was about to start looking for an internship for my future career, which was completely cancelled because of Covid, and I felt that it would affect the rest of my life. It didn't affect us as a family because nobody got sick from it, but it was shocking when we had to come home with my sister, who also attends the university in England, because of the closures and our parents were very scared and even afraid of us. We were quarantined in our own flat by our dad, who took control on the grounds of an emergency, even though we had been independent for years, but now he was controlling who we could see and how. This caused so much tension that my sister and I moved to another flat for a week, and then we moved back home with new living arrangements. But after that our family life became very peaceful. I had no classes by the time the university came online, but I had a lot of essays piled up, for which we were given a month's grace period. Covid also completely rewrote my summer plans, I had just applied to Berkley for a summer program, to Vienna for an internship, these were hard to process how this was going to affect my career, that they were cancelled, but also the university was hard to understand how it was going to work. But for me there was also a more general anxiety about how this whole pandemic was going to change the world, either socially or economically, but at the same time it was good to see the rainforests recovering. All the while, it was a weird movie experience of personally experiencing a global historical event. At the beginning I almost enjoyed not having to leave the house after the huge social life, the exam period kept me very busy anyway, plus I started to keep in touch online with several friends I had hardly seen in person recently. By the summer it was bad that everything was cancelled, we didn't go on holiday with the family, everything I had planned was cancelled. The most painful thing was that I got myself into something and then it didn't work out. The university was also unsure whether it would start, but I ended up taking two classes offline in the fall of 2020. Financially, I was doing well because I was at home in Budapest while getting 80% of my English salary as a furlough since I was also working in a café there. That's a lot of money in Hungary. My first year at university was spent to integrate into this new life, in the second year I started working in the café, in the third year I finally started my social life and it was really bad that covid interrupted it and I couldn't go out partying. I came home to Budapest at the end of the third year, because the university was closed and I was supposed to apply for MA programs, but I was not able to do it. Because of the covid, it was also hard to apply for good internship, because the last year's graduates applied for

the same places as this year's graduates. But in the meantime, I realised that I didn't want to apply for graduate jobs, I was just under so much pressure that that's the only way I also must pursue. In hindsight, it was difficult to move back home to my parents because of Covid, because the calm environment, the care of my parents, the fact that my dad even read my exam essays, made me forget what I was capable of. But I feel like it would have been much worse if I had to graduate from the high school under the covid. I really missed the parties at university then, and now that I'm out of university I don't miss it either and I've become closer with my friends in quarantine.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It came at a bad time because I was about to start looking for an internship for my future career, which was completely cancelled because of Covid, and I felt that it would affect the rest of my life.

By the summer it was bad that everything was cancelled, we didn't go on holiday with the family, everything I had planned was cancelled. The most painful thing was that I got myself into something and then it didn't work out.

it was shocking when we had to come home with my sister, who also attends the university in England, because of the closures and our parents were very scared and even afraid of us. We were quarantined in our own flat by our dad, who took control on the grounds of an emergency, even though we had been independent for years.

In hindsight, it was difficult to move back home to my parents because of Covid, because the calm environment, the care of my parents, the fact that my dad even read my exam essays, made me forget what I was capable of."

**Keywords:** the plans has been cancelled, losing the independency, uncertainty, future career prospects, youth, anxiety from the future

**HU02**

**Title:** 25-year-old gay man studying at the university and also working as a trainee in Budapest

**Narrative:** "I'm Tibi, 25 years old, a single homosexual boy, now in my second year at the Faculty of Law in Budapest.

I already have two BA degrees in management and marketing. Thanks to covid, I couldn't find a marketing job after the university in 2020, so I applied to Faculty of Law in Budapest what I really don't mind because I really like this field. Since January, I'm working as a trainee in a law firm specialising in criminal law from January.

Now I live alone, I have moved out from my mother's house and I have my own flat. Our parents bought an apartment for me and for each of my siblings who are 12 and 14 years older than me. My parents divorced when I was a teenager, but they are still in a good relationship. I stayed with my mum, but I also have a very good relationship with my dad. Despite the fact that I was involved in my dad's businesses, there was never any pressure on me to take over his business, I was always supported to be free and happy. My life has changed a lot under the covid. When the first lockdown was over, it was strange to

go to crowded places again because I got used not to meet people. Now I go out consciously so I don't get stuck at home and get very lonely. I really missed the travelling, but the covid was also bad for my human relationships, because my friendships disappeared. During the first lockdown in 2020, my mum and I moved to our holiday home on Lake Balaton and we were in our vacation house. I did my university online from there and I didn't meet anyone. The lockdown in autumn 2020 was really bad, I was living alone in Budapest. At the beginning I took it very seriously and I was afraid of getting infected, but in the winter I relaxed and met my friends. It would have been a lot worse if I was 19 years old and had all this covid, but now I'm much calmer and don't want to go to so many parties.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "When the first lockdown was over, it was strange to go to crowded places again because I got used not to meet people. Now I go out consciously so I don't get stuck at home and get very lonely. I really missed the travelling, but the covid was also bad for my human relationships, because my friendships disappeared. The lockdown in autumn 2020 was really bad, I was living alone in Budapest. At the beginning I took it very seriously and I was afraid of getting infected, but in the winter I relaxed and met my friends.

I always wanted to work in a bigger company or a multinational company because they are more accepting than a small Hungarian company. That's why I never applied for a job there. "

**Keywords:** youth, anxiety from the future, career, university degree, loneliness, long-lasting relationship

**HU03**

**Title:** 25-year-old gay man studying at the university and also working as a trainee in Budapest

**Narrative:** "I'm Tibi, 25 years old, a single homosexual boy, now in my second year at the Faculty of Law in Budapest.

I've been openly gay since I was 16, but fortunately I went to an open and tolerant private high school and it was no problem at all that I am gay. I was maybe 13-14 years old when I felt that I am gay, but it took me a year or two to come out with my identity. I didn't even have to tell my parents, because they were the ones who asked me nicely if I am gay, and I told them yes. Since then I've become more comfortable talking about it. I remember the first time I told someone that I am gay, he was a complete stranger on Instagram whom I started corresponding with, but at that time I was still nervous for a couple of months about how I was going to come out with it. In Budapest, especially in the countryside, it's very difficult to form a serious homosexual relationship, because many people still keep it secret. Sometimes it's the third meeting that they find out that they are still being kept up by a straight family. I think that gay people are mostly afraid of their families and their workplaces, of what they will say, and that's why most of us

don't dare to enter into a serious relationship, because it would be spectacular and coming out is very difficult for us. For me, I don't have a long-term relationship because I don't have the time, I'm studying at the university and I'm working at the same time. My best friends organise gay parties where I go from time to time and where I have chance to meet other gay people. On a personal level, the homophobic LGBTQ law that was passed during the covid emergency has not changed anything for me. In fact it has backfired and the situation has improved because it has thematised the issue in public discourse and has galvanised so many people that people are more accepting now than they were 5 years ago and I feel that more and more people are coming out. This has also been helped a lot by the TikTok, where everyone is more openly daring to admit that they are gay.

I spent a semester in Brussels on Erasmus, and the atmosphere there was very different from home, it's much easier to be gay there. If there was a serious connection, I might stay. I have a very good micro-environment here at home, I've never had a serious problem with it, so it never occurred to me to move out of the country. But many gay people are thinking about going abroad, but everyone comes up to Budapest because it is very difficult to be gay in the countryside.

I always wanted to work in a bigger company or a multinational company because they are more accepting than a small Hungarian company. That's why I never applied for a job there. Becoming an activist is a matter of habitus, most people, as long as it doesn't affect them personally, don't care, but the paedophile law that was brought together with LGBTQ people, it really pissed off a lot of people and a lot of people stood up against the law and for LGBTQ people. I used to go to Pride, but I'm not into anything else, and the law is just a bully. I would like to have a child later, that would be better with a couple, but I might go it alone, maybe a biological child, but I'm fine with adoption, at least then I'm helping a child. If they make that impossible at home by law, I would move abroad for that reason.

It is much harder to have a normal relationship as a gay person.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I was maybe 13-14 years old when I felt that I am gay, but it took me a year or two to come out with my identity.

I remember the first time I told someone that I am gay, he was a complete stranger on Instagram whom I started corresponding with, but at that time I was still nervous for a couple of months about how I was going to come out with it.

In Budapest, especially in the countryside, it's very difficult to form a serious homosexual relationship, because many people still keep it secret.

I think that gay people are mostly afraid of their families and their workplaces, of what they will say, and that's why most of us don't dare to enter into a serious relationship, because it would be spectacular and coming out is very difficult for us.

On a personal level, the homophobic LGBTQ law that was passed during the covid emergency has not changed anything for me. In fact it has backfired and the situation has improved because it has thematised the issue in public discourse and has galvanised so many people that people are more accepting now than they were 5 years ago and I feel that more and more people are coming out. This has also been helped a lot by the

TikTok, where everyone is more openly daring to admit that they are gay. Becoming an activist is a matter of habitus, most people, as long as it doesn't affect them personally, don't care, but the paedophile law that was brought together with LGBTQ people, it really pissed off a lot of people and a lot of people stood up against the law and for LGBTQ people. I used to go to Pride, but I'm not into anything else, and the law is just a bully.

I would like to have a child later, that would be better in a normal relationship, but I might go it alone, maybe a biological child, but I'm fine with the adoption, at least then I'm helping a child. If they make that impossible at home by law, I will move abroad for that reason.

**Keywords:** homophobic LMBTQ law, hidden homosexual relationships, non-tolerant workplaces, difficult adoption for gays, gay people's fear of their families and jobs

**HU04**

**Title:** 83-year-old widow living alone in rural village

**Narrative:** "I am Ida, an 83-year-old widow living alone in a village on the shores of Lake Balaton. I was born in 1939, my father was a railwayman and we settled here in 1945. We were deported from Oradea, first to Rét, and from there my father applied for this railway job in Révfülöp. I finished my school in Révfülöp. I finished the 8 year long primary school, and my parents wouldn't let me finish secondary vocational school and I had to go to work in the horticulture when I was 16. That's where I met my husband, whom I married when I was 18. They didn't want me to marry him because then the money I earned from the job would not have gone to them. When I got married, my mother-in-law gave us a room in their house so we could save the money we earned from work for a year. Later we got an apartment from the Producers' Cooperative, and I still live in that house today. Water was not piped into the house, we had a bathroom by the time my eldest daughter was born in 1960. After that I had two more daughters born in 64 and 69. I stayed at home with the children, worked at home as a housewife, because there was no child support then. We both worked all the time, and later we planted vineyards. We were always happy to do everything, we were always getting richer, we kept expanding our house, and eventually everyone had their own room. We always got better and better and I never felt tired. I worked in a restaurant in a village on Lake Balaton for 25 years, I served and managed the restaurant and retired from there in 89. It was a job where I worked in the summer but was paid all year round. In the meantime, the grandchildren came one after the other, it was very good, my eldest daughter lived nearby and came to our house many times, my middle daughter even left the children here for 2 months when they worked abroad. My youngest daughter took care of them a lot, and I cooked and baked for them. My husband died 7 years ago; it is still very difficult to get used to being alone. My children help me a lot, they call and come all the time. When the covid came, I was scared at first that I would be alone in the house, but I followed everything they told me, but my days ended up like normal. My family also

came during the covid, but I saw them less often and we were still out in the yard. But I still cooked and baked the same way, I even cooked for myself all the time.

I could only contact the doctor by phone as there was no medical check-up because of the covid. But I was not afraid that there would be no food in the shops, there was no shopping frenzy like in the cities.

But I missed the pensioners' club, which hasn't been reopened since, and the neighbours didn't come over, but I kept in touch with everyone by phone. I got vaccinated, that was not an issue, but there are many people who didn't get vaccinated here.

Luckily no one around me died. I go to the theatre with other pensioners because we have a theatre pass. I do miss the conversations though, and I see that everyone is scared of their grandchildren from the covid, not themselves.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I finished the 8 yearlong primary school, and my parents wouldn't let me finish secondary vocational school and I had to go to work in the horticulture when I was 16. That's where I met my husband, whom I married when I was 18. They didn't want me to marry him because then the money I earned from the job would not have gone to them.

Water was not piped into the house, we had a bathroom by the time my eldest daughter was born in 1960. After that I had two more daughters born in 64 and 69. I stayed at home with the children, worked at home as a housewife, because there was no child support then.

But I missed the pensioners' club, which hasn't been reopened since, and the neighbours didn't come over, but I kept in touch with everyone by phone. I got vaccinated, that was not an issue, but there are many people who didn't get vaccinated here. "

**Keywords:** loneliness, rare social life, low pension, unsupportive family when she was young, missing husband

**HU05**

**Title:** 78-year-old married woman caring for her sick husband living in a holiday village

**Narrative:** I am Ildi, 78 years old and I have lived in a holiday village with my husband for 22 years. I have a daughter, but no grandchild. We're from Budapest, we bought a plot of land at the end of the village in 1971, and then we built little by little, at first just a weekend house. My husband was a professional footballer, so we lived in Szombathely for many years. My husband retired in 2000, and we moved to Lake Balaton, and I commuted between Szombathely and Révfülöp for a few more years. I have a daughter born in 1970, but no grandchild. She used to visit us. I have two school-leaving certificates, one from high school and one from general vocational school. I have worked in a design office in Budapest and in Szombathely, in the technical department of a hospital, in a city council and in a design office. My husband is ill, he has had leukaemia

for 10 years, which relapsed this Christmas and his kidneys stopped working. He was in hospital in Pest for three months, while I was staying with my daughter, and now he is in Keszthely for treatment, and the ambulance is coming to pick him up and take him there. Luckily, we didn't have to stay in Pest because of this, because we wanted to come back to the countryside. The difficult thing here is that transport is difficult. During the lockdown, the municipality transported people or brought food and medicine for the elderly. My husband doesn't drive, I go shopping, but life here would be impossible without a car. We got through the covid very well, my daughter worked from home, she came down and the three of us were together. Usually in Tapolca I do my shopping well, we have everything, I have a pantry, I wasn't afraid during the closures that we wouldn't have anything to eat. We have a small garden, we grow potatoes and carrots, it lasts until February. During the lockdown we managed medical care and prescriptions by email, but it was bad that when my husband had to be taken for treatment and we went to Pest by train, I couldn't go to the hospital to wait with him, the shops and malls were also closed, and I had to wait in the street in the cold. We were very much looking forward to the vaccination, we were offered the Chinese one, we were not so happy about not getting Pfizer, but we accepted that one because we thought it was better than nothing. I would make the vaccination compulsory. I didn't get to see my brothers and sisters, that was bad, we still only keep in touch by phone, my brother was the only one who visited us. I was scared to meet anyone at the beginning, his daughter and I just hug, no more kissing. I feel that this stay left a mark on us, but in the summer, life came back better, I went to the beach every day.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "The difficult thing here is that transport is difficult. During the lockdown, the municipality transported people or brought food and medicine for the elderly. My husband doesn't drive, I go shopping, but life here would be impossible without a car.

During the lockdown we managed medical care and prescriptions by email, but it was bad that when my husband had to be taken for treatment and we went to Pest by train, I couldn't go to the hospital to wait with him, the shops and malls were also closed, and I had to wait in the street in the cold.

We were very much looking forward to the vaccination, we were offered the Chinese one, we were not so happy about not getting Pfizer, but we accepted that one because we thought it was better than nothing. I would make the vaccination compulsory."

**Keywords:** bad public transport system, loneliness, rare visits from the family, care for the husband, acceptance of difficulties

**HU06**

**Title:** 46-year-old divorced woman from Budapest working as a journalist who has a son and lived in an abusive relationship for 13 years

**Narrative:** I was doing the homeschooling with the child on my own, which also made

me change jobs, I had to find a job that worked on a different system than my previous job. So, I quit the previous job I was working at and moved to another one that was less tied. But that was a disappointment, so I quit there as well, freelanced for a couple of months, then went back to work at the old paper, and I've been there ever since. During the first lockdown, my ex-husband made several official complaints about child visitation. To minimize the meetings as much as possible because of the covid, I asked him to see our son only every two weeks, but for a longer time, which he refused to do. Anyway, the system for the past 5-6 years has been that on week A he has two hours with the child on Thursday, and on week B, they spend together the whole weekend. My husband refused to change this schedule because of the covid. As I did not let him meet his son on the next four Thursdays, only for every second weekend, he filed three charges against me. I lost all of them, I had to pay hundreds of thousands of forints because according to the government regulation, the covid situation did not constitute a ground for invoking the right of meeting with the child. My ex-husband was not fighting me for seeing our child but pushing me out. I tried to convince him to keep the contact with our son on video chat when he was supposed to be with him, but he also refused this form of contact with his son.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "During the first lockdown, my ex-husband made several official complaints about child visitation. To minimize the meetings as much as possible because of the covid, I asked him to see our son only every two weeks, but for a longer time, which he refused to do.

As I did not let him meet his son on the next four Thursdays, only for every second weekend, he filed three charges against me. I lost all of them, I had to pay hundreds of thousands of forints because according to the government regulation, the covid situation did not constitute a ground for invoking the right of meeting with the child. My ex-husband was not fighting me for seeing our child but pushing me out."

**Keywords:** work and care balance, homeschooling alone, bad relationship with the ex-husband, forced job change, charges against the mother

**HU07**

**Title:** 46-year-old divorced woman from Budapest working as journalist who has a son and lived in an abusive relationship for 13 years

**Narrative:** "I'm Zsuzsa, I'm a journalist and I am 46 years old. I had an abusive relationship and I have a child. I am currently living with a new partner who is much younger than me.

My husband, with whom I have a child, was abusive, at first verbally, but later he became physically abusive. I was 25 when I met him, he was only 20 at that time. Even the first 4 years were conflictual, from time to time he disappeared, and he did not talk to me. Sometimes he would shout threats or swear and verbally humiliate me. After 4-5 years of living together, he didn't come back after a week which hit me really hard I felt I

needed to behave even better and I begged my husband to come back. This was followed by a year and a half of living hell, which has included a lot of physical abuse, choking and punching in the stomach, and street fights. By this time, I had also seen a psychologist but he was not good enough. I felt that my life is not normal, but I couldn't articulate that I was living in an abusive relationship. My sister and one of my husband's friends were the only people who knew about the abuse, but both of them only knew of one incident. My sister was firm, she said one more time and she would take action, but my husband's friend said it was really bad, but "we know how you can be, I would slap you too".

We broke up after a year and a half, but after three months he started calling me again. We got married in 2010, we went to couples therapy in 2011, but after a year and a half the therapists found out about the abuse. We originally left on the grounds that we had a conflictual relationship, our arguments went too far, and that I was putting him down verbally. Then the therapists started to suspect that there was abuse. Then they stopped the therapy so we couldn't continue because it's not ethical to have therapy in an abusive relationship. I was sent to individual therapy, but I didn't want to start again and I couldn't identify myself with the victim role. Then things got out of hand again at home, but we had a child by then, so I called one of the therapists from couples therapy and said I couldn't handle it at home anymore, and then I started seeing one of them individually. After six months I moved out with my son and went home to my mother. After that, my husband didn't give me any money, but he came to see the child.

Less than a month later, he started threatening me that I had kidnapped the child and that he was going to prosecute me for child endangerment. I had no money for a lawyer, so I turned to legal aid services for help. Eventually, we went to a mediator to agree on the details of the divorce, and that's what we finally filed and within a year we were divorced.

We don't really cooperate in relation to our son, I don't know exactly where he takes the child on the weekends when he is with him. Now there is zero communication between us, but at least there is no fighting. In the first 2-3 years after the divorce, there was regular arguing, my dad had to be called over because he didn't want to leave the apartment. Even today, my son is anxious to tell me about his time with his father, because his father tells him things like don't tell me this and don't tell me that. He doesn't really like to go to his father's house because he doesn't like to sleep there. He also does not like to go for a long summer holiday with him, afterward, he has all sorts of psychosomatic or anxiety symptoms.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "My husband, with whom I have a child, was abusive, at first verbally, but later he became physically abusive.

I felt that my life is not normal, but I couldn't articulate that I was living in an abusive relationship.

Even the first 4 years were conflictual, from time to time he disappeared, and he did not talk to me. Sometimes he would shout threats or swear and verbally humiliate me. After 4-5 years of living together, he didn't come back after a week which hit me really hard I felt I needed to behave even better and I begged my husband to come back. This was followed by a year and a half of living hell, which has included a lot of physical abuse,

choking and punching in the stomach, and street fights.

We went to couples therapy in 2011, but after a year and a half the therapists found out about the abuse. We originally left on the grounds that we had a conflictual relationship, our arguments went too far, and that I was putting him down verbally. Then the therapists started to suspect that there was abuse. Then they stopped the therapy so we couldn't continue because it's not ethical to have therapy in an abusive relationship.

Less than a month later, he started threatening me that I had kidnapped the child and that he was going to prosecute me for child endangerment. I had no money for a lawyer, so I turned to legal aid services for help.

We don't really cooperate in relation to our son, I don't know exactly where he takes the child on the weekends when he is with him. Now there is zero communication between us, but at least there is no fighting. "

**Keywords:** an abusive relationship, domestic violence, helplessness, divorce, bad relationship

**HU08**

**Title:** 36-year-old Roma woman from a village, she escaped from an abusive relationship 7 years ago. She has one daughter who is 17 years old

**Narrative:** "I am Erzsi, a 36-year-old Roma woman from a village, I escaped from an abusive relationship 7 years ago. I have one daughter, she is 17 years old.

I grew up in a small village in East Hungary and I have three brothers and sisters. My parents have been day labourers all their lives, now they work as public workers. Today, I run an association in my village, which I set up under the first lockdown when I was forced to return home because of the closures. I have two brothers working in the association, which deals with housing, health, education and employment of local Roma. My association also deals with environmental pollution, because we Roma, because of our poverty, live in a very polluting way, for example, we burn everything to keep the house warm, but this releases a lot of toxic substances into the air.

Two of my brothers and sisters have a school leaving certificate, and I am now applying to university, one brother and sister have a vocational school certificate, and one has eight primary school degrees.

My parents wouldn't let me study, but I went to a secondary vocational school to study health studies. My parents did not want me to study, they said a woman does not need education, so I hid from my parents and i could prepare for classes. I was bullied a lot by my parents when I was in the primary school because I wanted to study. I raised my brothers and sisters, because my parents worked all the time, coming home late at night from the work. We were not raised by our parents, we didn't even know them, my younger sister calls me her mother. Now that's completely changed, I support them and now they are very proud of me working for a famous foundation in Budapest, and I think they also feel guilty that they didn't support me. My life is fucked up now, it was ruined by the expectation that they wouldn't let me do what I wanted to do. If they then support

me in talking to a boy without having to marry him straight away, my life won't turn so tragic. In our culture, if a girl goes out for the evening, it means she is already a woman and is forced to marry the boy she has met. Even though I could prove that nothing had happened, and I hadn't lost my virginity, I was forced to marry a boy I liked when I was 16. I was forbidden to meet him for a year, from the age of 15, because they did not want me to marry an Vlah Gypsy boy, but wanted a Romungro husband. At 16, when I had to move to my father-in-law's house, I was not allowed to go to school. My parents wouldn't let me go home, and in the new house I had to cook, do the washing and cleaning, and I couldn't go anywhere.

I got my first slap from my husband after two weeks we had been together. In that family, aggression was commonplace, my husband's sister was in an abusive relationship too. We never had that at home. I remember every moment of the abuse over the years, I felt so ostracised, I learned to keep quiet, and it led to depression. It never occurred to me to seek professional help, a Gypsy woman in the countryside has no one to turn to. I was also treated badly because I didn't get pregnant straight away, even though we tried, and I gave birth to Jasmin when I was already 19. My life was hell after that, even in front of Jasmin, I was constantly beaten. After a long time, I found out that there was another woman, but to this day I don't know if she had a child with that woman. I didn't want to find out because I was always running away from the knowledge so that it wouldn't hurt so much. When things got really bad, I would go home with my little girl to my parents, but I would always go back to him because he begged me to go back and I loved him very much and my daughter also loved is her father.

After a while they let me work because they needed the money I earned from my work. My husband had a bad temper, he was aggressive, so the other Roma who had work, they didn't take him with them. One New Year's Eve, when I came home, my husband wanted to have sex with me, but I didn't want to, so he tried to strangle me with a string. I could feel death coming, I was about to let go of my life, but then he looked me in my eyes and let me go. Then I went out into the cold night without a bag, without a coat, leaving my child behind. I asked my sister-in-law to help me bring the child, but she couldn't manage. After one night I went home to my mother. Jasmine was 10 years old at the time, but I never got my daughter back who stayed with her father. I wasn't allowed to see her, I was on the verge of death for six months, I wanted to die and I couldn't see my daughter, but I couldn't have done it.

In the meantime, I met my current partner, who is a gift from God, and finally after six months I was able to see my daughter again. My daughter is 17 now, she is still with her father, although legally I have the child, but she would go crazy if she had to be separated from her father, because that is how she was brought up. I live in Budapest now, but she can't come to see me, I have travel to the countryside to see her. I see him every three weeks or so. I can't have another child for medical reasons.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "My association also deals with environmental pollution, because we Roma, because of our poverty, live in a very polluting way, for example, we burn everything to keep the house warm, but this releases a lot of toxic substances into the air.

My parents did not want me to study, they said a woman does not need education, so I

hid from my parents and i could prepare for classes. I was bullied a lot by my parents when I was in the primary school because I wanted to study.

My life is fucked up now, it was ruined by the expectation that they wouldn't let me do what I wanted to do. If they then support me in talking to a boy without having to marry him straight away, my life won't turn so tragic. In our culture, if a girl goes out for the evening, it means she is already a woman and is forced to marry the boy she has met. Even though I could prove that nothing had happened, and I hadn't lost my virginity, I was forced to marry a boy I liked when I was 16.

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One New Year's Eve, when I came home, my husband wanted to have sex with me, but I didn't want to, so he tried to strangle me with a string. I could feel death coming, I was about to let go of my life, but then he looked me in my eyes and let me go. Then I went out into the cold night without a bag, without a coat, leaving my child behind. I asked my sister-in-law to help me bring the child, but she couldn't manage. After one night I went home to my mother. Jasmine was 10 years old at the time, but I never got my daughter back who stayed with her father. I wasn't allowed to see her, I was on the verge of death for six months, I wanted to die and I couldn't see my daughter, but I couldn't have done it.

My daughter is 17 now, she is still with her father, although legally I have the child, but she would go crazy if she had to be separated from her father, because that is how she was brought up. "

**Keywords:** domestic violence, abusive husband, poverty, the Roma's situation in Hungary, segregated housing conditions, early dropout from school

**HU09**

**Title:** 26-year-old Roma woman, living with her partner in a small village with my 8-year-old son in deep poverty

**Narrative:** "I am Katus, a 26-year-old Roma woman, living with my partner in a small village with my 8-year-old son.

My little son just started first grade because he was held back in kindergarten, but at least he didn't have to study online in the last year, because he was still in the kindergarten. I gave birth when I was 18, now my partner and I live independently, before that we lived with my in-laws. I did my 8th grade, then studied hairdressing at a vocational school, but dropped out in the last year and I didn't finish school.

I worked in horticulture and now I'm waiting to start working in a factory. Today, only my partner works, so we find it hard to make a living. I consider myself poor, but I have enough to eat, but we rarely eat meat. My partner works as a binman, so at least he has a job, but when we both work, we live better. It never occurred to me to continue my studies and get at least one profession, because we always have to work, so I can't afford to study. We didn't want more children, one is enough, I can give him everything, but I can't afford more. But my friends always say he needs a brother or sister. Before the covid, we both had jobs, now only my partner has, but I am supposed to start working in the factory soon.

What really got me down during the lockdown was that we couldn't go to the shop before 10am, because only old people could until 10. Even when I was working during the lockdown, my mum could look after my son. It is really bad how the prices have gone up, oil costs for example 800 forints in the village shop. During the lockdown, we didn't get any help from the municipality, but the government didn't help the poor people either.

We are vaccinated, but my 8-year-old son is not vaccinated, in fact we are still afraid of vaccination, we only got vaccinated because we couldn't go anywhere without being vaccinated.

My child felt alone during her covid, she missed kindergarten a lot.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I did my 8th grade, then studied hairdressing at a vocational school, but dropped out in the last year and I didn't finish school.

Today, only my partner works, so we find it hard to make a living. I consider myself poor, but I have enough to eat, but we rarely eat meat. My partner works as a binman, so at least he has a job, but when we both work, we live better. It never occurred to me to continue my studies and get at least one profession, because we always have to work, so I can't afford to study. We didn't want more children, one is enough, I can give him everything, but I can't afford more.

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We are vaccinated, but my 8-year-old son is not vaccinated, in fact we are still afraid of vaccination, we only got vaccinated because we couldn't go anywhere without being vaccinated.

**Keywords:** Roma woman, poverty, segregated settlement in a village, low education, dropout from vocational school

**HU10**

**Title:** 48-year-old single lesbian woman from Budapest without children, activist and research fellow at a university holding PhD degree from gender studies

**Narrative:** "I am Dóri, 48-year-old single lesbian woman from Budapest. I have no children. I have a PhD in gender studies, and I work as a research fellow at a university. My father has no degree, but he lives his life as an intellectual, my mother is a kindergarten teacher, but she has rather working-class habitus. While my father is liberal and tolerant and I am his God, my mother is conservative and a FIDESZ voter, who has not yet accepted in her soul that I am a lesbian. I have 3 half-brothers, one of whom has lived in America for 20 years, is homophobic and a Trumpist, but I think he is a closet gay. I've never really wanted children, but maybe if I'd had a partner that I would have been happy with, I might have a different opinion. I tried straight relationships for 10 years, then fell in love with a woman, which was so much better. Since then, I've only had relationships with women. My own identity was greatly influenced by a gender class in English, which took an intellectual approach to lesbianism, and it was there that I realised the whole patriarchy system and how uncomfortable I'd always been in expected female roles, like looking feminine, and how I didn't like that. The first time I had a lesbian relationship, that's when I finally became self-identified, and it was so comfortable.

I kept my gender identity a secret from my family until I was 31, even though I was already in a long-lasting lesbian relationship. I was particularly afraid of my mother, but then someone saw me at Pride and told my mother, who reacted as I expected. Since I became type one diabetic at age 7, one of her theories was that insulin caused my lesbianism. The whole conflict escalated to me not getting as much of an inherited flat as I should have on the grounds that I was a lesbian and I wasn't going to have children anyway, so I didn't need a flat as big as my brother's. After that I cut off contact with my mother for years, became depressed, feared death and didn't speak to her for 7 years. I went to my mother 4 years ago to tell her what was bothering me about all this. My mother has learned to behave since then, but she still doesn't think any differently about my lesbianism. She didn't even find out that my book made me a star.

Now I feel that living together is not a lifestyle for me. I have met almost all my long-term partners through a lesbian organisation, where I also hold a leadership position. Now I see this has not been very good for my relationships. It is also very difficult to get to know each other only within a very narrow circle, many people still don't come out as lesbians. I feel that while acceptance is growing, rejection is also growing in Hungary. A good example of this is that while 2009 was the most progressive year for LGBTQ people regarding the regulations, in 2008 the Nazis smashed Pride. After that, straight people started to attend Pride as a sign of solidarity. Even though I became famous last year because of the book, even though I was voted one of the 100 most influential women by a famous foreign magazine, it didn't improve my relationship with my partner, which ended a few months ago.

During the lockdown, I didn't go out, but also I didn't have time. Today I go out a bit more, but I'm still very depressed. There were monthly community programs in the organization before the covid, but that hasn't restarted since. The success of my book was good, it's cool to do something important, the child in me was happy about it

because I wanted to be famous, but the adult in me is burdened and depressed by the politics of men intoxicated with power being allowed to personally interfere in my life and my community through the homophobic LMBTQ regulations and we are constantly subjected to violence.

For a long time, I thought I would not leave Hungary, I belong, and I like living here, my friends are here, even though it's not good to be a lesbian in this country. But just before your covid I had a feeling that I should go, I could make better progress there professionally, because gender studies are completely impossible in this country. Now I might be able to get into an English university, but I don't want to go for good.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I tried straight relationships for 10 years, then fell in love with a woman, which was so much better. Since then, I've only had relationships with women. My own identity was greatly influenced by a gender class in English, which took an intellectual approach to lesbianism, and it was there that I realised the whole patriarchy system and how uncomfortable I'd always been in expected female roles, like looking feminine, and how I didn't like that. The first time I had a lesbian relationship, that's when I finally became self-identified, and it was so comfortable.

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The success of my book was good, it's cool to do something important, the child in me was happy about it because I wanted to be famous, but the adult in me is burdened and depressed by the politics of men intoxicated with power being allowed to personally interfere in my life and my community through the homophobic LMBTQ regulations and we are constantly subjected to violence.

But just before your covid I had a feeling that I should go, I could make better progress there professionally, because gender studies are completely impossible in this country."

**Keywords:** lesbian, LMBTQ people's rights, hostile politics against LMBTQ people, intolerant parent, still many lesbians hide their identity

## Ireland

IE01

**Title:** Anna 'only' has to write her master thesis and do the job placement, while the university gives her very little support

**Narrative:** "My name is Anna, and I am from another European country. I came to Dublin in the summer of 2019 to do my Masters in Arts. Before that I lived in another European country where I did my undergrad course, and I also worked in Southern Europe before that. I now live in Dublin and work for a non-profit organization.

I moved to Dublin in summer 2019 so I was fortunate that when the pandemic hit Ireland around St Patrick's Day, I was already done with most of my courses. I 'only' had to write my thesis and do the job placement. At that time "the university was pretty shit in terms of supporting students throughout the pandemic. At least in our course we didn't hear anything from them". And for our thesis, they just added a sentence there saying 'just let us know how Covid affected you in ways that had an impact on your thesis'. But obviously Covid affected all of us, because most of us were international students and most of us were from outside of Europe. "So, obviously the mental health toll was a bigger toll than the practical toll, such as not being able to access libraries. Because we were obviously all stuck in here, we didn't know what to do. We didn't know if it would be better to go home, or to stay in Ireland". So I think that in terms of support the university was not a very helpful place. But for me the writing of the thesis and having that kind of focus was helpful in terms of keeping me sane.

I had to do a job placement before I wrote the thesis and this was part of the course. I think for a lot of us it was the part that we all look forward to the most. It was the last thing after all our courses were finished, so it took place from April to May. The placement turned into an online thing, but I was lucky that I still got it. A lot of people that I studied with wouldn't have that chance as some arts organisations were amongst those most affected by the pandemic and didn't have a capacity for an intern. I did mine with an arts company, but "it was obviously such a different experience from what I initially thought it would be. And it kind of sucked". I know that if I had done it in person, I would have gone to the place and met all the people. "So the people were actually lovely there, but it was the work that changed so much. And it was obviously outside their control because they had different plans, but it just was not what any of us was expecting. And I didn't really get as much out of it as I hoped, except that I was able to put on my cv that I have done the placement".

"During that time, especially at the beginning, I had a terrible Zoom anxiety. To the point that I had to leave zooms with my friends, because my heart would just start beating like crazy, and I would get so anxious that I had to say: 'I actually cannot do this'". And I tried to use Zoom, while I was doing the placement. One of the first meetings was on Zoom, and everyone had their camera on, because it was a small team and they all knew each other. And in Zoom "you always have to present, even though you are not doing anything". They were talking about things that didn't really affect me, so I asked if I could skip the

next Zoom. And I was not really met with any understanding. “But I didn’t have the words to say ‘I get incredibly anxious, I am not getting anything out of those zooms, just write me an email and tell me what you want. Because I don’t even know you’. So, it was very stressful”.

In terms of writing the thesis, in normal times, we would use the library a lot more. And for the first part - “obviously the campus was closed, and we were not allowed in, so we had to write at home. I was fortunate that we lived in a big enough house, so it wasn’t the worst”. One of the people I studied with actually went to a train station to write, just because there was no space for her at home. “And some people lived in a one-bedroom apartment, or just had a tiny room without a desk. I didn’t have a desk in my room, so I was just writing in the kitchen all the time”.

“Obviously it was different for everyone, and I don’t want to speak for everyone in my course, but just being away from home, and also being in your early, mid or late 20s, when everyone tells you: ‘those are your best years!’ and then you are stuck at home”. And you need to find the way to not just write your thesis, but also find some other outlets - but then there is nothing to do. And I have done all the walks, and I played so much guitar, but I would have preferred to go out and meet more people.

After all that I got a job in a Non-Profit organization in Dublin, through a friend from the course. It was part-time at the beginning but then it changed to full-time. We have always been considered essential services because we do community support. So we were always going to the office and doing the hybrid work. So “we were always able to go to the office, which was a God sent. I am very fortunate in that sense that I get to go in and actually interact with nice people”.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “obviously the campus was closed, and we were not allowed in, so we had to write at home. I was fortunate that we lived in a big enough house, so it wasn’t the worst”. “Obviously it was different for everyone, and I don’t want to speak for everyone in my course, but just being away from home, and also being in your early, mid or late 20s, when everyone tells you: ‘those are your best years!’ and then you are stuck at home”

**Keywords:** higher education, remote job placements, isolation, Zoom, social aspects of education, social aspects of work.

**IE02**

**Title:** Emilia tries to take care of herself while struggling with loneliness and isolation.

**Narrative:** "My name is Emilia, I am 26 years old, and I moved to Ireland in summer of 2019 to do a Master’s course in one of the universities in Dublin. I left my home country eight years ago. Before coming to Dublin, I worked in a hotel in Spain, and then I moved to another country in Europe to do my undergraduate degree.

I was fortunate in a sense that when the pandemic really kicked off in Ireland, I was already done with most of my courses. “I was also very lucky that I lived in a house with

four other people back then - three of them were Americans and one of them was Irish. Having that support network was incredibly important to me during that time. And I noticed that when we were all very much stuck at home, the people you live with are very important". It can be very difficult in Dublin because housing is so expensive "that you kind of end up in weird housing situations sometimes". And I was lucky that we lived in a big house in a nice South Dublin neighbourhood, which has a very suburban feeling, and we had a garden.

Not everything was easy though: "I feel like everyone was kind of just struggling in the house as well. And then you wanted to support each other but you didn't always have the capacity to do so. So that was tricky to navigate. But I think we all really appreciated each other's company, because we all knew - and we talked about it at great length - that this was very special to have".

I am a very high achiever, I always had very good grades, and I put a lot of pressure on myself to do that. But "towards the last week before I handed in my master's thesis, I had a sort of epiphany where I felt that it doesn't really matter if I get A or B or C or whatever, as long as I pass. And that was a very liberating experience". But at the same time, I was under so much pressure during Covid. Even when things opened during the summer of 2020, before I handed in my thesis - I remember the night or the day before I handed it in - "I just started sobbing in the garden, I was just sitting there, and then had to wake up the next day feeling like absolute shit, and finish writing up the thesis". And then the winter of 2021 - pretty much around the same time last year - was particularly hard "because we thought that 'after the summer everything will be better'. And then it just got worse, and we were all stuck at home". At that time, I made the decision to stay in Ireland because I got a job, and I was lucky to get a job even remotely related to what I studied. But at the beginning the job was part-time, it was winter, and everything was closed. "I would say it was my lowest during the pandemic, that winter at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021. Just in terms of feeling very isolated. I had very few friends here, a lot of people who I would have gotten close from course had left the country, and you don't want to have only one person to rely on, because the other person is also obviously struggling".

"I also started therapy then, which really helped to just have somewhere to go to and talk free, or just word vomit for an hour a week". But I didn't have a lot of money because I was on a part time contract, and there were mental health support services for people on low income. There was also the Jigsaw for those under 25, but "the waiting list was 4 months, and I said: 'I need to speak to someone now!!!', so I went with a different organisation". But in terms of comparing it - because I had done therapy when I was an undergrad, and I paid the full price - I could really see the difference. "Because when you are on 'low income' services, you get paired with a trainee. And I could really tell that this person was not qualified in the sense that I was used to during my previous therapy". But it was fine for what I needed, "because I just needed to talk to somebody, I didn't need a long-term support, I just needed an immediate support".

And then things got much better, during last summer. I still have ups and downs, but I got much better. I listen to myself and my needs, and I am minding myself. And maybe, I suppose, going back to Covid for me ties also with the queerness itself. "For me it was kind of coming to terms with my gender identity as well. Because I recently started to

identify as non-binary as well. And that was a big step for me because I think I have a lot of 'internalised homophobia'. So it has been also a very positive year for me in terms of growth. And it is something that I probably wouldn't have done as quickly as I did if I haven't so much time to reflect on myself."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I was also very lucky that I lived in a house with four other people back then - three of them were Americans and one of them was Irish. Having that support network was incredibly important to me during that time. And I noticed that when we were all very much stuck at home, the people you live with are very important". "For me it was kind of coming to terms with my gender identity as well. Because I recently started to identify as non-binary as well. And that was a big step for me because I think I have a lot of 'internalised homophobia'. So it has been also a very positive year for me in terms of growth. And it is something that I probably wouldn't have done as quickly as I did if I haven't so much time to reflect on myself"

**Keywords:** self-care, mental health, young, gender identity, social isolation, therapy, support network

**IE03**

**Title:** Magda, who works in a bank, is not prepared for the remote work.

**Narrative:** "My name is Magda, and I am from Poland. I came to Ireland 17.5 years ago. At the moment I am unemployed. I was made redundant last year, and I decided to take a break, after working in Ireland for almost 18 years. I started college and I study data analytics full-time. I also started to look for a new job as college is supposed to finish in May. I worked for a year and four months under Covid. Covid started in March, and I was let go in June the following year.

When the pandemic hit, I was still working in an investment bank. The change to work from home was very hard for me because "when you work in the office, and then you all the sudden work remotely, and you are at home with a kid, it was hard to get the work done. And at work in general, it was a disaster, because nobody was prepared for the remote work. So people didn't know what to do". We also had a problem with vendors in India, because they were all getting sick and most of them lived away from their families, and they were stuck in the small rooms they were renting. The restrictions were very hard over there so these people were very depressed, and it reflected on their work. And it also reflected on our work. We had loads of work at that time.

"Besides that I missed people from work. Because when things went bad between myself and my ex-partner, I always had people from work, who were very funny, cheerful... In fact I spent entire day with them". And that had stopped. So for me that was extremely hard, to get used to work from home, and not seeing these people.

Before Covid started, we used to work from home for one day a week, because the management agreed that we could do that. But it was different. They were saying, maybe not openly, but it was generally known that 'ah, well, there is no harm if somebody puts

the wash on or makes dinner'. So it was known that that day, when you are not in the office, you don't do much work. You just have to have the laptop on, but you are probably using it to watch Netflix. "And when Covid started, problems started". You had to have two monitors, and they gave us no equipment. People had to buy everything themselves. They sent me one monitor later, but you had to have two monitors, and you had to have a workstation. And they assumed that everyone had a PC at home. "Because it was no longer that you sit with the laptop on your lap. You HAD TO WORK, and that was the worst of all of that. Before that the remote work was a bit of a joke, you would turn on your laptop, somebody would said something every now and then, but it was generally known that you are not in the office and you are not getting much work done". I also didn't have any appropriate clothes to wear at home because I only had dresses for work. And we were laughing with the girls at work that one day a week of remote work is OK, but more days working from home is not great. There was this snow blaze in Ireland two or three years ago, and our bank was closed for a week, and the girls were saying that at that time they didn't even wash themselves for two or three days. "And it was like that in the beginning of Covid. I was sitting in my pyjamas, I stopped brushing my hair and I stopped putting my make up on. In the beginning I maybe washed myself every second day because I was not going anywhere". It was only later that I had to work on it and to say to myself that it doesn't matter whether I sit in my pyjamas or in old track suit bottoms, I still must wash myself anyway. "And a lot of people in the office said that it was the same for them, that because they were not going to the office, they didn't have to put the make up on, or brush their hair". In some teams they had to turn on their cameras every day, just to encourage people to get dressed and to wash themselves. This also started to be practiced in my team after a while, but we only had to do it once a week. "So then you had to put your make up and brush your hair - but only on Thursdays".

The fact that I was made redundant was not related to Covid. I just didn't get on with my manager who didn't even speak to me. Because he treated me badly, I threated that I would complain to the HR about the unfair treatment. The manager and the head of my department got scared. And I always wanted to get the redundancy and I was saying it to everyone. So they offered me the redundancy. But there was no Covid related reductions in my company.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "when you work in the office, and then you all the sudden work remotely, and you are at home with a kid, it was hard to get the work done. And at work in general, it was a disaster, because nobody was prepared for the remote work. So people didn't know what to do". "it was no longer that you sit with the laptop on your lap. You HAD TO WORK, and that was the worst of all of that. Before that the remote work was a bit of a joke, you would turn on your laptop, somebody would said something every now and then, but it was generally known that you are not in the office and you are not getting much work done". "I was sitting in my pyjamas, I stopped brushing my hair and I stopped putting my make up on. In the beginning I maybe washed myself every second day because I was not going anywhere

**Keywords:** remote work, social aspects of work, female professional workers,

equipment, dress code.

## IE04

**Title:** Karolina tries to find positives of Covid while she struggles to combining work with looking after her son.

**Narrative:** "My name is Karolina, I live in Dublin, and I am from Poland. I am 43 years old. I am a single mum, and my son is 8 years old. I am currently unemployed, but I worked full-time in a bank for a year and four months during Covid, while I was also studying part-time.

I had a quite difficult situation when the pandemic started because at that time I was splitting up with my partner, the father of my son. He moved out in October 2019, and I had to look for a new house. I was meant to buy the house from my parents-in-law, but they changed their mind, so I had three months between December 2019 and March 2020 to find a new house. After that my contract was going to be finished. And fortunately, because of Covid, things got delayed and I was able to buy the house I have now. This is the first aspect of Covid, the fact that the sale was delayed, and I got the house.

"The problem was that my in-laws were helping me to look after my son. And we couldn't really meet with other people because we didn't want to infect them". In the beginning everybody was scared. "For me Covid had a psychological impact, it really brought me down, the fact that I had to stay and home and that I couldn't see other people. Because it wasn't even about me that I couldn't meet people". It would have been different if I could go out and not be worried, and "I couldn't because I was worried that I would get infected and then they would get infected. Maybe other people don't remember it that bad, but for me it was a very bad time". So for the first six weeks of Covid I had not seen anybody except my father-in-law and the father of my son.

I also managed very badly with home schooling. At that time, I worked full-time remotely, and I was also studying part-time. "I remember that we were crying together" with my son, because I was meant to finish an assignment and to record the description of codes, and my son was constantly talking, so I couldn't record the description. "I didn't have the energy to start it all over again and he got very upset and started crying, and I started crying as well". I also remember that I felt so bad for not having time for him. He got 4000 Lego blocks for his birthday, it was a ship, and I was so exhausted, and I had an assignment due next day, but I was up with him until 3am putting these blocks together. "Because I felt so bad about the fact that I never had time for him, and that there was always something else I had to do". I felt that I wasn't giving him enough time, because he was staying at home with me, and I was constantly on my laptop. While we still lived in the old neighbourhood, we were going out during my lunch break, and he was riding his bike. "That was all I could give him timewise, during the day, that one hour during

lunch". But the second positive of Covid is that "my son learned how to speak Polish. Because he didn't speak Polish before the pandemic, and now he does".

Shopping was also a problem. There were queues to the supermarket, you had to queue for an hour just to get in. "I could only go to the supermarket when my son was with his father and that was problematic. At that time, I didn't have a car so I could only buy as much as I could pack into a backpack and carry back to the house". Because at that time you were not allowed to take the kid to the shop. Not that you were not allowed, but they were saying not to bring kids to shops. "So that was a big problem for me, even the shopping, and I think that for many single mothers, with kids, who don't have a car, that was a big problem. Thanks God I had that supermarket close to my house, so I was simply able to drag the shopping back to the house, on my back. But because you had to wait for an hour to even get to a supermarket, and I was only able to do it once a week".

In general, a lot has changed for me during Covid. I was made redundant, I moved to the new house, my son changed schools. I transferred him in September. In fact, that was another positive of Covid. Because I didn't have to drive to him to the old neighbourhood, as schools were closed anyway. And he started the new school in September. This was also a problem for him, because he didn't know kids in the school, and they are still staying in bubbles. He doesn't really know the kids but it is only now, this year, that he started saying that he has friends in the new school. I hope he doesn't remember much of that in the future. I hope that he doesn't remember much of Covid."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "The problem was that my in-laws were helping me to look after my son. And we couldn't really meet with other people because we didn't want to infect them"

**Keywords:** single parent, home schooling, remote work, grandparents, social isolation, lack of time.

**IE05**

**Title:** Oonagh is a divorced mother of two children living in a working-class area in Belfast.

**Narrative:** "My name is Oonagh. I live in rented accommodation with my 20- year-old son and my 12-year-old daughter. I separated from my husband in 2018 and I later got a divorced by zoom, during Covid, "which was a very interesting experience". I work part-time in sheltered accommodation. This is accommodation for people over 55 who cannot cope living on their own for diverse reasons and need help.

The first Covid-19 lockdown felt very lonely to begin with. My son spent the day studying his A Levels, and my daughter doing her schoolwork. Both were transitioning during the first year of Covid; my daughter from primary to secondary school and my son from

secondary school to university. That was a peculiar experience for them as they missed out so much. But they actually did great, everything was so well organised. For example, my daughter needs routine, and her school ensured that a routine was followed. She had to be in front of the computer, wearing her uniform, from 8.45am to 3pm. "We had lots of parent-teacher meetings on Zoom and the teachers were brilliant. I am so thankful for that. Actually, her results went through the roof from Cs to As". As for my son, he has a very different character, "had a great set up in his room, did his own work and didn't need anything. He just came down for his food and never talked much about it". He is now a student in Computer Science at Queen's University Belfast.

"I felt very isolated during the first months of the pandemic. I was clinically classed as extremely vulnerable as I am asthmatic, so I couldn't get out. And this also affected my son, who was at the time working part-time at McDonalds and then he wouldn't be allowed to work anymore as he was living with me. So, we were all stuck in the house because of that. At that time, (XXX) kitchen, in Dundonald, were delivering meals to us."

At work, the communal lounge was closed, so the tenants in sheltered accommodation also felt extremely lonely. They couldn't get together anywhere, you see. And I would phone them everyday to see how they were getting on. And phone call after phone call it was all about how horrible life was for them! "It was too much for me, listening to this all the time. I was a shoulder to cry on, 36 tenants I was phoning everyday, including holidays, but I had no shoulders. I felt so exhausted". Thankfully, I went back to work in August 2020. My employers were brilliant, they paid my wages in full throughout the pandemic. I know so many people who lost their wages, that I feel very grateful to my employers.

What really saved me from the loneliness and sense of isolation was the neighbours in the street. First, we started a whatsapp group to help each other out. As there were very large queues at the supermarket, someone would just get the shopping done and buy multipacks. And it was like "I've got a bag full of oranges, anybody needs oranges? That is how I started building friendships with people I never knew, and this developed in a way that I had never imagined. I now feel we are all part of a big family. My children and I, we feel safe here, very secure. The pandemic made me really appreciate the value of building new friendships". You see, I didn't know people in the street before Covid. Just "hello".

"Then we started creating a collective garden in the alleyways. Starting the garden was amazing". You see, we have no gardens in our houses here. Then one of the neighbours said, as a joke, that she needed a garden for her disabled child. And then we made it happen. A lot of work still needs to be done, but we all now have a shared garden we can go to and sit down. We already had all sort of gatherings there: Bingo, Summer parties, Christmas Carols. That is a great positive effect from Covid, "so it was not all just putting our heads down". "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I felt very isolated during the first months of the pandemic.

I was clinically classed as extremely vulnerable as I am asthmatic, so I couldn't get out. And this also affected my son, who was at the time working part-time at McDonalds and then he wouldn't be allowed to work anymore as he was living with me. So, we were all stuck in the house because of that. At that time, (XXX) kitchen, in Dundonald, were delivering meals to us."

"It was too much for me, listening to this all the time. I was a shoulder to cry on, 36 tenants I was phoning everyday, including holidays, but I had no shoulders. I felt so exhausted".

"I've got a bag full of oranges, anybody needs oranges? That is how I started building friendships with people I never knew, and this developed in a way that I had never imagined. I now feel we are all part of a big family. My children and I, we feel safe here, very secure. The pandemic made me really appreciate the value of building new friendships".

"Then we started creating a collective garden in the alleyways. Starting the garden was amazing". "

**Keywords:** Divorced, children in education in transition years, loneliness, extremely vulnerable, caring for others, collective action, community building, finding new friendships

## IE06

**Title:** Patrick, an Irish 74-year-old retired man, feels challenged by travel restrictions, cocooning, and the lack of social contacts.

**Narrative:** " I am Patrick, I'm 74 years old and I live in the center of Dublin. My wife died nearly 9 years ago. I have travelled a lot since then. Travelling keeps me young and engaged in the world. The pandemic stalled this. I know it's annoying for young people not being able to travel but if you're held back at 18 or 19 you can go when you're 22. But you don't really have that chance when you're older. "I approached [the pandemic] with a very open mind. We're living through something very unique and unusual times, and the main thing is to get through it. So better to do what you are being asked to do". I had to cocoon for a while I think it was something everyone over 65 had to do at different times. This "put a halt to a lot of my social interaction and sense of discovery and sense of having something to do in the world in my retirement". When I didn't have to cocoon and could go to the supermarket again it was great that - "you didn't have to show a piece of paper to a police officer. Whereas if I'd been living in France or in Spain I would have had to." Compared to other countries the restrictions here weren't that bad. Some of my friends told me about restrictions being tougher in other countries. I remember the police in England going into parks and "separating people and being really heavy about it". We didn't experience that here which I think was good. I felt most people were "kept in line by an approach that was for the most part not heavy handed".

Not being able to greet people like I normally would was a challenge for me. “Even just shaking hands with somebody, suddenly that was gone. That whole sense of human contact which for me is a vital thing wasn’t allowed”. I am “a very tactile person” so not being able to hug was very difficult for me. During the pandemic I felt people were afraid of other people. I feel now we have lost that fear and I feel safe enough to connect with other people again. Connecting with people is very important to me. The pandemic halted that for me. My Italian neighbor, Elena organised for some of us in our apartment block to meet during the various lockdowns. We all sat apart from each other, but it gave us an opportunity to connect. Elena shopped for me when I was cocooning and when I had Covid.

I caught Covid travelling to England in October. I got free antigen tests when I was there, and I used them when I got home and started feeling sick. Then I called my doctor who put me in touch with the HSE [Health Service Executive]. A nice woman called me that evening and asked if I was mobile. I said I could cycle or get a bus, but she said they’d get me a taxi. So, they sent a taxi to bring me to the test center. I had the test in the taxi and then I was brought home again. “It was brilliant. My whole experience was very good”. I think it was great that the HSE [Health Service Executive] had it in their budget to bring people to the test center who lived alone or didn’t have a car. “Somebody was really thinking outside of the box”. They gave me a box of 50 masks which was great too. I think we should have been given free antigen tests in Ireland and that we should have been wearing masks sooner than we were.

I am vaccinated. Some of my friends aren’t but that’s their choice. I don’t understand it, but I accept it. I get annoyed with “anti vaxers who go out and cause problems demonstrating in the street. I just feel what the feck are they wasting everybody’s time for. If you don’t want to do it as a private individual – don’t, fine that’s your choice. But there are certain things that you should do just for everybody’s good. Like wear the mask if you’re going on public transport and obey some rules as common civility. It’s not a huge amount to ask.” We don’t need to have an antigovernment mentality just for the sake of it. I find that for some people being against the vaccine is “practically a religion”. I recently met a woman who was very against the vaccine and the government. I said to her you’re lucky to live in Ireland, where you have a choice about the vaccine and “you have the right to feel as you do. But I have the right to very strongly disagree with you.” By and large I don’t have any issues with the way the pandemic was handled. It didn’t have a long-lasting negative effect on me.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “I approached [the pandemic] with a very open mind. We’re living through something very unique and unusual, and the main thing is to get through it. So better to do what you are being asked to do”.

“Put a halt to a lot of my social interaction and sense of discovery and sense of having something to do in the world in my retirement”.

“Even just shaking hands with somebody suddenly that was gone. So that whole sense of human contact which for me is a vital thing wasn’t allowed”

“The problem with anti vaxers is its practically a religion. That’s what I’m finding.”

“Kept on side by an approach that was for the most part not heavy handed”.

“Anti vaxers who go out and cause problems demonstrating in the street. I just feel what

the fuck are they wasting everybody's time for. If you don't want to do it as a private individual - don't, fine that's your choice. But there are certain things that you should do just for everybody's good. Like wear the mask if you're going on public transport and obey some rules as common civility. It's not a huge amount to ask." "

**Keywords:** age, social connection, cocooning, travel restrictions, vaccine

IE07

**Title:** "Cian, a 63-year-old gay male with underlying health conditions overpowers isolation by establishing self-care plans for wellbeing".

**Narrative:** "My name is Cian, and I am 67 years old. At the beginning of the outbreak of the Covid 19, I was living alone on a family farm based in a rural area of a county in Ireland. My days were occupied with taking care of farm animals. But I had zero to no contact with other people during that period, which was terrible. It also does not align with my personality, as I used to do lots of participatory activities such as giving research presentations or arranging educational programs on diverse issues. Besides that, immediately before the outbreak of the pandemic, I lost my older sister to cancer. I was grief-stricken, and I was completely isolated for 6 months at the beginning of the pandemic. Being on my own is not a problem, also being alone is okay, but being lonely is a completely different thing altogether. "Overall, the pandemic exacerbated loneliness and isolation for me."

I am a survivor of a terminal illness (cancer) and a chronic illness (cardiovascular disease). I suffered a heart attack in December 2019. Due to the underlying health conditions, taking care of farm animals on a huge 45-acre farmland turned out to be heavily demanding for me. In addition to health issues, the sudden outbreak of Covid-19 and the restrictions made me feel that "my life is stuck on a farm which is heart-crushing".

As a retired health care professional, I started to realize that the lack of human contact and the lack of activities could have an impact on my health. So, I started to fill out my bucket list with several activities to utilize the lockdown time. Additionally, to combat the impact of isolation and loneliness, I began to learn new skills such as learning new languages, crocheting hats, and doing online courses on diverse topics such as medicinal plants, cooking, ecosystem aquarium, and shibori, which is a Japanese form of tie-dying. I also started to incorporate Indian spices and herbs for healing purposes as ayurvedic medicines. I also made a few watercolor paintings. I used the pandemic time to keep myself busy and stimulated, and I thought that this was the best way to deal with this situation. However, even though my brain was occupied, psychologically I was in a grieving period.

"I want to emphasize the fact that I was 63 years old gay male living alone and isolated in rural Ireland, without having any contact with anyone from my own community".

During the lockdown, due to the detachment from my own community, I started to have depression. So, I have decided to move from a rural area to the city. All the process of moving out from the rural area to the city amid the pandemic kept me busy for a while. After settling down, I started to look for the LGBTQ+ community based in my area. I found one LGBTQ+ civil society organization which was providing support to its members and helped them to deal with the isolation during pandemic. So, I started to work with them voluntarily to raise awareness around the issues related to the LGBTQ+ community. I can say with satisfaction that I blossomed a beautiful year of raising awareness by giving online presentations on some relevant issues such as community support for LGBTQ+ people in rural areas, detachment, and isolation from and within the community due to ageing. That virtual peer support group and the virtual awareness-raising campaign helped me a lot to address challenges faced by older LGBTQ+ people, for example by setting up a helpline for older LGBTQ+ members.

I was happy to take part in all these initiatives as I could help people who were in a situation comparable to where I was before. I think moving to a big city from a rural area, and involvement with the virtual LGBTQ+ community had an incredibly positive impact on my life. I could see the impact of mental health and of wellbeing on physical health. This led me to uptake cognitive behaviour online courses. I believe that, with the support of LGBTQ+ civil society organizations, educative events can make an impact. I am happy that I was involved in such initiatives. All this involvement was a self-care tool to combat isolation and loneliness during lockdowns.

I also feel accomplished because I am trying to make an impact by addressing the stigma and bullying, which have been exaggerated after the outbreak of Covid-19. I witnessed discrimination towards older LGBTQ+ people within the community as well as in the broader society which fetishizes older members of the community. "Especially, 60+ older LGBTQ+ members are often designated as a redundant gay within the community". This creates a division among LGBTQ+ members. "I think there should be more socializing and educative events other than the pride day to bring the community together for a cohesion in these challenging times." From my experience of organizing social events, I observed a difficulty to represent the rural aspect of the LGBTQ+ community. Campaigns by "LGBTQ+ related civil society organizations" need to address social and cultural issues around the LGBTQ+ community as this pandemic exacerbated them. I feel that LGBTQ+ community members should be self-driven to step up and deal with gender-based violence and isolation by utilizing community resources, the way I made it happen for myself. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Overall, the pandemic exacerbated loneliness and isolation for me"

"Being on my own is not a problem, also being alone is okay, but being lonely is a completely different thing altogether."

"I want to emphasize the fact that I'm a 63-year-old gay male living alone and isolated in rural Ireland without having any contact with anyone from my own community."

"Especially the 60+, older LGBTQ+ members, are often designated as a redundant gay

within the community”

“I think there should be more socializing and educative events other than the pride day to bring the community together for cohesion in these challenging times”

“There is a difficulty to bring the rural aspect of the LGBTQ+ community.” ”

**Keywords:** LGBTQ+ community, isolation, self-care, aging, rural areas, marginalization, activism

**IE08**

**Title:** Tumi, who has underlying health conditions, would like a hybrid work which would allow her to interact with her colleagues

**Narrative:** “My name is Tumi and came to Ireland in 1999 along with my husband and daughter. I have been working as a librarian since 2001. My husband passed away in 2008 and my 22 years old daughter is now studying at a university. I have lived with my sister since 2001 and I have a niece. I am happy to share that I am doing a PhD and I am currently employed in Dublin.

Because of the pandemic, and because of my underlying health conditions, I have been working from home since March 2020. Honestly, I cannot say that I do not like it, although it is restraining me from adequate physical movement. Additionally, I am more focused at work now, in comparison to the in-person work, as there were always some distracting interactions in the workplace. Diverse interactions at in-person work used to keep me away from my tasks, such as solving problems for students and colleagues, or liaising with other departments at the workplace. But losing the “in-person contact” with colleagues and being unable to exchange ideas with coworkers is also annoying. “Sometimes, I feel that I have been forgotten”. I am the only one who could not go back to work due to health concerns. Sometimes my colleagues change something and implement those changes without discussing it with me. So, I am lagging and always playing with a catch up, which is a bit annoying. But it is not their fault either as I am not physically present over there. “I feel like I’m out of the loop”.

Professionally, I went through a tough time when, due to the pandemic, everything shifted to the virtual platform. Every department needed to adjust to the changes but for the library section it was much more difficult. I used to manage a team, and there was a shift in the organizational design of that team due to lockdown. Unfortunately, I could not contribute at that time because of my health condition and the restrictions imposed on me. Not being able to be there in person and to reassure my team during the transition phase made me feel helpless.

I am a very adaptable person with high resilience skills, but the second lockdown made me feel down at some point. Even though I am not a very social person, I wanted to go outside for a walk but the tension of maintaining social distancing rules made me feel

overwhelmed.

Regarding returning to work when the Covid restrictions were lifted, I felt frustrated because I could not go back to the in-person work due to the restrictions imposed on me by both my doctors and my employers. I wanted to go back to my workplace even once a week. I feel that I have lost a sense of control in my life due to my health issues. I would feel much better if I could decide myself whether I wanted to return to the in-person work. I know I am at considerable risk of getting the virus but, on the other hand, it is healthy to be outside for a while, and it has been years now.

Initially, the work policy related to Covid-19 was all over the place because of that sudden announcement of lockdown. At that moment everyone is allowed to work from home except the library department. I felt annoyed because people who are working at the library now are more exposed to health risks in comparison to the other employees. I think that, from an organizational perspective, there should be more options to incorporate formal hybrid work so that people like me, who could not go back to work, do not feel out of the loop. I do not know how it would work for librarians, but it is also unfair when other professionals are availing themselves of such opportunities.

"On a positive note, my bonding and my relationship with my family members both here in Ireland and in my home country became stronger during the lockdown period." I never felt genuinely isolated or lonely. I was also involved in an online drama club, and we did all our rehearsals virtually. So, regarding my personal life, I did not feel isolated at all. But I also do not want to be accustomed to such a lifestyle for a long time. However, the work policy regarding Covid-19 also helped me. I had been diagnosed with a chronic illness after the outbreak of Covid-19. Due to the nature of Covid-19 work policy, I was able to work from home instead of taking sick leave. This was financially beneficial for me, and I feel grateful for that. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I feel like I'm out of the loop."

"Sometimes, I feel that I have been forgotten".

"On a positive note, my bonding and my relationship with family members both here in Ireland and my home country became stronger during their lockdown period"

**Keywords:** Remote work, hybrid work, in-person work, work-life balance, underlying health conditions, Covid-19 restrictions

IE09

**Title:** Orla, a retired schoolteacher shares an optimistic story of overcoming the fear of Covid-19 with the support of her family and her community

**Narrative:** "I am Orla, a retired schoolteacher, turning 67 now. In early February 2020, while travelling to London to meet my son, I heard the news about a new virus. People

were very cautious, but I was reassuring myself by saying that this virus won't spread in Ireland. But exactly after one month, in March, we got the news about the new virus here. Just before Saint Patrick's Day, we got the announcement of a lockdown which imposed restrictions on travel beyond 2 kilometers. But the nearest grocery shop for me was around 3 kilometers away. So, I was a bit concerned and I considered going to the grocery shop once every 10 days. At that time, I was living alone as my son was doing a PhD in London. But then my son came back from London and he was working from home.

One of my friends told me that "I was one of the very luckiest ones as I was not on my own during the lockdowns." Besides that, I was not over 70 years old, so didn't need to cocoon. I felt sorry for some of the neighbours who were living on their own and who were in their 70s, with underlying health conditions. I was trying to help them by dropping my phone number in their letterbox asking if they wanted me to pick up anything from the grocery shop.

During the first lockdown, people were accustomed to walking a lot. Also, the weather was lovely because it was summertime. I love gardening and there was a shop that used to sell gas and diesel, but later they started to sell garden plants and fresh poultry to help people around here. So, I used to go there to buy plants, or if I ran out of milk or meat. I like the way everyone came forward to support each other at the community level.

But "the way the media was broadcasting news regarding the Covid-19 virus and deaths that was spreading a dreadful negativity. That made me feel helpless". Especially the images and news from Italy: the way hospitals turned into morgues and the way the coffins were lined up, that made me feel frightened. One day, I was on my way back walking from the grocery shop, and the road was very quiet. I think I had a hallucination as I saw an image of a coffin that was sort of wrapped up. It was one of the lowest days at that time when there was no information on where we were heading.

When the restriction lifted from 2 km to 5 km, I went to meet my sister for her birthday. We sat on a wall with a flask of tea, scones and we maintained the two meters distance. Later, after the travel restrictions were lifted, we went to my brother's house to celebrate his 70th birthday. One of the saddest moments I can remember was when my friend died, and we could not even see her. Her coffin was outside of the church and people could not attend the funeral. I don't know how the family felt but I wanted to meet them, I wanted to talk to them, but Covid made it difficult. That was a difficult situation.

There was one funny situation too when my other son came back from London. There were restrictions due to the Covid-19 situation in London and he could not travel with me in my car from Dublin airport. So, I decided to leave the car outside of the airport and took a bus from Dublin to my county. It was a bit of a funny and adventurous situation, but I had to do this due to the restrictions. I think what I did was the right thing because we needed to be careful, and we needed to have this kind of awareness about

our responsibility towards others.

I found the second lockdown a bit longer, but we were much more prepared in comparison to the first lockdown. I was not afraid as an older female because my sons were here. I am on my own now, but I am lucky to have a dog. He is my shield now.

I am so glad that I am retired because otherwise I would have to have more social interactions. I spared all the technology-related challenges during the first lockdown. Then during the second lockdown, I decided to learn new ways of communicating. Thus, I got involved with online groups for interactive activities where I got to meet lots of people and I learnt how to use technology for communication.

However, Covid has not gone away. I think that Covid made some people fearful, and we don't know how long it would take to vanish away. I felt those ways of self-isolation seemed like a self-imposed prison. "I feel those imposed rules of lockdown made people more fearful not because of Covid but rather more about breaking the rules. It became more severe on elder people." "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "The way the media was broadcasting news regarding the covid 19 virus and deaths, that was spreading dreadful negativity. That made me feel helpless".

"I feel those imposed rules of lockdown made people more fearful not because of Covid but rather more about breaking the rules. It became more severe on elder people." "

**Keywords:** community support, family support, travel restrictions, self-care, isolation, media representation of Covid-19

**IE10**

**Title:** Covid-19 restrictions, working part-time, studying, and balancing childcare, impacted the respondents' mental health. She parents alone and initially struggled after leaving the direct provision centre (direct provision refers to the accommodation, food, money, and medical services people receive in Ireland while seeking asylum). She had lived in since coming to Ireland. Her son struggles in social situations due to limited socialisation and interaction opportunities during the pandemic. Gender, race, and nationality are visible intersections in this narrative.

**Narrative:** "My name is Gerri, I'm 35. I've lived in Ireland since 2018 after moving here from Southern Africa. Life was difficult in my home country. I heard Ireland is a good place to move to, so I came here. When I arrived the reception centre was full, so I was brought to a centre in West Dublin. I made a lot of friends there. They've helped me a lot especially since I had my son Lorcan. He's 2 now, it's just him and me. I got pregnant shortly after arriving in Ireland, which was unexpected. My pregnancy was tough

emotionally, trying to get my head around having a baby on my own.

“Things were fine until Covid. Covid ruined everything”- getting my residency papers and housing assistance took a long time because of it. When I got my papers, I could apply for a house. But “the council took about 6 months to approve my housing application. Normally it would take about 8 weeks but because of the pandemic it took nearly 6 months”. That was all stressful. “My mental health was bad during Covid. I thought I was going to go crazy because there was so much going on. At some point you get frustrated - you’re going to college; you just got your papers, and you have a baby.” Before the pandemic “things were much easier, there was better support.” I had so much to deal with during Covid, since moving to Ireland I’ve had a lot to deal with. I found it difficult emotionally to leave the hostel, I went into “shock, I was thinking - I have to be in college, and I have no one to take care of Lorcan. Those fears actually made me cling” to the center because “people were willing to help” there. After moving I kept going back because I was very lonely in the apartment. I used to leave Lorcan in the centre with friends while I went to college.

I am in my second year of a business diploma, my apartment is near where I study so that’s handy. Initially, I didn’t want to take this apartment because it’s on the 6th floor and there’s nowhere for Lorcan to play. But Mary in the Irish Refugee Council said I’d be silly not to because there are so many people waiting for houses. She helped me to get my papers and to find my apartment. The management in the centre helped me too.

When I started college, classes were online because of Covid. “In a way that turned out great for me because I couldn’t find a creche for Lorcan.” Because I didn’t have childcare, “I would wake up and do my classes. When he’d wake up, I’d make him something to eat, turn on the TV for him and do my classes for the rest of the day.” If Lorcan was crying, I’d have to leave class early. When he did start going to creche that was hard too because he kept getting sick from the other kids. Another thing was he’s not used to playing with other children because of all the lockdowns and he was biting kids. After a few complaints they said he couldn’t go to their creche anymore. It took a while, but I found another creche. I only bring him for a few hours not a full day because he’d get frustrated and fight with the other children. He has a lot of problems “socially connecting and he was a bit slower walking and he’s not talking yet.”

Having a baby on my own was tough enough and then Covid happened. I couldn’t go to the mother and baby classes I’d signed up for. We did some stuff online but it wasn’t the same - no emotional connection. Lorcan and me both missed out. “Normally he’d be meeting other children for his social development, but he’s been in the house only with me. We have a 33-year age difference, so we don’t really have much in common! He should be playing. I don’t enjoy playing and with me having no clue what to do with a baby, it makes it difficult for me and for him. I think Covid had a huge impact on social skills in children and in adults as well. I could be out there interacting with other Moms getting tips, seeing other people really helps.”

I worked part-time as a care assistant during Covid. I want the best for my baby. To get the best out of life you need to work hard. I do agency work now in a care home. I prefer nightshifts because the person minding Lorcan has less to do because he's asleep. I work "12-hour shifts and then I come back and take Lorcan to creche and then I go to college. Sometimes I sleep on my break at work and then probably an hour or 2 before I go to work." Thankfully, I finish college in April! I'm thinking about going on to get my degree though. I have made peace with the fact that Lorcan's dad is not really part of his life, college is going well, we have a nice place to live, and things are getting back to normal what can you do but keep going! "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Things were fine until Covid. Covid ruined everything".

"My mental health was bad during Covid I thought I was going to go crazy because there was so much going on at some point you just get frustrated - you're going to college; you just got your papers and you have a baby."

"I would wake up and do my classes. When he'd wake up I'd make him something to eat, turn on the TV for him and do my classes for the rest of the day".

"Normally he'd be meeting other children for his social development, but he's been in the house with only myself. We have a 33-year age difference so we don't really have much in common! He should be playing. I don't really enjoy playing and with me having no clue what to do with a baby it makes it difficult for me and for him. I think Covid really had a huge impact on social skills in children and in adults as well. I could be out there interacting with other Moms getting tips, seeing other people really helps." "

**Keywords:** mental health, direct provision, residency, single parent, restrictions

**IE11**

**Title:** 49-year old disabled carer struggles throughout the pandemic to find a new daycare centre for his older brother, who has learning disabilities.

**Narrative:** "My name is Grainne. I am 49 years old, and I am a wheelchair user. I have a house in the city but live between this house and my parents' house in the countryside. I am the primary carer of my older brother who has a learning disability. I share the care with one of my sisters, so I spent half of my time in the country house with him. Both my parents are dead. I have another sister who lives in the city and is the mother of two, a baby and a toddler.

I have very good memories of the first lockdown as the whole family gathered at our parents' house. We were there together for a few months- my two sisters, my brother, brother-in law, niece and nephews. The weather that spring was splendid; we were outside in the garden most of the time, and as one of my sisters is a great cook, she was

preparing good food every day for the whole family, while I played with my wee nephew.

“When the first lockdown started, my main concern was for my older brother who has a learning disability and goes daily to a daycare centre”. He came back one day and said that day members were excluded in order to protect the residents. And I thought, oh my goodness, that is going to be a problem, my brother is going to be heartbroken, because he absolutely adores that centre. I was very worried about him and also about how we were going to manage him and his expectations. He is autistic, doesn’t read books and is not on social media. So his only interaction is with the people at the daycare centre, and with us. I wondered how we were going to entertain him and how all this was going to impact on the rest of the family.

After the first lockdown restrictions were lifted during the summer, things moved on. My brother-in-law had to go back to the city to work. Come July, and I was getting paler and paler, didn’t have any energy at all. My sisters said, “you need to get your bloods checked” - because, you know, “I suffer from chronic anemia”- but I of course ignored them. “I didn’t want to go to the GP or to the nurses in the middle of a pandemic”. When I finally decided to go to the GP - in August- “my hemoglobin levels were so shockingly low that I was told to go straight to hospital”. So, one of my sisters dropped me at A&E (Accident & Emergency) and from there I was immediately transferred to a ward. I had two transfusions and “was released early as they were very careful about not keeping you for too long in the hospital”. I returned home I even felt worse afterwards. That went on for about 6 weeks. On hindsight, I realise that during those first few months of Covid I was very low on iron, and that “if it wasn’t for Covid restrictions, I would have had my bloods checked much earlier”.

When my health improved, what sustained me during the whole covid-19 period was the interactions with friends through social media- whatsapp mainly. That was a great way to stay connected. “I felt even more connected than before the pandemic because we were all making an effort to communicate”.

Covid affected me mostly in my role as a carer. When my brother was excluded from the daycare centre, we were trying to reassure him, saying he would be able to return after Easter, then after the summer, then after Christmas. But that never happened. “When we were coming out of the pandemic, other institutions were opening up but these opportunities were not opening up for him”. I appreciate that the centre is peculiar in that there are full-time residents there that needed to be protected. But “the authorities, especially the local health board, could have done a lot more for my brother. I was so upset”. I talked to the social workers, who were good, but the line managers were awful. “I wrote a letter to the health board, and another to our local MP (member of parliament), but no response”. The social workers were trying to get him to another daycare centre in another village that is very close to us, but the board suggested moving him to a daycare centre that is much further away. “The local board was putting obstacles all the way”. We appealed that decision, and at the end he was transferred to the daycare centre that is close to us. I took him over to view it, and surprisingly he was very ok with

it. I put it to him like it was a good “promotion”. My brother finds it so hard to adjust to new routines (he was going to the old daycare centre for 25 years) but he was able to adjust so well to the new one. Which is brilliant!”

**Specifically telling quotes:** “When the first lockdown started, my main concern was for my older brother who has a learning disability and goes daily to a daycare centre”.

“I suffer from chronic anemia (...) - but I didn’t want to go to the GP or to the nurses in the middle of a pandemic. When I finally decided to go to the GP (...) my hemoglobin levels were so shockingly low that I was told to go straight to hospital”

“If it wasn’t for Covid restrictions, I would have had my bloods checked much earlier”.

“When we were coming out of the pandemic, other institutions were opening up but these opportunities were not opening up for him”

“The authorities, especially the local health board, could have done a lot more for my brother. I was so upset”

“The local board was putting obstacles all the way”. ”

**Keywords:** Disability, care, family, illness, Daycare, bureaucracy



## Iceland

### IS01

**Title:** 67 years old woman working as a physiotherapist at the children's hospital

**Narrative:** "I'm a 67 year old woman and have been working as a physiotherapist for children for over 40 years. I'm currently working at the children's hospital. I'm married with two grown sons and two grandchildren. I'm interested in outdoors activities and dancing. I go dancing three times a week and it matters a lot for me.

My job wasn't that affected by the pandemic in that sense that the structure of my work did not change. The nature of the job did however change a lot, I'm mostly working with younger children and for the last two years I've had to wear a mask everyday at work and that has made my job more difficult. I'm training a lot of children who do not talk and not being able to use full facial expressions (because of the mask) has limited their training and potential. The pandemic has also limited all communication. All meetings were online so I never got to meet my coworkers face to face. I still had relatively good access to the people and resources because everyone came to work everyday. Only one parent was allowed to enter the hospital with the child at a time. When I was working on a diagnosis process for a child, I found it harsh and not right that only one parent could be present. It is important for the quality of the work that both parents are present and especially when delivering bad news, it should not fall on the parent that was present to tell the other one the bad news.

Looking back the covid period has been both challenging but also in a way a resting and a calm period. The hospital and my work were very hectic before the pandemic with many severe cases and surgeries. After covid hit, we were instructed to keep the outpatient department at a minimum so the ward could focus on covid patients. There were fewer infections and all non-emergency operations were put on hold.

I personally have not experienced fear of catching covid, even though I have an underlying disease and have been around covid infected patients at work. I would say that in the beginning I was afraid of what was going to happen but ever since receiving a vaccination my fears have gone away. I always make sure that I'm wearing a mask and I'm constantly washing my hands and using sanitizer. Wearing a mask for eight hours straight five days a week has had its effect, I've noticed that my asthma has been worse and my voice is constantly hoarse. I would say the only time I experienced fear was regarding my 90 year old mother. We were all very afraid that she would catch the illness and tried to be extra careful around her. But now she has been vaccinated and isn't afraid of getting covid so everyone else is more at ease.

In my opinion Icelanders have bought way too much vaccine and are being too greedy with it. I have been vaccinated twice and I consider myself fully vaccinated. When the time came to accept the third dose, I declined and I wanted my dose to be given to other

countries that need them more than we do. I think it's ridiculous that we are vaccinating everyone here two three times when e.g. the people in Africa can't even get their hands on the vaccine. We are by this risking that the virus spreads throughout the world and then arriving here again and again. It is established by WHO (World health organization) that everyone on this planet should be vaccinated to counteract (stemma stigu við) the virus. Otherwise we run the risk of getting mutated varieties, like the flu. The Icelandic government sent to Africa some left over vaccine that was most likely was about to expire and that is so typical for Icelanders, only helping when something is going to be wasted either way.

When then restrictions here in Iceland were the strictest my dance studio shut down. Then I felt a big difference in my well-being and mood. What exercise does for me is that it keeps me "above the surface", both physically and mentally. I tried dancing and doing exercises at home but it wasn't the same. I was knocking down furniture and hurting myself that way. Being around other people dancing is inspiring for me so I really missed that. I also felt that my job was harder to manage when the dance studio was closed. Covid has prevented me from visiting my family that lives abroad. I went to visit them in February 2020, a month before everything happened in Iceland, and I've only seen them once since then. That's what has weighed the most in all of this for me."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "for the last two years I've had to wear a mask every day at work and that has made my job more difficult. I 'm training a lot of children who do not talk and not being able to use full facial expressions has limited their training and potential".

"When I was working on a diagnosis process for a child, I found it harsh and not right that only one parent could be present. It is important for the quality of the work that both parents are present and especially when delivering bad news, it should not fall on the parent that was present to tell the other one the bad news"."

**Keywords:** Work, health care, workloads, working conditions, mental load, distress, privileges, family overseas, social isolation, travel.

**IS02**

**Title:** 25 years old man studying at the University of Iceland

**Narrative:** "I'm a 25 year old man. I'm studying to become a preschool teacher at the University of Iceland and alongside my studies working at a kindergarten. I've been a full-time student and worked a 50% job for the past three years. I live with my girlfriend who is also studying at the University and together we are renting a student flat. We started living together right before covid hit.

The covid pandemic has hugely affected our studies. For me I had only been studying

for half a year when the pandemic started. The first half year of my studies was great, I met so many new people and really liked the university atmosphere. Then when covid hit everything shut down and we were not allowed to enter the faculty building and of course every social event was cancelled. Then online teaching began and that has in my opinion been problematic and really put a damp on my education. I found it much more difficult to focus and to study at home. We were at that time living in a small and dark apartment and had nowhere else to go (to study e.g.). In the beginning of my studies, I managed to treat it like work; I always showed up to every class and after class I studied at the school building. After covid started, things changed a lot in that regard and I felt I became a lot more stressed towards my studies, feeling overwhelmed to always be at home and trying to study there (with so many distractions at home). The teachers seemed to be reluctant to make courses available online and there were always some technical issues with the online teaching. It was hard for me to be motivated to wake up in the morning and open the computer to see the teacher and all the other students on the screen. It felt as if they were all staring at me and it made me feel extremely uncomfortable. It also felt as a minor invasion of my privacy because everyone could see into my apartment and the way I was living.

There was also this constant fear of catching the virus which didn't help with my studies. At one point it got so bad that I seriously thought about just giving up and quitting. I feel that the whole experience of being a university student was taken away from me, we were both kind of robbed of that experience.

Covid has hugely affected my social life. I didn't see the point in trying to get to know my fellow students because every social event got cancelled. I was a part of the previous student council and we were trying to organise some sort of events for the students but we ended up giving all the money we had raised to the current student council because we didn't get to throw one single event. Me and my close group of friends meet today almost exclusively online and we have been doing that ever since the beginning of covid. I've felt my mental health declining throughout the pandemic. Reading about covid and how it doesn't seem to end has seriously affected me in a bad way. I miss meeting people and travelling.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "After covid started, things changed a lot in that regard and I felt I became a lot more stressed towards my studies, feeling overwhelmed to always be at home and trying to study there."

"It felt as if they were all staring at me and it made me feel extremely uncomfortable. It also felt as a minor invasion of my privacy because everyone could see into my apartment and the way I was living"

"At one point it got so bad that I seriously thought about just giving up and quitting"

"I've felt my mental health declining throughout the pandemic."

**Keywords:** Student, education, university, performance, mental health, youth, social isolation

IS03

**Title:** 25 years old man working at a kindergarten.

**Narrative:** "I'm a 25 year old man. I'm studying to become a preschool teacher at the University of Iceland and alongside my studies working at a kindergarten. I've been a full-time student and I have been working 50% the past three years. I live with my girlfriend who is also studying at the University and together we are renting a student flat. We started living together right before covid hit. I have been working both full-time and part time at a kindergarten for over five years now. I decided to become a preschool teacher because I'm very interested in the job. I used to love my job but ever since covid started things have been getting more difficult. My girlfriend for example lost her job due to covid and has been going forth and back with various jobs. The kindergarten where I work is relatively big, which means that someone, either a staff member or a child, is constantly going in and out of quarantine or isolation. This poses a lot of difficulties in running the kindergarten and keeping it open with so many staff members away and a general shortage of staff. For example, one section hasn't been fully staffed for more than a year. The parents were also not allowed inside the building which resulted in a lack of communication and the parents being dissatisfied with the situation. I find myself arguing more and more with parents who don't seem to understand the situation or the rules that we have to fulfil in order to keep the kindergarten open and functioning.

Kindergartens are heavily affected by the state of the labour market. When there is prosperity there is a shortage of staff in the kindergarten and vice versa, when there is a recession there is no shortage of staff. So, in the beginning of the pandemic when so many people lost their jobs things were looking good at my kindergarten and we could easily manage the situation. But as time went by we began to experience the opposite, some of the staff, especially those who were not trained preschool teachers and students, went on to other jobs and others went on sick leave. Another trend I noticed is that so many of my colleagues have gone on sick leave, not just with covid but mainly from long term strain and workload. This results in closing down some of the sections of the kindergarten. In order to refrain from the same section being shut down the staff has to alternate between wards. This in my opinion is both bad for the children and the staff since this creates more chaos and instability. I've even heard some of my colleagues discussing that they almost hope that they have to quarantine in order to get a break.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "A trend I noticed is that so many of my colleagues have gone on sick leave, not just with covid but mainly from long term strain and workload"

"I've heard some of my colleagues discussing that they almost hope that they have to quarantine in order to get a break". "

**Keywords:** Gendered labour marked, low paid jobs, kindergartens, wellbeing,

overwork, stress, strain, health risk, exposure to covid-19, children.

**IS04**

**Title:** 18 year old girl soon to finish high school

**Narrative:** "I'm an 18-year-old woman, a high school student and I will be graduating this spring. I live at home with my parents and three younger siblings. I've recently started working part-time at a kindergarten. I got the job in January and right before my first day, I got covid as well as my whole family. I was the one among my family members that felt all the worst symptoms and I got quite sick. I thought that was strange because I've been vaccinated and I don't have any underlying diseases. I had received two doses of vaccine and was planning on getting the third one when I got sick. But I've recovered and now I feel good.

I started high school in the fall of 2019. I managed to experience one semester where everything was normal and then the pandemic started. And now that I'm graduating I'm kind of sad that the experience wasn't as I imagined it to be. I know that I could have gotten to know a lot more people and more intimately if things had been normal. I cannot imagine what this high school experience could have been if not for covid.

I love being around people, sewing clothes and I am interested in fashion. Me and my friends started this sewing committee in school where everyone is invited to come and learn how to sew and mend their clothes. I'm also part of my school entertainment committee but there hasn't been much to organise there. We have had one ball in the last two years. We were always planning something but then the rules always changed, and we had to cancel. I've mainly had to organise my social life myself since there haven't been any events happening.

Looking back, the covid pandemic has both had a positive and negative impact on my life. The main positive thing is that I got to know myself better and learned how to be alone. Overall, I managed well being alone, even though I thought it was difficult as well. I love being around people so in the beginning of 2020 I struggled with being forced to almost isolate myself from everyone. People were so afraid in the beginning and I had to choose five people to be around. My two last birthdays have been weird. When I turned 17 years old, I could only invite five people and when I turned 18 years old we were allowed to be ten people in the same room. At first, I found that all this ruined a lot for me and I developed some social anxiety which is both new and strange for me because I've never considered myself to be an anxious person. I found it difficult to be completely isolated and taken away from people and when things started to feel normal again, I thought it was difficult to reach out to people around me. Friendships did not develop normally during this time, especially those friendships I made in the beginning of my high school duration. So yes, the situation really affected my mental health.

During this time there wasn't a lot to be excited for. I only had my studies to attend to, nothing besides that. I was used to studying on the weekdays and then I always had the weekend to look forward to doing something fun as a reward for studying hard. That was not the case during covid and then everything started to feel kind of pointless and boring. It was also hard to stay at home and study there. The hopelessness of this whole thing was also hard in that sense that I was always hoping that things would get better and then the opposite happened. I felt a lot of chaos in regards to my school and could never foresee how things would be planned. As a result, I lost a lot of ambition towards my studies.

I would never have chosen to do high school remotely, but I was forced to. If I would have known how things turned out I would have taken a year or two off and then returned to finish school in a normal way. I was always thinking that if things aren't back to normal in 6 months I'm quitting and making other plans but it never came to that.

There was a lot of stress and confusion in the beginning about who I was allowed to meet and be around. The first school group infection was at my school. There was even news published online about how contagious and fast the infections spread around the school. Then we were forced to attend and everyone got upset about it. The most stressful thing for me was the thought that I could infect someone, especially older people. I felt I had more responsibility towards others than myself. I once went voluntarily into quarantine with my then eight-year-old sister and took care of her for a few days. My parents made sure we had food and everything but they couldn't quarantine with her so I decided to step in. This was mainly because she, out of all of us in the family, is the one who has had to quarantine the most and had once done it all by herself and couldn't imagine doing it again. She is so excited to get the vaccine to go back to normal life. It wasn't difficult for me to stay with her but I felt the responsibility. I'm worried about the long-term effect on the lives and upbringing of the younger generations.

When I fell ill with covid, the study counsellor and the school's psychologist contacted me to check on me. That was a nice gesture but what annoyed me was that I was expected to not miss out on anything but learn everything online at home. I found that both hard and unfair since I got pretty sick. I got the reaction that no one was that sick now of omicron and i.e. I should follow along with the curriculum.

As time went on, I adapted and now I feel better. The situation has taught me a lot and I think everyone has benefited from being forced to get to know themselves better. I also started keeping a journal and that has helped me a lot. I would say that I have become great at managing expectations as a result of the last couple of years. Now I don't necessarily expect everything to work out or go according to plan but when it does I'm so grateful. I'm generally more grateful after the pandemic, both for my family and for being able to go to school now. I can appreciate smaller and mundane things. I'm looking forward to the future and I am for example going with my classmates on a graduation trip this summer (if covid allows) and we will be the first class in two years to go on such a trip.

**Specifically telling quotes:** " I developed social anxiety which is both new and strange for me because I've never considered myself to be an anxious person".

"I found it difficult to be completely isolated and taken away from people and when things started to feel normal again, I thought it was difficult to reach out to people around me. Friendships did not develop normally during this time, especially those friendships I made in the beginning of my high school duration".

" I felt a lot of chaos in regards to my school and could never foresee how things would be planned. As a result, I lost a lot of ambition towards my studies".

"I would never have chosen to do high school remotely, but I was forced to. If I would have known how things turned out I would have taken a year or two off and then returned to finish school in a normal way".

"I was expected to not miss out on anything when I was sick with covid but learn everything online at home. I found that both hard and unfair since I got pretty sick. I got the reaction that no one was that sick now of omicron and i.e. I should follow along with the curriculum".

" I have become great at managing expectations as a result of the last couple of years. Now I don't necessarily expect everything to work out or go according to plan but when it does I'm so grateful"."

**Keywords:** Student, education, high school, performance, ambition, mental health, youth, social isolation, social anxiety, expectations, family

**IS05**

**Title:** 37 years old male migrant working as a elementary teacher

**Narrative:** "I'm 37 years old and I come from Denmark so I'm an immigrant living in Iceland. I'm a teacher and a father and I live with my girlfriend and our three children. I teach languages (Danish and English) to 10, 11- and 12-years old children as well as supervising one whole class. Most of my spare time is spent on my children since they are all still young. I love cooking and music, but I don't spend a lot of time on my hobbies due to family obligations. I migrated to Iceland in 2014 with my girlfriend. I understood a little bit of Icelandic back then but to this day I'm still learning and always thinking about ways to get better at the language. I wanted to take more classes to advance my knowledge in Icelandic but due to Covid there aren't any courses available, only online and I prefer to attend classes in person. Because I'm already speaking a lot of Icelandic it would benefit me more to get a more personalised Icelandic education and I don't think online teaching is suitable for that. When covid is over I'm going to attend an Icelandic course.

Covid has mainly affected my life in three ways. Firstly, it's been hard travelling to and from Iceland resulting in me not being able to visit my family in Denmark as often as I would like to have. I've seen my Danish friends and family less than the years before the

pandemic. Thank God for smartphones because I've been using that technology a lot to communicate with them but it's not the same as meeting up in person. Before covid I would go maybe twice a year back home and my Danish family would come up here to visit and that made it easier to be away from home. Last summer I was finally able to go and visit them but I could only go alone since I was the only one in my family vaccinated.

Secondly, our Icelandic family is relatively small in that my girlfriend only has an aunt and her family around. Therefore, we haven't seen them during the past few years a lot since we don't belong in their inner circle (meaning that they are all meeting up but we are not included in that bubble). The same goes for our friends, we have a good and strong relationship with a group of friends but we lost touch. We knew having young children would change our relationship with friends but we expected it to only take a short time, not two years! This group of friends has always been close and always helping with this and that and this support completely disappeared in covid time. It was hard to lose that close and solid connection.

Thirdly I'm looking forward to not having to overthink and over analyse every little detail of my day to day life when this all is finally over. There's so much mental energy that goes into planning every possible scenario and catching every little thing in order to not get exposed or sick. It's been both annoying and exhausting to be constantly alert and on the lookout for the virus.

Regarding my job the rules have changed much during this covid time. I consider myself lucky that neither me nor any of my students have fallen ill. The school actually closed at the beginning of the epidemic due to infection and all teachers went into quarantine. In the beginning, there was a great deal of information chaos and a great deal of uncertainty about what should and could be done. I thought a lot about how I should teach and what should be done and what not. So much was unclear and a lot to find out and fear. I had a comparison from Denmark where all the schools were closed. Then I started to think a lot about which country had it right and which way was better. I found it difficult to follow all the rules, to make sure that you did not become infected yourself and at the same time to offer good teaching and to ensure the safety of the children, all at the same time. Teachers have been one of the main professions most exposed and vulnerable to infections. For teachers, it wasn't an option to show up for work, they were supposed to show up according to the authorities without knowing what consequences it could have. What did teachers sacrifice with that? I also noticed that the rules had a great impact on the children, such as e.g. not being able to hug others or get close to their teachers. This has had a bad effect as a result, especially on the children who are more sensitive or weaker in some sense. Lately, things have gone better after the rules were expanded, so that daily work is more or less back to normal.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I wanted to take more classes to advance my knowledge in Icelandic but due to Covid there aren't any courses available, only online and I prefer to attend classes in person. Because I'm already speaking Icelandic it would benefit me more to get a more personalised"

"it's been hard travelling to and from Iceland resulting in me not being able to visit my family in Denmark as often as I would like to have".

" I'm looking forward to not having to overthink and over analyse every little detail of my day to day life when this all is finally over. There's so much mental energy that goes into planning every possible scenario and catching every little thing in order to not get exposed or sick". "

**Keywords:** Migrant, small family network, family overseas, care work, gendered labour marked, primary school, travel, social isolation, mental health, information chaos, exposure to covid-19, children

**IS06**

**Title:** 34 year old queer woman working full time as a dentist

**Narrative:** "I'm a 34-year-old woman working full time as a dentist. I live with my girlfriend and we have a dog together. A typical day is waking up, going out for a walk with the dog before going to work and then going again for a walk after work. I'm also a member of a choir and we practise once a week when that is allowed. I also love dancing and have been taking various dance classes the last few years. I'm currently studying and adding a diploma to my resume remotely so my evenings are mostly devoted to studying.

In the beginning of the pandemic my work changed due to restrictions imposed by the government on operations like dentistry. We were ordered to shut down for eight weeks. I was only allowed to handle and treat emergencies wearing special equipment like virus glasses and virus masks. The good thing about this time period was that I could finally give myself time for continuing education, like reading up on the latest developments in dentistry and I learned a lot.

When everything reopened I started working full time again but I had many more cancellations, if people had for example a minor cold they didn't show up. There was still a great deal of fear because there was no talk of vaccinations. My concern was to get infected without knowing it and then risking transferring it to an elderly patient of mine. Therefore I made sure I wasn't out and about and self-isolated and just went to work. I've actually been super busy at work because so many patients haven't been spending their money on e.g., travelling or pursuing hobbies and instead taking better care of their teeth. We've noticed that people are taking better care of themselves and not delaying things like before. On the other hand, many of my patients are in a state of bad dental health. The older patients didn't dare or were afraid to show up so problems that could have been easily solved have become big and almost unsolvable. Those with dental anxiety have been using the situation as an excuse to not to come and those who have gotten Covid are repeatedly forgetting to cancel their appointment. So, it's been both a good and bad development.

Fortunately, I haven't had any work loss except in the beginning. If anything I've been working more than ever since I've been covering for other dentists who have had to go into quarantine. When you are a self-employed person, like I am, there's nothing that covers my salary if I can't work. If there isn't a patient in my chair then nothing comes in and I don't get paid. There is no net or nothing that covers or grabs me if I get sick meaning that no income comes in. It's kind of stressful.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "The good thing about this time period was that I could finally give myself time for continuing education"

"My concern was to get infected without knowing it and then risking transferring it to an elderly patient of mine. Therefore I made sure I wasn't out and about and just went to work".

"many of my patients are in a state of bad dental health. The older patients didn't dare or were afraid to show up so problems that could have been easily solved have become big and almost unsolvable. Those with dental anxiety have been using the situation as an excuse to not to come".

"There is no net or nothing that covers or grabs me if I get sick since I'm self-employed. If I'm sick then no income comes in. It's kind of stressful."

**Keywords:** Work, dental health care, workloads, working conditions, self-employment, continuing education, dental health issues, social isolation.

**IS07**

**Title:** 34 year old queer woman living with mentally abusive spouse

**Narrative:** "I'm a 34-year-old woman working full time as a dentist. I live with my girlfriend and we have a dog together. A typical day is waking up, going out for a walk with the dog before going to work and then going again for a walk after work. I'm also a member of a choir and we practise once a week when that is allowed. I also love dancing and have been taking various dance classes the last few years. I'm currently studying and adding a diploma to my resume remotely so my evenings are mostly devoted to studying.

These really have been strange times; the last few years have felt like forever and at the same time have passed so quickly. There have been so many events cancelled so time has ceased to make sense. The covid years have lacked these highlights over the years, like traditional family holidays or concerts with my choir, which made time kind of the same and bland. I have felt like I'm stuck in a conveyor belt or a continuous loop.

I've isolated myself a lot lately from friends. My girlfriend suffers from OCD and bacteriophobia that has really intensified during the covid years and been difficult to deal with. Her family lives in the countryside and we have not visited them lately, mainly

due to her fear and panic over the covid situation. She would not be able to forgive herself if she would pass the virus on to her people and infect others. Her discomfort and panic is immense and overwhelming. She never took off her mask even when there was no obligation to wear a mask. She asks me constantly if I'm washing my hands and wearing a mask everywhere. It helped her a lot after the possibility of taking an exam (PCR or rapid test) came into being. I haven't been nervous about catching the virus myself. My sister got Covid in march 2020 and she recovered fully. I'm trained in thinking along the lines of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) which has helped me a lot. I think that this pandemic hasn't affected me as much as other people, especially people with children.

In the queer world there are usually many parties throughout the year and now there are none. Everyone talks about the gay rights being so great in Iceland but the thing is we can always regress and lose them back. We've seen the rights regressing in many countries. It was only two or three years ago that we got almost the same civil rights as others. Five years ago we only had about half of the civil rights that heterosexual people had. There were all sorts of clauses that hadn't been taken out and changed. There were all sorts of things that were still in the law regarding homosexuals that were to be taken out, like e.g. you could legally been fired for being gay. This is the reason it is so important to be vocal and visible and why for example the Pride walk is important. Visibility and events related to Pride are also very important for other individuals who are e.g. still inside the closet and searching for info.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I've isolated myself a lot lately from friends".

"My girlfriend suffers from OCD and bacteriophobia that has really intensified during covid and been difficult to deal with. Her discomfort and panic is immense and overwhelming".

"In the queer world there are usually many parties throughout the year and now there are none. Everyone talks about the gay rights being so great in Iceland but the thing is we can always regress and lose them back".

**Keywords:** Sexuality, intimate partner violence, mental abuse, social isolation, mental health, wellbeing, exposure to covid-19, human and fundamental rights of gay people,

**IS08**

**Title:** 35 year old married mother of two children; and activist and a psychologist.

**Narrative:** "I'm a married mother of two boys and a self-employed psychologist. My interest these days is mostly centred on the grassroot organisation that I and other colleagues are running. The organisation is called "life without violence" and focuses on women and children who are victims of violence. I'm currently the chairwoman for the group. Much of my energy goes into the organisation and being a mom but when I have time I like to work out and meet up with friends. The organisation was formally

established in august 2020 when a board was elected but we still don't have an official office space so most of our work is done via the internet. The main idea was to put pressure on the authorities to make/undertake a comprehensive review of the legal environment and administration of child protection, access and custody matters to ensure that children enjoy protection against violence. We have also been helping and supporting victims of violence which was not something that we set out to do exactly but has evolved in that way. We can't turn away people that seek our assistance and say no. But the main drive and goal is to point out problems in the system. All the work is done voluntarily and without any pay. We have recently started to receive some grants but we haven't decided on how to best administer them. This is mainly done to have something to cover operating expenses.

In the beginning of the pandemic we stayed a lot at home. Both the kindergarten and the elementary school that my sons attend wasn't operating fully. My older son is diagnosed with ADHD and staying with him at home was challenging. That resulted in us deciding to get an au-pair in order to survive that period. We still have an au-pair because the situations are still demanding, for example the threshold for getting sick is so much lower than it used to be, meaning that if the boys had a runny nose they must stay at home. Me and my husband don't have that many sick leave days to cover for that so that is why it is good for us to have an au-pair. I'm self-employed and if I had to stay at home every time they got sick that would mean a lot of income loss for me.

I'm triple vaccinated but still I got covid last month. It started with my youngest son getting sick and ended up with my whole family catching the virus. I experienced all the main symptoms and got pretty sick. My other family members didn't get as sick. At one time my symptoms were so bad that I got a call from a nurse and she instructed me to do breathing exercises. During our isolation I noticed a behavioural change in my older son, he was quite miserable and I even asked the covid team to call me to talk about how covid is affecting children with ADHD. They hadn't heard about any link between getting covid and experiencing temperament deficiency or changes. I don't know if this change in his mood was connected to covid or just the fact that he was locked up with his family for a week.

I have noticed that my patients have worsened from anxiety and depression after being infected with covid. Especially during the first wave when no one was vaccinated. It looks as though the ones who got very sick during the first variant are struggling with the long term effects. Covid plays a big part in the aggravation or some kind of over-sensitivity in that the situation gets worse for people that suffer from depression or anxiety. Most of the women that seek my organisation's help, have already broken free from the abusive relationship but often they share custody with their perpetrator. It has been reported that covid has sometimes been used as a tool to e.g. keep the children in the perpetrator's care longer, a kind of fake quarantine. Or when the children are not allowed to attend school covid is used as the reason and kept away from the mothers. It has not improved the quality of life to be dealing with a pandemic on top of some other stress as many of the women are dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder. Sharing

custody with another family or guardian is complicated in a pandemic. The school system is being relaxed more, so that the children end up being much more at home, which can be used by victims of violence to keep the children away from the perpetrator. But can also work in such a way that the perpetrator can take advantage of the situation to keep the children with him longer and make up a quarantine e.g. It is a known fact that a pandemic worsens the conditions for victims of violence the system and yet all service is greatly weakened and all case processing takes longer. We have for example tried to get a meeting with the minister of education and children's affairs but he has used covid as an excuse.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "We can't turn away people [victims of GBV] that seek our assistance and say no."

"Both the kindergarten and the elementary school that my sons attend wasn't operating fully. My older son is diagnosed with ADHD and staying with him at home was challenging. That resulted in us deciding to get an au-pair in order to survive that period. We still have an au-pair because the situations are still demanding, for example the threshold for getting sick is so much lower than it used to be"

"I have noticed that my patients have worsened from anxiety and depression after being infected with covid."

"It has been reported that covid has sometimes been used as a tool to e.g. keep the children in the perpetrator's care longer, a kind of fake quarantine. Or when the children are not allowed to attend school covid is used as the reason and kept away from the mothers."

**Keywords:** Gender based violence, NGOs, victims, care work, aupair, privileges, work, self-employment, social isolation, mental health

**IS09**

**Title:** 27 years old man seeking asylum, not vaccinated because of the consequences it would lead to.

**Narrative:** "I am a 27 year old refugee seeking asylum in Iceland. I live in a reception centre for asylum seekers (located approximately 30 minutes from the capital). I've been in Iceland just over one year and the authorities have rejected my application for asylum twice. Just recently I got a negative answer about reopening my case. Legally I have the right to have my case reopened by the authorities after 12 months. This has been the case for other asylum seekers, but me and a selected group of guys have all got rejected. So now I'm in the dark about my situation and in a waiting stage.

I'm not vaccinated even though I really want to receive the covid-19 vaccine, because the authorities are using the vaccination to deport asylum seekers. It has happened before where the authorities weaponize the vaccine to deport and scare other asylum

seekers. I can't let that happen to me because I have no place to go to. I'm scared for my health to not be vaccinated and therefore risk catching the virus. So now one of my biggest worries is getting seriously sick and this fear has affected me a lot. If you're vaccinated you can still get contracted but it's likely to affect you less. If you're not vaccinated and you contract the virus you never know how it will affect you. It is also a safety issue for others that I get vaccinated, it isn't just my health at stake here. I don't want to put other people's lives in danger so I've been isolating myself a lot. This is a matter of basic human right to have access to medical care. The vaccine should be easily accessible to everyone but when they weaponize it then it becomes a whole other story.

I haven't been able to communicate and be around people because I'm not vaccinated. I've been isolated now for a very long time. Because of this situation I haven't been able to integrate or get to know anyone or go to any social gathering.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I'm not vaccinated even though I really want to receive the covid-19 vaccine, because the authorities are using the vaccination to deport asylum seekers. It has happened before where the authorities weaponize the vaccine to deport and scare other asylum seekers."

"It is also a safety issue for others that I get vaccinated, it isn't just my health at stake here. I don't want to put other people's lives in danger so I've been isolating myself a lot."

"I've been isolated now for a very long time. Because of this situation I haven't been able to integrate or get to know anyone or go to any social gathering."

**Keywords:** Refugee, asylum seeker, inhumane treatment, human rights, social isolations, vulnerability, marginalisation, deportation, safety.

**IS10**

**Title:** 37 year old woman in a custody dispute with a violent ex-husband

**Narrative:** "I'm 37-year-old single mother. I was raised abroad but moved to Iceland when I was 20 years old. I have a master's in psychology and I'm currently working with teenagers with psycho-social problems. Health wise covid hasn't affected me much. I recently got infected and got very sick but now I've recovered with no major complications. I think If I had gotten infected a year and a half ago, I would have been a lot more nervous and anxious but now the situation is completely different. It looks as though everybody has covid so it's not as much of a deal now as it was in the beginning. I've received one dose of Janssen vaccine and nothing more after that. I've been going through a custody dispute with the father of my child for several years now. He was charged for violence against our child and after hearing about his abuse towards other children, I completely stopped him from seeing our child. Then a year and a half later a judgment from the main hearing in the District Court ruled that he should be granted full custody. The case goes to the district court just as covid is starting and it really took

its toll on me and was absolutely horrible. The summer after this ruling was the first summer of covid so everything felt really strange both for the sake of covid and also because I felt as if I wasn't allowed to be with my child. It felt like I had lost my child. I did not have custody of my child but I was still trying to do my best to create a normal life for the both of us. I had good support here in Iceland but it was hard not being able to visit my parents who live abroad, both because of this custody battle and also covid. I experienced a lot of loneliness during this time. About half a year later the case then went to the Court of Appeal where the prior ruling was reversed and I was granted full custody. However, my ex was still allowed to see our child a great deal but under supervision. I felt little joy from this ruling because I had to obey the decision of him being allowed to see our child and make sure that the supervision was done right. We benefited from the pandemic as he could not take our child anywhere and the visit under supervision had to take place at an open playground near our home. I was trying so desperately to hold on to that little control I could have over this whole situation and covid kind of help me in a way to at least control the settings that they met in. That way I could make it a little tolerable for my child. He appealed to the Supreme Court and the end result was that I was granted full custody and he was granted increased visitations to take place without supervision. What I find most extraordinary and so disappointing is the fact that there's been this awareness and attention on domestic violence rising during this pandemic. Still, I have not received any help or support from any direction at all. I feel as though the whole system and the government is such a hypocrite saying that they would defend and do everything to meet the needs of victims/survivors of violence in the times of this pandemic and then finding out that it was just empty promises. I did not get an audience anywhere. The only person that listened to me and told me the things that I had been experiencing were not right was the policewoman who wrote down my report. She told me that what me and my child had been going through could only be described as violence, and that she would not let him near any child. The only good thing about how this whole thing ended is that I now have a legal right to take care of my child. The detrimental and serious part is that through this procedure he was still granted a lot of rights to see our child and the statement that me and so many others made about his violence was totally ignored. What was also overlooked for so long was how my child's well-being and behaviour changed after she stopped being around him. You experience terrible betrayal on behalf of the authorities and the whole system going through all this. It was as if the violence was not serious or credible enough. At least we did not get the help I thought was available. Authorities had expressed a lot of concern that the pandemic created ideal conditions for domestic violence and that they would do something about that but that has not been the case. The government's awareness-raising and increased emphasis placed on domestic violence in covid-19 is not resulting in any actions from the government. Women, like me, have been forced to let their children into the hands of perpetrators. This needs to change, so I am fighting with other women in pressuring the authorities to take action. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I had good support here in Iceland but it was hard not being able to visit my parents who live abroad, both because of this custody battle and also covid. I experienced a lot of loneliness during this time." "We benefited from the

pandemic as he could not take our child anywhere and the visit under supervision had to take place at an open playground near our home. I was trying so desperately to hold on to that little control I could have over this whole situation and covid kind of help me in a way to at least control the settings that they met in. That way I could make it a little tolerable for my child." "I feel as though the whole system and the government is such a hypocrite saying that they would defend and do everything to meet the needs of victims/survivors of violence in the times of this pandemic and then finding out that it was just empty promises." "Authorities had expressed a lot of concern that the pandemic created ideal conditions for domestic violence and that they would do something about that but that has not been the case. " "The government's awareness-raising and increased emphasis placed on domestic violence in covid-19 is not resulting in any actions from the government."



## Italy

IT01

**Title:** Abdoul, a 20-year-old Egyptian who lost his job immediately and who has tried during the two years of the pandemic to survive and find a new job.

**Narrative:** "I'm Abdul, I'm almost 20 years old, I've been in Italy since I was 13. Now I work as a sushimen in a chain. I arrived with my father and brother when I was almost 13, but then I was practically alone (my father went back to Egypt and even when he was there he couldn't take care of me, my brother is alone and he needs help too). I started working at 16/17 as a dishwasher in a diner, where I was taught a lot. At that time I had also done the HCCP course. Two days after my 18th birthday, the lockout started in Italy. I had just moved in with a friend of mine. We were trying to save money on everything. I lost my job and had to move to a house further away and with more people. I had some money put aside and tried to survive with it. I was not entitled to ask for help because I was not an Italian citizen and I had not been in Italy long enough to ask for citizenship income. When the money ran out, I asked for help from some friends, Egyptian and mostly Italian. Sometimes someone would bring me my shopping.

I would have liked to use the money I had saved to complete my education (private night school) and a specialised cooking course and maybe, if I had continued working at that time, move into a house of my own. But all this failed.

I spent my days looking for work, sending out applications and following cooking videos, reading books, learning things and messing around. I tried to make the most of the time I had. I couldn't meet my friends. I would make video calls with my friends. Occasionally I would do odd jobs, in some restaurants on weekends, at a florist's. I played sports and went running.

I had anger at my blurred plans, uncertainty about the present and future, determination to move forward and find a solution. I felt lonely. I tried to keep calm to avoid making the situation worse. At first I thought the pandemic would end soon. I also made some bad choices, for example I opened a business in the summer of 2020 with my older brother which did not go well and then we had to close it.

Towards the end of 2021, one of the chains I sent my CV to called me; I did a one-week trial which went well. I prepared myself by going to see how to cook and prepare sushi dishes. Now I have a permanent contract: I work in shifts. I finished paying back the money to the people who prostituted me and I was able to go back to the house I was staying in before the pandemic. I was able to buy a used car and get my driving licence. It is important to be reliable. I still have a lot to learn. I got vaccinated because it was required.

I can't judge the government's measures because I don't know things. I keep my opinions to myself. Maybe they are exaggerating a bit with the covid because of the

green pass, which is actually compulsory even if they don't say so. I'm a foreigner: can I complain about how things are here in Italy? Then I go to my country if I don't like the way things are here. I don't want to go back to Egypt, because things are better here anyway.

It's important to learn more and more. I've tried to take advantage of the time. If I go to work in a restaurant, I still don't have the basics to be an assistant chef. So I still have things to learn."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Two days after my birthday, on 9 March, the first quarantine arrived. I then lost my job. I started working again towards the end of 2021. And there I found myself in difficulty, because I had no right to ask for help."

"Being locked up for a year is like being in a prison for a year. And for a boy who had just come of age, being alone was very hard. Especially the first months were very hard.

Now it's better. But until a few months ago it was bad. Now I feel free."

**Keywords:** loss of job, lack of public support, anger, being alone, friendship, uncertainty, determination, work, training

## IT02

**Title:** I am Gabriella, a 76-year-old self-sufficient widowed woman with a son and his family abroad, terrified of being stopped when she went out shopping.

**Narrative:** "I am Gabriella, I am 76 years old, widowed and retired. I live alone, my son and his family live in France; I have a brother. For a long time, I couldn't see my son and my grandchildren, they could only hear us by phone. In France things were organised differently: every day my son could go out for two hours. My daughter-in-law works in a hospital. My grandchildren (nursery, kindergarten and primary school) always went to school.

My brother works and could not take care of me, so I had to manage on my own. I went shopping once a week (sometimes twice); sometimes I also went shopping for two people in my building who were older than me and who didn't leave home, or I went to the pharmacy to get them some medicine for them. They had terrorized me with having to stay at home. I spent my days reading by the window, embroidering, crocheting, listening to the radio and sometimes the television. I heard from friends and family via phone and WhatsApp. I followed and follow the Facebook page of my home country, where we exchanged information, jokes. I spent a lot of time on Facebook. I am able to use computer. Television didn't help at that time: they didn't pay attention to people who don't usually follow soap operas, they should have made more programmes, including cultural ones. Then they showed all the sad and distressing things, from the coffins to the Pope alone in the deserted square at Easter. Something not sad would have been useful.

I was and am not afraid of Covid. I was terrified, instead of being stopped when I left the

house to go shopping to the supermarket. I thought about what I might say to the policeman, what documents I would have to show him. I was very afraid because I was walking to a supermarket a little further than 400 metres away. That's why I tried to go shopping early in the morning, when there was no one on the streets. I counted the 400 metres: it was roughly a building tour. I was really terrified. I was more afraid of being stopped than of taking the covid.

There was no attention paid to lonely elderly people during the pandemic by the institutions. It would have been necessary for a list of lonely elderly people to be compiled, with the input of the municipality and the town hall and the collaboration of the general practitioner, and to contact them to find out if they needed help.

With friends we helped each other. The neighbourhood elder citizens' centre sent out the phone numbers to call for help or for shopping at home. With some people in the building, we sometimes greeted each other through the window. A family who had rented out a piece of the communal terrace for a party was reported and fined by the carabinieri.

I would have liked to go for walks with my friends, to be outdoors (not inside the house), but we couldn't do that. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** I live on the 4th floor, in a house where the sun shines a lot, so I would stand in front of the windows and read, or I would open them and get some sun. I don't have any friends in the building, as they are mostly occupied by professional offices of lawyers, dentists, accountants or older people than me, who don't even leave the house. I felt lonely, but Facebook kept me company. [...] The thought that a carabinieri might stop me terrified me. No one stopped me; I was walking fast; inside me I was thinking I'll show him my identity card, etc. That's what terrifies people, and especially people of a certain age.

**Keywords:** Self-sufficiency, autonomy, use of WA and Facebook, fear, shame, sadness, lack of care and attention for the elderly

**IT03**

**Title:** I am Giovanna, I am 55 years old, I am married and have a 24-year-old daughter, I am a professional nurse, experiencing the fear of bringing covid into my family and the mistrust of the families living in the building.

**Narrative:** "I am Giovanna, I am a professional nurse in a big hospital; I have been married for almost 28 years; I have a 24-year-old daughter. When the lockdown came, I kept going to the hospital. My husband, on the other hand, worked in smart working, while my daughter followed her law degree at a distance. Both my husband and I took turns going shopping. At first, I had a feeling of panic. My personal experience, even being one of the professions, is one of fear. I was afraid of something unknown; I didn't know what was going to happen next; I saw so many people getting infected. Fortunately, I'm not one to be frightened.

From a work point of view, I didn't have any problems, but there was a lot to do: they moved departments, they moved staff. We all had to use masks, gloves, earphones, so there were a lot of methods to protect ourselves. We were unprepared and scared. From an organisational point of view, I could see that there was some confusion. Everybody was busy, but there was a lot of chaos, in general, you did what you could: wards were closed or dismantled, whole wards were dedicated to covid; pathways were defined for covid and non-covid patients. I used to work in a non-covid ward - cardiology, an outpatient clinic where patients came for ECGs, EKGs, etc. But basically, because of this covid we were evicted and went somewhere else. But the life we used to live could no longer be lived. Because every patient who came, had to go through triage, if he had a fever he had to go home. Patients who had an appointment had to come earlier, they were called, they were triaged, they were asked if they had contact with a positive patient they couldn't come, they were swabbed. Everything became much more complicated.

We nurses were afraid to bring covid into the house, into our family. When I came home they looked at me at first like a plague, because they were afraid I would bring covid to them. At that time there was no vaccine yet. So they were afraid. When I arrived I would throw myself under a shower; I would disinfect myself. It was a very peculiar period, because not only my family, but also the people in my building, when they saw me they kept away, as if I were a plague victim, since they knew I worked in the hospital and therefore did not look at me very well.

My family understood and we tried to play it down.

In October I changed jobs and went to work in an outpatient clinic, because the cardiology clinic was closed. Patients were diverted elsewhere. I felt a bit disoriented, but I'm a person who wants to learn. The situation seems calmer to me than at the beginning of the pandemic.

Throughout this period, my family, relatives and some friends have helped me. Some of my friends and I have set up a Whatsapp group where we can relax and exchange jokes.

I think this experience has distanced us from each other. I personally feel stronger for having faced two tough years.

I vaccinated myself to protect myself and others. Meanwhile, I am worried about my sister who works in a covid ward. She sees people die, even young people; she works 8-9 hour shifts with a double mask, overalls, helmet. And it's very tiring: when she takes off her protective gear it's a sweat bath. Sometimes you take home with you what you have seen and experienced in the ward that day (people dying, even young people, people suffering who you can't hug or don't know what to say to). I think we need shorter shifts, more staff and psychological support. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** My personal experience, even being one of the profession, is one of fear. I was afraid of something unknown; I didn't know what was going to happen next. Fortunately, I am not one to be intimidated; just a little afraid of something I don't know. I am a brave person. I was afraid for my family, for my relatives, for what could have happened, because there were so many people getting infected, when we

didn't know anything about the virus. [...] From a work point of view, I didn't have any problems, only that there was a lot to do: they moved departments, they moved personnel. We all had to use masks, gloves, earphones, so there were a lot of methods to protect ourselves. We were unprepared and scared. We were unprepared, because obviously they didn't know what this virus was like and how it would turn. But from an organisational point of view, I could see that there was some confusion. Working shifts for 8 or 9 hours in overalls, with a double mask, a helmet is very heavy. My sister is three years older than me, but you can see so much suffering in her eyes. [...]

**Keywords:** Nurse, fear, mistrust, uncertainty, support from family and friends, protection, organisation, supporting and caring for people on covid wards

#### IT04

**Title:** I am Maria, I am 35 years old, I have two children aged 5 and 2, able to to save myself from violence thanks to the 1522 free toll number and the recovery in a shelter for 10 months.

**Narrative:** "I am Maria, I am 35 years old, I have two children aged 5 and almost 3. I was in a shelter for 10 months and since July 2021 I have been living alone with my children. I have been with my ex-husband for 13 years, 5 of which we were married. Our story started normally for several years. In the last two years, first the psychological violence started, then the physical violence. Until at some point I decided to leave out of an instinct for survival.

With the lock-out, with everyone having to stay at home, all his attention was on me. I was his outlet. It was continuous violence. Before it was intermittent violence.

We were both unemployed at the time. It was a very serious situation. Before that we had a shop together that we closed and we were both unemployed. I had found a job as an accountant, which I left because of his jealousy.

My parents knew there were problems, but not so serious. Being in another region, they had not seen the bruises. Once, secretly, I asked my mother to get information from the counselling centre on how to deal with violence. They told her to contact 1522.

However, he forbade me to use the phone. In July 2020, a neighbour of mine who heard me shouting, at a time when my husband had gone out, knocked on my door and asked me how I was. I asked him to make a phone call and called 1522. The social workers on the phone told me to get myself to safety as soon as possible and then to contact them again for help. They were afraid for both me and my children.

Two days later I was put in a safe place. A relative came to pick me up and took me to Rome. In Rome I called 1522 again, I explained the situation, they gave me support and explanations about possible ways to get out of the violence.

Mine was an emergency, so they took me to the shelter. 1522 was very efficient. I decided to rely on them 100 %. In the shelter I had legal, psychological and practical assistance, because when you leave a situation like that you don't take anything away. I only left the house with the documents and the children.

I had to start from scratch. The ten months in the shelter were a break from life, to understand and become aware of what had happened to me so I could start again.

I receive citizenship income. Having this resource, they proposed me various exit options and I chose to get out on my own; I found a house on my own and now I am looking for a job. The Juvenile Court ruled that the father of the children had no parental authority. He cannot come near us. I do not see him any more. I am followed by the social services, who helped me with the children's schooling and other bureaucratic procedures.

When you live in violence you resign yourself, you think there are no alternatives but it is not so. Then there are the fears and the threats. And you ask yourself, where do I go alone with two children? How can I do that?

You have to ask for help from institutions and anti-violence centres, like the one that helped me (relatives and friends are not enough).

The children adapted very easily to the new situation. In the shelter there were other women's children and they understood that they were not the only ones in that situation; they did not feel like second-class or wrong children. They had witnessed, both directly and indirectly, the violence; they had seen their mother crying or they had seen me with bruises.

Now I am a free person.

When you call 1522, they explain what they do; they don't put obligations or limits on you. They show you the different possibilities to get out of the violence: you have to choose. 1522 always works. We need to intensify the presence of shelters, raise awareness in schools and increase funding. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "To have freedom of choice, to have freedom of decision-making, seems to you to be something obvious, but it is not: when you are subjected to the violence of your life partner, who should be a person who supports you and respects you, instead he forces you to do things as he says, otherwise he does violence to you. It's not easy to deal with and it's not easy to get out of it either, because it takes over. One asks oneself: where do I go alone with two children? How can I do that? Instead, it is thanks to the presence of associations like the one that helped me, which is fundamental precisely because of this. Because you can go out; because a woman is not alone. The step is to ask for help from the right people and take back your freedom. Because asking friends and relatives for help does not achieve the same result. But turning to these anti-violence centres and to the right institutions like 1522 is fundamental to get out of violence, to start a free life, centred on oneself and not on what

someone tells you to do and not to do."

**Keywords:** Violence, fear, pain, trust, 1522, shelter, psychological support, legal support, concrete assistance, autonomy, home, work, awareness raising, reporting, funding of anti-violence system

## IT05

**Title:** I am Alessandra, I am almost 48 years old, I am separated from my ex-partner and I have a 7-and-a-half-year-old son, experiencing economic problems from 1 year and problems in moving and transporting my son because I was not yet recognised as his mother.

**Narrative:** "I am Alessandra, I am almost 48 years old, I live in a big city. I am separated from my partner; I have a 7-year-old son, with a shared management (two days a week for each, one weekend in turn).

I work in the communication sector, writing articles, blogs, scripts. I am also an activist in the LGBT community and president of an LGBT+ family association.

In March 2020, I had written a series of scripts that were to be aired. 90% of my projects came to a standstill. In 2020 I had no income.

This had never happened to me before, having been financially independent for 23 years. I was living in a rented flat, at 800 euros a month, but I didn't know how to keep paying. So I asked the owners to lower the monthly rent. The landlords lowered it to 600 euros per month for one year, but the situation remained difficult.

One of the problems that has become important since the beginning of the pandemic is the fact that I am not recognised as a mother. During the blockade it was problematic for me to pick up the child from my ex-partner's house and bring him to my place. Despite this, I still went to pick up my son on foot by taking the back roads.

Once I was stopped while I was in the car with my son. I explained the situation (I usually walk around with my son's documents, declarations, will, etc.) to the policemen and they were very empathetic and understanding. One of them told me she had a lesbian friend who had brought the issue to their attention and explained the reality that LGBT+ families experience. As an LGBT+ rights activist, it is not possible that we have this situation, that our freedom depends on meeting an open policeman.

LGBT+ people who needed to move with their children had to talk to the local police station to be authorised by the police. In my case, my signature and that of my ex-partner are deposited at the local police station.

If I want to go on a trip with my child, I have to go to the police station and say when I am leaving, where I am going and when I am coming back.

With Covid, the whole LGBT community has had problems. At Gay Pride 2020 my association made a statement about the different impacts of the pandemic.

My son had an illness, from which he recovered, but which requires regular check-ups, at which both my ex-partner and I are usually present. In 2020, however, only one of us could accompany him to the day hospital. My son wanted me to accompany him. So I went up to the day hospital with him, while my ex-wife waited for us downstairs. After I had done all the tests, I couldn't sign out of the hospital and had to call my partner.

I have and have tried to protect my parents who are elderly.

In these two years I was first afraid; then angry, which gave me the energy to react to different situations and to put my life back on track. I had my son to protect from a dystopian situation that was also very worrying for us. During these two years, but especially at the beginning, I did a lot of yoga and this helped me. The accumulated tension caused me some physical problems with my back which I am still nursing. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** In these two years I had fear at first; then anger, which gave me the energy to react to different situations and to get my life back on track. I had my son to protect from a dystopian situation that was also very worrying for us.

**Keywords:** Rights, LGBT+ community, refreshments, rent reduction, discrimination, child support, care, transport, fear, anger

## IT06

**Title:** I am Mirko, a 45-year-old trans man, who worked during the pandemic as a rider, experiencing difficulties at times with restaurateurs and clients because of my being trans: they were expecting a woman and a man arrived and stress and anxiety at the checks.

**Narrative:** "I'm Mirko, an almost 45-year-old trans man who came out in early 2018. I am currently semi-unemployed-precarious. I live outside Rome.

I have been working on human rights since I was 14 years old; I have focused on the rights of the LGBT+ community, I am an expert in protecting difference and fighting discrimination. I study judgements regarding LGBT+ families, trans people, rainbow families.

Shortly before the pandemic, my relationship with my partner ended. However, due to the pandemic, we painfully decided to postpone my move. As the house was small, I tried to stay indoors as little as possible to leave space for my ex-partner and her children.

I started a job as a biker/rider for various food platforms and after 15 days the blockade began. There was a lot of work, from morning to night. At the same time, I saw very little of my elderly parents and especially my mother, who is a cancer patient and had delays and difficulties with her therapy. Even though I would bundle up with masks, gloves, etc., I didn't trust her much to visit, and when I did, I left her groceries and other necessities, the mail, outside the gate.

The lockout actually affected the search for a real job.

There was a lot of demand for bikers. There was a lot of money floating around. People were also tipping a lot: I was getting up to 20/30 euros a day in tips: almost another salary. There are some platforms that pay very little. With one platform I put in a request to have my alias career approved and have me work under the name Mirko, because otherwise every time I go to the shops they expect a woman and instead I come in, with a goatee, and so they create a bit of a buzz. Let's say that it's a stress, every time, Madam, Miss, etc., so I'm trying to solve the problem with the name Mirko. So I'm trying to solve the problem with the union.

During the pandemic I was being stopped more than once a day. I was walking around with pre-filled self-declarations and my documents. I provided the documents they asked for. They never asked me to take off my mask, so there was never any misunderstanding.

Now I'm considering whether or not to continue as a rider, if it's worth it, as the work has decreased. When I was making deliveries during the lockout, I had a sense of apocalypse, walking around in a deserted Rome. I even cried. There was no one around. I was afraid.

During these two years I was helped a lot by some friends from some associations of the LGBT+ community and some collectives. It was more difficult to be an activist and work on social media.

In addition, the government only allowed visits to "relatives", which doesn't take into account how families are today. It would have been better if everyone could do what they do in Sweden: everyone indicates 3 names and 3 places they usually go to, without specifying the relationships with the three names.

Now I have started a collaboration with a group of girls for the marketing of light cannabis. Let's see how it goes. In the meantime I have an early initiative.

For two months in a row I received a 200 euro bonus from a regional programme for riders, to buy gloves and masks. I had also applied for other subsidies, but they were too complicated or based on ISEE. In all these cases I must have made mistakes and so I received nothing.

I think some of the good hygiene habits we learned during this pandemic would be good to continue afterwards, for example wearing masks when transporting food or

wearing gloves on public transport.

The pandemic has further highlighted the shortcomings of family law in Italy, including cohabitation, non-cohabitation, married, divorced, children born out of wedlock. I saw everything and everyone in trouble'."

**Specifically telling quotes:** When I was making deliveries during the lockdown, I had a sense of apocalypse, walking around the city. I even cried. There was no one around. I was scared; I thought that this pandemic thing doesn't end and if it does, it ends badly.

**Keywords:** Work, trans person, economic support, rider, fear, friendship, gender identity, advocacy, right protection

IT07

**Title:** Pandemic, youth and social networks

**Narrative:** "Actually, the first period of the pandemic, the lockdown, was great for me. I came from a very hectic work life, working from morning to night. I didn't have time to look after myself, to take care of myself, to do my own thing, to be with myself. So, during that period, I really got myself together. I lost weight, I was working out every day, I was really building my routine and it was beautiful. I started to follow my passions, such as doing computer graphics. But, then, towards the end of the second month of quarantine, it started to feel a bit difficult. For example, at that time, I had met a girl and we liked each other. We started talking, but for two months we couldn't see each other. After two months of talking every day only on the phone, you really start to miss physical contact. You miss going out with friends and sharing your fun activities and free time.

I never really understood the logical thread/narrative and everything that happened. The real reasons for certain restrictions. After a while, I started to feel bad and to question things because, I thought, but why do they ban this particular thing? And maybe let this other thing go through? No, for me personally, the overall picture has never been clear. I lived in this state of confusion, in having to respect the rules even though I saw that they did not contribute to the general health, do you understand? So, I felt caged, like I couldn't decide things for my own life. I felt powerless, small. I felt that I didn't have decision-making power over my life. This made me suffer, especially because in the last four or five years I had begun to understand that I could decide for myself. I had begun to understand that I could make wise choices. But, then Covid came along and it broke me completely. I found myself lost, I didn't know what to do anymore and so I started to live life in a state of uncertainty.

Before, I had been involved in some big projects. One of them was with a collective I had created with some friends of mine. We are a group of four members and we organise hip-hop, skateboarding, graffiti, live music events, plus we would like to create a clothing brand. So, I do the graphics for the shirts and we sell them at our events.

But, of course these happenings themselves are fundamental, because at the events you make yourself known, you make your music known, your art, you sell your wares. But since the outbreak of Covid-19, these kinds of live and in-person events, you know, have been banned.

Add that to the fact that these other guys and I aren't usually too social anyway, but during the months of the lockdown and throughout the pandemic, being social became central, indispensable, to the young people. On the one hand, social media was a salvation, it was the only way to communicate and to be together. But, at the same time, in my opinion, this led us to cling even more to the phone. Because, then, when the quarantine ended, I saw that the campaign of online-only events, didn't end, didn't even diminish. Everything continued to go through social media because, whether you like it or not, there are fewer rules there and you can show yourself without a mask. And, so, in my opinion if before we were asleep because of the social networks, now, it is even more so, because we are really into using it. I mean, it's really like another life, a parallel life. And people identify with it too much in my opinion. Moreover, social networks always put you in comparison with those who are better than you, better looking than you, more successful than you. You try to circulate an artistic project and then ... along comes this guy who makes two stupid videos on Instagram. The video goes viral, they start paying him, he starts to make money, he gets a head start and you see his ephemeral wealth, which allows him to live well and you are unhappy, even though you, too, may have your passion and your dreams. It's like a person who always felt that they had something special since they were little, they've always felt that they would have done something special when they grew up, always. But, in my case, lately I think I'm not doing anything particularly important, I mean I think I'm just another person going about my life, I'm destined not to bring any change, not to do anything significant, because there are already so many people doing it and I'm not at that level and I'll never get there.

The great importance that social media has taken during this pandemic has amplified all of that.

And it has amplified my malaise. Over time, with the other quarantines and red zones, I started to lose energy towards relationships, I was in a sort of depression, I couldn't get out of bed. And I used to blame myself because I used to say 'now you have time to do things because they have closed you down and yet, you don't do them'. I would wake up at 12:00, eat and go back to bed. I didn't have the strength, I wasn't stimulated anymore, I reacted to the situation, badly. And today I tell you that I've completely changed, I mean before I was less afraid, now I see that I tend to renounce and avoid social occasions.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Once I was at the lake with my girlfriend, it was summer 2020. I felt a panic attack, there were so many people there!"

"If before the covid I went out and went everywhere, now I think about it a lot more, I have a lot of paranoia".

"If before we were asleep because of the social networks, now, it is even more so, because we are really into using it. I mean, it's really like another life, a parallel life. And people identify with it too much in my opinion".

**Keywords:** self-love, isolation, depression, social networks, self-devaluation

IT08

**Title:** Story of a person who discovered to have cancer while health care was shaken by covid

**Narrative:** "My life has been affected by the Covid-19 situation in several ways. The most important impact on our family was because of the fact that my husband was also going through the diagnostic phase of a serious illness at the time of the pandemic outbreak. He started having symptoms in the autumn of 2019 and by January 2020 his symptoms were getting worse, his sore throat wasn't going away.

For a while we thought this could even be related to Covid-19, since the illness usually started with a fever and a sore throat. However, we soon realised that, unlike with Covid, his symptoms lasted much longer. His throat had been bothering him at that point for several months. At the time, we were going through three months of isolation and closure in Italy. So, by the time he could actually go and get an appointment to see a throat specialist, it was six or seven months after the symptoms had first appeared.

Anyway, since the health system was very shaken up by what had happened with the pandemic, I realised in retrospect that my husband did not receive the level of attention that he needed. The doctors were so focused on covid all of the time, always looking for covid, or being afraid of contracting covid, themselves. My husband Paul was one of the first patients after the lockdown period to come into the local hospital here, towards the end of May. The very young doctor he saw then seemed like she just wanted to be done with him as soon as possible and move on to the next patient or task. So, even though she used the small camera apparatus to see down his throat, she missed the tumor on his tonsil, and diagnosed him with acid reflux, instead. After that, he went to several different specialists, and was misdiagnosed repeatedly. And each time, to investigate further, he had to ask his GP for a referral to another doctor, then another, and so on. The way the health system works here is very confusing and cumbersome, there is no sort of centralised database or anything. You run from one office to another and many times you get a lot of wrong information from the personnel at the various offices. All-in-all, it took a year for the health system to realise what was wrong with Paul. By then, he had stage four throat cancer.

Between the late diagnosis, the intense pre-occupation with Covid, the political fear dynamics...That period was just terrible for us.

Also, if someone doesn't understand the language or how the system works, they'd just go crazy. This is because if you are a foreigner, there is really no one to support you if you are not fluent in Italian, to help you navigate through the labyrinth of the healthcare system. All of this, on top of learning that my husband had cancer, was very traumatic for me. I can only begin to imagine what he was feeling inside, as he tried to put on a brave face. I'm kind of glad, when I look back on that period, that I was rather numb at the time. Otherwise, I think that if I had allowed myself to think too much, I could have sunk into the funk of a deep depression.

To compound matters further, the cancer doctors kept mentioning the covid19 vaccine. And when my husband said "Look, I have no interest in getting the vaccine, I'm already dealing with my cancer, I don't want to add to that burden. It's my choice." The doctors said he would have to get weekly covid testing, somewhere outside of the hospital where his treatment was to take place, and that there were no vaccine exemptions - even for cancer patients - and even though those with serious illnesses were never part of the initial vaccine trials and that they really had no idea how the vaccine might react with the chemo and radiation that they were also recommending as treatment for his illness. This made both my husband and myself very uncomfortable, and in the weeks leading up to when his treatment was scheduled to begin, we became more and more anxious and uncertain about how to proceed.

In the end, my husband decided not to continue with any kind of traditional treatment because he had lost confidence in the system, and moreover, it would have forced him to have a Covid test every few days, which would mean waiting in long lines with others who could potentially have covid, at a time when his own immune system might have been compromised from his cancer. Because he lost confidence in the system, he also lost confidence in the treatment. Also, the current treatment widely used by Western medicine for the type of cancer that he has, often leaves the patient with debilitating side effects. Paul was worried that these side-effects would be hard to manage, even during the best of times, let alone during a time of societal crisis, like this one.

The radiologist in charge of his case was a bit like a used car salesman when she was selling us the program. Like she was eager to convince us to sign on the dotted line. But as soon as my husband said "No, I don't think I will", this same doctor got super cold and even seemed angry. She said with a total lack of empathy, "This cancer will kill you." Her reaction seemed so irrational, there was no warmth in her manner or any kind of concern about why Paul had made that decision. She never asked him why he had changed his mind, or what other treatment options he would be pursuing instead, etc.

I know that this may sound like age discrimination, but the oncologist was very young, like 25. And my husband didn't feel very comfortable with her. Also, the doctor who misdiagnosed him the first time, the one who told him he had reflux and missed the tumour completely, was very young and unsupervised, as well.

But, to be fair, I'm also sure that there's a lot of stress within their work environment. I

really feel like they should have separated Covid from the rest of the medical system, with a parallel triage health care system implemented just for that, while keeping the other routine health care objectives separate and up-to-date. There are still people now, even two years later, who don't go for their regular check-ups and follow-ups for diseases that are not related to Covid. I mean, look at the general population, besides suffering various untreated health ailments, many are depressed and even suicidal. There are many people who are put in the position of having to neglect their care needs because of this health system situation, this irrational hyper focus on Covid-19, as if it is the only disease that exists within our societies. It seems to me as if the healthcare system has gone completely backward, and gotten unscientific in so many ways. Now, it's even harder to trust standard healthcare than it was before.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It seems to me that the healthcare system is completely backward, so unscientific in so many ways. Now it's even harder to trust healthcare. The recommendations they give people are not necessarily scientifically based or things that make sense to people. If you're a determined person now, you don't want your body to participate in an experimental practice, because you're already dealing with cancer, the healthcare system won't accommodate you".

**Keywords:** cancer, fear, lack of trust, hyper focus on Covid-19, stress.

IT09

**Title:** Language barriers, income collapse, and family divisions because of the pandemic.

**Narrative:** "My life has been affected by the Covid-19 situation in several ways. First of all, even though I am an Italian citizen, I came to the country as an immigrant, whose first language is not Italian. I found it very difficult to follow the government's decisions and constantly changing rules throughout the various stages of the pandemic. I have decent computer skills, so I was able to find my way around using Google Translate for the things I didn't understand, and it actually helped me quite a bit. However, if I had been someone who didn't have this skill for whatever reason, or didn't have access to a computer/internet connection, how would I have been able to navigate through all of the ever-changing information coming from the government, during the course of the pandemic? I would have struggled a lot more, like I am sure that many others did. That said, I can certainly understand how other immigrants living in the country, must have felt very confused and very disoriented, especially because the rules kept changing all the time. Moreover, since English is the official language of the European Union and since Italy has always been an integral part of that Union - and is even one of its founding members - I think it would be prudent for Italy to adopt English as a second official language. Especially, since so many of the country's immigrant population speak English, regardless of where they are originally from.

To sum up, it was very difficult to get accurate information as a foreigner living in Italy

during the pandemic, if you didn't have the right research channels and capabilities. Especially, because residents were also kept away from the Comune (town hall) and other local offices, as they remained closed to the public for several months during and after the lockdown periods. Many of these public offices have not opened to the public yet, to this day, or are now accessible by appointment, only. In my view, this gives residents the feeling that they are disconnected from the local governments that they have always felt comfortable relying on, especially during times of public emergencies. The Covid-19 situation has also negatively affected my personal working conditions. In retrospect, I'd say that since the 2008 financial crisis and even before, the Italian economy has been weakening year by year. Many Italians will even tell you that the financial crisis started with the currency change-over from the lire to the euro, with ever worsening consequences to both the local and national economies, ever since. So, anyone who is involved in commerce or tourism had already been dealing with a very long period of recession when the pandemic hit. They had been essentially bearing the twin burdens of constantly increasing costs and decreasing revenues for decades. During the early months of the pandemic period, our business was still fairly new - and I could also see from my colleagues who had businesses in my area and in other parts of Italy that I had traveled to - that these were business owners who were already teetering on the edge of financial insolvency, even before the onset of the pandemic.

When the confinements came many of us were in a state of shock. We assessed our situation early, and came to an agreement with our landlord that was fair to both of us, to let us out of our lease. We agreed that our landlord would keep our security deposit, and we paid one month's rent during the lockdown period. As soon as the lockdown was over, we gave up the space. We pretty much lost the initial investment we had made to open the shop, because we had only been open for a little over a year at that point. Anyway, we felt that we had no choice but to close our artisan business, because without tourism and with all the restrictions, our business model simply wasn't viable. The things that we sell were very tactile, and people often touched them and tried them on, before purchasing. And, it was a luxury business in the sense that you don't need the types of items we sell, like one would need food or medicine. Since we weren't considered "essential" by the government, It was clear to us that under the circumstances and with the overhead being what it was, ours was the kind of business that wouldn't easily survive amidst the pandemic protocols and restrictions. Nor, did we want to put ourselves in more risk in regards to the illness, itself. So, we made the decision to close the shop earlier than some others did. And, in retrospect, it seems like it was the right choice.

The policies issued by the government to help traders were there but, again, difficult to understand and to access because of language barriers, and of course, because the uncertainty that comes with constantly changing information. Our accountant was not always attentive to our interests because we were only a minor client, and amidst all of the confusion, she had a lot on her plate. She didn't really keep us up to date with the aid that was available, as everyone was so confused. I turned to social media to try and stay up to date, and did my best to scour government websites for news on financial assistance, and to find other up-to-date information. I think that the government made things much more confusing than they needed to be. There was often conflicting information about what bonuses for businesses were available, and the amount of aid

that one would receive was often determined by the type of business that you had. Also, their websites were often overloaded and crashed and the security measures implemented were confusing and cumbersome, always with layers passwords, some of which even came in the mail, days later. Finally, just when you got used to how a particular government site worked and established how to have access and get in, you were asked to change your password again! A bureaucratic nightmare, time after time, to say the least.

To be honest, from my perspective, in general, policies throughout the course of the pandemic often seemed to be irrational and even in conflict with one another. In many ways, the overall response has reflected an often totalitarian approach, resembling a type of public health authoritarianism that has been driven by fear and the use of repetitive, even erroneous information, that has caused tears within the fabric of Italian society and has in some cases, even divided whole families. For example, my adult daughter, who had had Covid several months before, wanted to visit my parents and spend some time with them. But they said they didn't agree with her staying with them because she had not been vaccinated. Even though she had recently recovered from having had the virus. So we are seeing this information gap, and these divisions in our family, the likes of which I have never seen in my entire life of 59 years. These are ideological divisions, many of which are pushed by whatever forms of the media that one has access to. And I think that's really one of the biggest dangers in regards to the politization of medicine. These differing belief systems can alienate family members and other members of society from one other. And this has happened all over the world. I've heard so many stories about people no longer talking to certain family members or friends, simply because they disagree on various aspects of how the pandemic was handled, how dangerous it is, what constitutes government over-reach and what does not, etc. I've heard many people say "I don't talk to my sister, I don't talk to my father. I've lost several friends", etc. So, yes, it's been extremely divisive time in our history. And I think that this divisiveness, as destructive as it is, has been another thing that has really contributed to the societal decline in the overall mental health of citizens. So many are depressed and in despair these days. It's really hard to think about the future, let alone, to plan for it.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "In this small country, I do not have many friends, it is difficult to make friends. Hardly anyone speaks English, and we don't understand the strong dialect of this area".

"Health should never be politicised: it only leads to divisions and conflict".

"The government has appeared to be so over-zealous when it came to imposing mandates, like in the case of the "super green pass" which forced hundreds of thousands of Italians to be forced out of their jobs for choosing not to get vaccinated. The government, itself, appeared to be vindictive and punitive, marginalizing its citizenry and causing division, instead of bringing people together to manage a collective crisis, like they should have. In my view, by marginalizing and demonizing the individual, governments actually managed to hurt the collective as a whole, and succeeded in augmenting suffering, when they should have been abating it".

**Keywords:** Isolation, language barrier, politicised health care, social divisions, punitive government.

**IT10**

**Title:** A woman who had to put her daughter's care ahead of her work.

**Narrative:** "The arrival of Covid has drastically changed my situation. To begin with, I was immediately left at home, without work and without money, with nothing, because the schools were closed. I was then, and still am, a domestic worker. The cooperative that I was working with in 2020 did not offer me insurance coverage, and it did not give me any compensation. So, because I had to stop my work to stay home with my daughter, I literally had no salary. What else could I have done? It was really a disaster for me, I had a good contract, I worked long hours, it just didn't cover me, there was no guarantees in regards to hours or sick time. If I went to work, I got paid, if I didn't go to work, I took in no money. Period.

During the months of the lockdown I was at home all day with my daughter Denisa. Things went very badly because she didn't want to do anything, she was dazed, she changed completely, she didn't want to leave the house anymore. Even after that period of closure was over, she just didn't want to go out. She went to sleep at 8pm and she ate at night. She no longer distinguished night from day, lunch from dinner. She started to do her homework, but after five minutes she got distracted, she said that she was hungry or thirsty, or sleepy, etc. A real disaster. I tried to play with her, I drew pictures, but, still, she wasn't well anyway. You cannot keep a child indoors. "They" [Policy makers], gave permission to go out to dogs, cats, but children?... A nightmare, a nightmare.

I was also worried about work. Once the period of total closure was over, I went back to work, the contract went on; however, I did not serve at the same person's home because in that family, in the meantime, another person had taken over the job. However, after a while, I still ended up resigning, because it was not a contract that, in that situation - schools suddenly closed, class in distance learning mode, class quarantine - that allowed me to feel relaxed and secure.

Now I have found a new job. I have a better contract, with all the rights. They pay contributions, sick time, and other benefits and it is also a permanent contract. Except that it is only for a few hours: 9 hours a week. I could possibly find another contract and increase the working hours, as I've been looking for a long time ... But, how can I do that with Denisa to care for? My husband is working outside the home, on a construction site five hours from here, sleeping there during the work-week.

So, how can I make a work commitment of many hours a day, if there is a risk that the class will go to Distance Learning? So for now, I am satisfied with only working these few hours, as well. Let's see what will happens in the future. From April 1st my husband will be back here and it will be another thing, another situation. I will be able to find a job

with more hours, and I will be able to pay a person who will accompany and take Denisa back and forth to school. But, as long as my husband is away, I don't feel comfortable working harder.

Covid has only brought bad things. In the economic field, for children, etc ... I have friends who have not been able to go to hospital, who have had cancer, who have not been able to go to the hospital for treatment, who had to undergo dialysis but could not. And, it is not that everyone died of Covid, many yes, they died of Covid, but many others also died of other things and "they" [health officials], still said that it was Covid.

I don't know what to say now. I hope that we finish with this whole situation. I also got the vaccines, now let's see what happens. To tell the truth, I have told everyone that Denisa has not been vaccinated. I did it just for work, because everyone was asking for the vaccine, and you can't work without the vaccine. My husband ... they threw him out of the job-site until he got vaccinated. He took four different trains to get home. He kept the train ticket as a souvenir. He was home for three weeks, until he took his second dose of the vaccine, in total, almost a month. Fortunately, they didn't fire him but they didn't pay him for those weeks away from work, either. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "School doesn't give me certainty. I cannot make a work commitment of so many hours knowing that my daughter's class could go into distance learning any day now"

"My daughter changed so much during the lockdown, she was listless, didn't know day from night, lunch from dinner"

"It is not that everyone died of Covid, many yes, they died of Covid, but many others also died of other things and "they" [health officials], still said that it was Covid".

**Keywords:** drastic changes, insecure contract, childcare, gender care gap, distrust of vaccines.

**IT11**

**Title:** I am Mirko, a 45-year-old trans man, active in the LGBT community and I experienced the psychological and concrete support of participating in online self help group for trans persons.

**Narrative:** "During these two years I was helped a lot by some friends, particularly active in some associations of the LGBT+ community.

At a certain point, given the situation experienced at that time (fear, anxiety, etc.), I felt the need to participate in an online self-help group for trans people, set up by a local collective, led by a very dear friend of mine, we have known each other for years. Initially the meetings were held every 15 days on Sundays, but then it was necessary to increase the number of meetings and make them every Sunday, because sharing allowed us to reduce the malaise we were experiencing at that time.

We also had to deal with the emergency of the lack of hormone medication for those on hormone therapy. For trans people who were already on hormone therapy there was a shortage of such drugs, which are essential.

We activated a support network. There was a risk that many people, especially young people, would turn to the black market or to some guru selling junk.

Two drugs in particular were needed: testosterone and oestrogen. For testosterone we put pressure on the manufacturers and the health system to make it available again, and it became available. For oestrogen it was more complicated. Some trans activists looked for galenic pharmacies that were willing and able, based on the package inserts of these drugs (Pfizer or Bayern), to make the equivalent galenic preparation. This was a good solution, although more expensive.

I must say, after two years, that the ties with some people in the network have strengthened.

We realised that we have to take better care of our mental health. Because I don't know how those who didn't have, like me, a support network or a psychologist to talk to during the pandemic do it. In particular, my psychologist decided to reduce the fees understanding the criticality of the moment.

The mental health of individuals and families is greater than any government bonus could cover. We need a permanent psychologist in every school and workplace".

**Specifically telling quotes:** People did not suddenly experience a crisis. People were living in an already precarious situation, which was about to explode, and some eventually did explode.

**Keywords:** Trans people, psychophysical stress, self-help group, support, proximity, shortage of life-saving drugs, self-organisation, networking, pharmacies, active citizenship

## Lithuania

LT01

**Title:** Every death shakes you, no matter whether someone's close or not.

**Narrative:** "I am 67 years old, I live in [a small Lithuanian town] and work as a librarian. Currently, we live just the two of us together with my husband. I have three children, they are all grown up now, two of them live abroad, and one here, in Lithuania. They have families, I have four grandchildren. My husband is a pensioner, so that's how we live. Because of the general atmosphere in the beginning of the pandemic, there was a lot of discomfort and fears of getting sick ourselves, family members, surrounding people, acquaintances. Later, when the pandemic intensified, there were a lot of deaths of people I know, there was some panic. But I worked remotely, because of my age. I mostly stayed at home, had very few interactions with anyone, children also didn't visit, [we communicated] only through electronic networks. I went out only when it was necessary to buy groceries and bring books from the library so that I could deal with them at home. Basically, we didn't go anywhere and did not communicate with strangers ["svetimais" (not family members)]. So, this is how life was then.

Since I am older than 65 years, I was allowed to work remotely. Actually, all of us worked remotely when the first restrictions were put into place. Then some had to come back and to serve people in a non-contact way, to quarantine books. There was also a period when a time limit was imposed for readers - not more than 20 minutes to choose or return a book. Everything was disinfected, all hygienic means employed. Still, some of my co-workers got infected, they were seriously sick, but thankfully, everything ended happily. However, there was another librarian who worked at school, she was older, and she died from Covid.

The constant flow of information [about Covid-19], everyone talks about it all the time and then you learn that people you know have died, of course it's not nice. I wasn't so much worried about myself, but about my family, children. I guess, I worried about myself the least. Of course, I was careful, I tried to protect myself and they also protected me. I can't say I was extremely panicky, we used all protective measures and trusted ourselves.

In terms of health services, I didn't have any issues. I am prescribed drugs for high blood pressure and my prescription was renewed remotely. I didn't need to see the doctor in person throughout the pandemic. You get the prescription for three months remotely and just go buy the drugs at the pharmacy.

I felt quite busy during this time, as I wanted to perform my work duties well, to do as much as is needed and on time, so that everyone is happy, me and the management, I did not need any additional activities. My husband went fishing during the winter and gardening during the summer. We didn't interact even with our neighbours in the [collective] garden, just waved and said hello from afar.

During the first quarantine, when there were more restrictions put in place, I felt very uneasy, because we didn't know anything – what, how and why [is happening]. However, later, little by little, you just get used to it, especially, when you learn what to do to protect yourself. Maybe we were lucky [for not getting infected], God forbid, of course it's not the end yet, but we managed to outmanoeuvre. My son's family in [foreign country] got sick, but it was a mild form for them. The son-in-law who lives in [another foreign country] was severely ill, but pulled through.

I got vaccinated as soon as it was possible, as soon as my registration came up and now we have all three shots. I believe in vaccination, vaccines have saved the world from so many diseases. Of course, there are interpretations that they are not sufficiently researched, but still, at least something, at least somewhat lowered risk. I did feel unwell after each shot – increased temperature, general weakness, but it lasted for only two days. I don't know from a medical point of view, whether the shot helps, but it did definitely help us psychologically.

I think people need to take care of themselves themselves, no one else will take care of you, no one will protect you, if you won't protect yourself. You need to follow hygiene rules, not gather in groups, even though I understand that people want to meet. Actually, I just recently went to one meeting myself, but all who participated were vaccinated, those, who were not, did not come.

In terms of government's restrictions and recommendations [in respect to Covid-19], I think they were all put in place to manage the pandemic, no matter how successful or unsuccessful they were. And it was our obligation to follow them. I understand the outrage by some, like artists [who could not perform/ hold concerts], but human lives are the top priority.

A lot of people have died. You feel sorry for everyone, but especially for those that you knew. A famous archaeologist/ historian [local celebrity] has died, my grandchild's teacher. Some active readers who used to come to our library died. So many people around, people that we knew. I wouldn't say they were very old, rather middle aged, in their 50-ies/ 60-ies. Perhaps, younger people think it's not a big deal, but when we ourselves are of the same age, we think it wasn't time yet [to die]. Apart from timing, another issue is how – they died in severe condition, suffering. It's completely different from, say, dying of a heart disease like stroke, suddenly. Of course, this didn't happen at home, it happened at the hospital, we did not see that, but we heard how things went there. Every death shakes you, no matter whether someone's close or not. You pause for a moment, but then go on living your life.

The pandemic has not finished yet, but now we have an even bigger problem, unfortunately [referring to the war in Ukraine]."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I worked remotely, because of my age. I mostly stayed at home, had very few interactions with anyone, children also didn't visit, [we communicated] only through electronic networks. I went out only when it was necessary

to buy groceries and bring books from the library so that I could deal with them at home. Basically, we didn't go anywhere and did not communicate with strangers ["svetimais" (not family members)]. So, this is how life was then.

"During the first quarantine, when there were more restrictions put in place, I felt very uneasy, because we didn't know anything - what, how and why [is happening]. However, later, little by little, you just get used to it, especially, when you learn what to do to protect yourself."

"I wasn't so much worried about myself, but about my family, children. I guess, I worried about myself the least."

"A lot of people have died. You feel sorry for everyone, but especially for those that you knew. A famous archaeologist/ historian [local celebrity] has died, my grandchild's teacher. Some active readers who used to come to our library died. So many people around, people that we knew. I wouldn't say they were very old, rather middle aged, in their 50-ies/ 60-ies. Perhaps, younger people think it's not a big deal, but when we ourselves are of the same age, we think it wasn't time yet [to die]. Apart from timing, another issue is how - they died in severe condition, suffering. <...> Every death shakes you, no matter whether someone's close or not. You pause for a moment, but then go on living your life. "

**Keywords:** remote work, work in the public sector, social isolation, emotional toll of the pandemic, dealing with death and loss, pro-vaccination, personal responsibility [for protecting oneself], living in a small town

**LT02**

**Title:** We were frightened, because we did not know what impact it will have on our business

**Narrative:** "I am 63 years old, I work as a financier at my own company. I live with my family which consists of my husband and my elderly parents, aged 95 and 92. We live in a private house in small town that is close to one of Lithuanian resorts.

The pandemic has definitely had an effect on us, we were frightened, because we did not know what impact it will have on our business, how will it all unfold, especially in the beginning. Our life is heavily impacted by our business. However, it turned out that people were quite willing to shop at our online store, so we had even more work. I think it has also to do with the fact, that many Lithuanian migrants returned to Lithuania in the beginning of the pandemic and travel abroad was not possible, so everyone was vacationing/ travelling inside the country [the business sells active leisure inventory]. In fact, during the first year of the pandemic there was so much work that we didn't even have time to panic. We didn't need to close ourselves off, I mean to sit at home and work remotely, because we work at a warehouse and our team is small. So, the type of work we did didn't change, we just had a heavier workload.

Our physical stores had to be closed during quarantine, so we received subsidies from the state to compensate employee salaries during downtime. This specifically

concerned employees who worked in our physical stores (sellers, etc.), the work in the warehouse continued. This happened both times when the quarantine was declared, the first and the second year of the pandemic.

Social life has deteriorated. There were no events, we went out less, didn't visit our relatives as often, we lived a more secluded life, just went for walks in the park. We spent more time within our family, trying to avoid any gatherings.

Because my parents are so old, to avoid possible infection we try to be more careful [around them], not have guests in the house. Luckily, they did not get sick [so far]. My father takes blood thinners, he has blood check-ups every month (every first Wednesday of the month), our primary care is quite good, so he continued to have his visits during the pandemic as well. He has also had two shots of the Covid vaccine. My mother is not vaccinated, but she never ever leaves the house and does not meet anyone.

Me and my husband are hypertonic, but we received doctor consultations remotely and were able to buy our medicines in the pharmacy as usual.

All the time I tried to be hopeful and stay positive. However, I am so over masks, I'm tired of having to wear a mask all the time. I wear glasses, so every time I go into a shop my glasses fog up - you can't see, you can't breathe, especially during winter when it's cold. It's not pleasant - for me, personally, it feels like my brain stops working when I put on a mask. And the worst thing, I don't think they work, it's a mere show, a way to boost the economy.

Me and my husband are vaccinated, but I refused the vaccine the first two times I was invited [by the primary care physician] to get it. I just did not want to be vaccinated with Astra Zeneca. When the nurse called for the third time and said that they finally had Pfizer, I agreed. I must admit I was very afraid of the vaccine in the beginning, there was a lot of anxiety, and there was already some information spreading about blood clots related to Astra Zeneca. I don't know if it was information or misinformation, but the media has induced a lot of fear in that respect. However, when you realize that there is no alternative, you make the decision and just do it hoping it will make you safer. And indeed, I felt safer, calmer afterwards. I was more willing to go out, I felt bolder as I thought I had gained at least some immunity and if I were to get infected, at least I won't die."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "The pandemic has definitely had an effect on us, we were frightened, because we did not know what impact it will have on our business, how will it all unfold, especially in the beginning. Our life is heavily impacted by our business. However, it turned out that people were quite willing to shop at our online store, so we had even more work. <...> In fact, during the first year of the pandemic there was so much work that we didn't even have time to panic.

ü Social life has deteriorated. There were no events, we went out less, didn't visit our relatives as often, we lived a more secluded life, just went for walks in the park. We spent more time within our family, trying to avoid any gatherings.

ü I am so over masks, I'm tired of having to wear a mask all the time.

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a lot of fear in that respect."

**Keywords:** women entrepreneurship, state support for business during the pandemic, elderly care, healthcare in the time of the pandemic, deterioration of social life, initial vaccine hesitancy

LT03

**Title:** I'm in between Lithuania and the UK

**Narrative:** "I am 39 years old. I was born in Kaunas and grew up in Kaunas, but at 17 years old I went to study abroad and graduated from a university there. I have a bachelor's degree and two master's degrees. I work as a consultant in company change management and process improvement. I'm currently in between Lithuania and England, as my work is fully remote. My main client is from Switzerland, and I have clients in other European countries, but I am employed at a company in England, and I pay all my taxes in England. It's best if I spend 6 months a year in England and I cannot spend more than 6 months in Lithuania, as I would then have to pay taxes in Lithuania [as well]. So, I usually try to spend around 6 months a year in England, and the rest, except for some other travels, in Lithuania.

In my professional life I used to travel to see my clients based in other countries almost every week. This was of course very tiring. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed all that and now we communicate only through zoom. I got introduced to my main client on zoom and I haven't seen my employer in real life since May 2020. Now I work remotely, completely alone and communicate with my clients through internet. The downside of remote work is that you must work from home, I don't have an office either in Lithuania, or in England.

Emotionally, my life has improved 120 times with the onset of the Covid pandemic, as it gave me the chance to be where I wanted to be. Specifically, I was able to spend more time in Lithuania than in England. England has a much higher cost of living, and I just can't afford to have the life I want there, I have much better working and living conditions in Lithuania. In England I could only afford to rent a small room and here I have a 90 square meters apartment in the city centre. It depends on the person's background and his/ her surroundings. It is not easy to be an immigrant in London and in general immigrants have to build everything themselves. The conditions that I have here in Lithuania were not created by me, rather by my parents, relatives, but their support ensures a more comfortable life for me.

I even started to think how I could come back and integrate into the Lithuanian society. I have a feeling, many Lithuanian migrants have started to think in the same direction during this Covid pandemic. It's in process now. However, my second half [partner] is not Lithuanian, he's getting used to little by little but it's very difficult to integrate him. I think my life will remain between Lithuania and some other country. You can spend the whole summer in Lithuania and then disappear from November for a few months.

If you are a hired employee, it's very difficult to change your work country. I guess it's

easier when you're young and are considered cheap labour, the employer does not mind investing in you, teaching you. But once you've had a lot of work experience in one country, it is usually best recognized in that country and not others. I'm also not sure if my knowledge and skills would be needed in Lithuania, I work in a specific sphere. I am employed, but it's a "one month notice", so I wouldn't say that it's a very safe position. I had some health issues during the pandemic - I needed to have a check-up two years ago and managed to do that only recently. I was too afraid to go see the doctor, I was afraid I'll get infected [with Covid]. Now I'm waiting impatiently for the results, it's taking a long time because all the laboratories are busy [with Covid]. I pay health insurance in both Lithuania and England, but I usually use only the Lithuanian one. If someone asks me "where are you based?", my answer is - "I'm in between Lithuania and the UK". If they ask "what's your address in the UK?"... [pauses and then laughs]... we're not renting anything in the UK at the moment. I miss stability. I don't feel like I have a home anywhere, I'm not integrated into any of the places. For that you need to put in some effort - go out and meet people, socialize. But it was not possible with the pandemic. Our circle of friends has shrunk, there is no social life, when you go out with friends during weekends or have a trip together. I'm glad I have a partner, because otherwise I'd feel lonely. Then again, we spend too much time together, I'm very happy that he's currently away for two weeks [laughs]."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Emotionally, my life has improved 120 times with the onset of the Covid pandemic, as it gave me the chance to be where I wanted to be. Specifically, I was able to spend more time in Lithuania than in England. England has a much higher cost of living, and I just can't afford to have the life I want there, I have much better working and living conditions in Lithuania. In England I could only afford to rent a small room and here I have a 90 square meters apartment in the city centre. It depends on the person's background and his/ her surroundings. It is not easy to be an immigrant in London and in general immigrants have to build everything themselves. The conditions that I have here in Lithuania were not created by me, rather by my parents, relatives, but their support ensures a more comfortable life for me.

If you are a hired employee, it's very difficult to change your work country. <...> I am employed, but it's a "one month notice", so I wouldn't say that it's a very safe position. I had some health issues during the pandemic - I needed to have a check-up two years ago and managed to do that only recently. I was too afraid to go see the doctor, I was afraid I'll get infected [with Covid].

If someone asks me "where are you based?", my answer is - "I'm in between Lithuania and the UK". <...> I miss stability. I don't feel like I have a home anywhere, I'm not integrated into any of the places."

**Keywords:** migration, the state of "in-betweenness", a sense of homelessness, remote work, delayed healthcare, vaccine side effects, vaccine hesitancy

LT04

**Title:** the pandemic has changed my studies, their ending, and the perspective for the future.

**Narrative:** "I am 26 years old, live in Vilnius. I just got my Bachelor's degree from a university [one of the main universities in Lithuania]. I am bisexual.

The pandemic has had the biggest effect on my studies. When it started, I was in the second half of my fourth year. I always thought that after my studies I'd go to ERASMUS traineeship for graduates, but with quarantine countries closed, those who went before it had to come back [to Lithuania] and instead have a "remote" traineeship. I wasn't interested in that. On top of that I had difficulties writing my bachelor's thesis, so I decided to take an academic leave. I wanted to keep my student status for longer with the hope that Corona and quarantine would end after a year, and that I'd be able to write my thesis in a calmer condition, calmer environment, and then do the traineeship. But Corona did not end - I came back to my studies after this year-long break. I passed the exam I had failed previously, wrote my thesis, but in the end didn't do the traineeship. Thus, the pandemic has changed my studies, their ending, and the perspective for the future.

I was also (part-time) self-employed at the time and my employment was supposed to end in the middle of the quarantine. So, keeping the student status [while on academic leave] at least guaranteed health insurance for me [full-time students in Lithuania are publicly insured; persons who are not publicly or otherwise (e.g. through employer) insured must pay a fixed amount each month out of pocket for health insurance].

The thesis writing process was also affected. My supervisor was not very knowledgeable in the subject I was writing about, and direct contacts with other lecturers ceased, so my consultation opportunities diminished. There was also uncertainty about the thesis defence - whether it would happen at all, or maybe take place remotely. The administration has postponed the writing of the thesis plan(s) many times, pushed the deadlines. I am the type of person who tends to work the most before the deadline, so my work was also constantly being pushed.

There was also a lot of worry and uncertainty in relation to student internships. My course-mates had ordinary student internships, but I had opted for a complex internship that includes activities not necessarily directly related to the study subject and work experience. It's a kind of an amalgamation of a number of activities that together count as a professional internship. It is rather complex as it is, but during the pandemic it became even more complicated, because everyone was trying to figure out how to complete the ordinary internships. No one knew how to account for a non-traditional internship.

There was lack of Statistical software licenses (SPSS), that would allow students to perform data analysis remotely. The university only had 20 of them and there were 30 students just in my course. That means that at least 10 of us didn't have a license. Usually, students can use this software on university computers in the library or laboratories, but

everything was closed during the quarantine. I was lucky to have obtained an illegal license through my friends.

These situations led to heavily increased stress. I tend to procrastinate, and quarantine does not help with that.

My Bachelor's thesis defence took place remotely on the "Teams" platform. I think in general lecturers were more forgiving, the grades were slightly higher than they should be in normal circumstances. All students have graduated, even the ones who shouldn't have.

My personal life was not that much affected by the pandemic. I had just started a new relationship. "

**Specifically telling quotes: "**

The pandemic has had the biggest effect on my studies. When it started, I was in the second half of my fourth year. I always thought that after my studies I'd go to ERASMUS traineeship for graduates, but with quarantine countries closed, those who went before it had to come back [to Lithuania] and instead have a "remote" traineeship. I wasn't interested in that. On top of that I had difficulties writing my bachelor's thesis, so I decided to take an academic leave. I wanted to keep my student status for longer with the hope that Corona and quarantine would end after a year, and that I'd be able to write my thesis in a calmer condition, calmer environment, and then do the traineeship. But Corona did not end - I came back to my studies after this year-long break. I passed the exam I had failed previously, wrote my thesis, but in the end didn't do the traineeship. Thus, the pandemic has changed my studies, their ending, and the perspective for the future.

I was also (part-time) self-employed at the time and my employment was supposed to end in the middle of the quarantine. So, keeping the student status [while on academic leave] at least guaranteed health insurance for me

These situations led to heavily increased stress. I tend to procrastinate, and quarantine does not help with that. "

**Keywords:** remote studying, health insurance, social insurance, social uncertainty, mental health

**LT05**

**Title:** Quarantine equals emotional rest when anxiety is non-existent or minimal.

**Narrative:** "I am 35 years old, I work at a big secondary school in [major Lithuanian city] mostly in administration, I am deputy chair for informal education. Additionally, I work as a teacher but I don't have many classes - 2-3 per week. I also manage one class of

seven-graders. I am bisexual. I'm not married and I don't have any children. My parents are Ukrainian and I feel partly Ukrainian, but more Lithuanian.

I teach civil defence and project activities. Project activities - it's like small bachelor's, children work on their projects, choose a subject and write 5-6 pages. There's a theoretical part and a practical part. I like this subject, I like working at school in general.

I'll say this - after the first quarantine I stopped differentiating them. Corona was an amazing time for me. I enjoyed very much the fact that life has just stopped, that my schedule for the first time was empty. And since everyone else has stopped as well, you didn't experience the fear of missing out. I relaxed both physically and emotionally. The only worry I had was about my parents, since they are older. But they stayed at home, I brought them groceries. At the time I was still in a kind of relationship [with a female partner], so I didn't feel alone.

Last year we had the whole year of remote teaching. It was great! You work from home, you don't have to go anywhere. Of course, by the end of the second year, I started missing going out, seeing people, having parties. But during the first year I didn't need anything. And at school, when the question of remote teaching aroused, I prayed "let it be remote, let it be remote". Honestly, I can't think of anything negative. Not even when I fell ill with Covid - I spent these two weeks contemplating, reading, watching movies. It was time for myself, I didn't need to hurry anywhere. Quarantine equals emotional rest when anxiety is non-existent or minimal. I am generally prone to anxiety.

My work is important, it was still needed during quarantine, teaching still had to go on, so I felt safe about not losing my job. The school also provides a sense of community.

Since I don't have that many classes, it was easier for me to adapt to remote teaching. For other teachers it took some time, but they also managed to adapt. I mostly do administrative work, so my home basically became my office. My work even became easier, as, for instance, when you organize parents' meeting, more of them can participate when it's happening online. We learned in the process that we can do a lot of things remotely. If it were up to me, I'd have 6-7 months of the school year "on site" and 2-3 months (30 percent of time) remotely from now on. It would mean less stress for me, because, when you're at school, you constantly have to deal with some extra situations happening among children. Thus, you're able to do your actual work only after they go home."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I'll say this - after the first quarantine I stopped differentiating them. Corona was an amazing time for me. I enjoyed very much the fact that life has just stopped, that my schedule for the first time was empty. And since everyone else has stopped as well, you didn't experience the fear of missing out. I relaxed both physically and emotionally.

My work is important, it was still needed during quarantine, teaching still had to go on, so I felt safe about not losing my job. The school also provides a sense of community.

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**Keywords:** Remote teaching, dealing with anxiety, positive effect of the pandemic, work in a public institution, mental and emotional health

LT06

**Title:** In the end I had to leave my work, because with me working everything started to fall apart at home.

**Narrative:** "I am 41 years old, I live in Vilnius. Currently I am unemployed and together with my husband we're raising 5 children. The youngest one will soon be 4 years old and the oldest one - 13.

The two quarantines were very different. During the first quarantine we put a lot of effort into trying to make the situation as good as possible for the children, so that they don't have to experience a painful quarantine. We had a 4th grader, a 2nd grader, the twins went to the kindergarten, the smallest child stayed at home, I did not work at that time. We spent a lot of time together, played boardgames, went for walks, travelled locally. My husband took time off from his remote work at least once a week to spend it with children. We had ideal circumstances, because we had a lot of rooms and those who needed it the most were able to close themselves in - my husband and the two children who go to school. Me and the smallest children were left without a place, but I can imagine that other people don't have even that, don't have enough room for everyone who needs to work or learn remotely. At the end of the first quarantine, we all, including children, started missing other people, gatherings, but in general I would say that compared to the second quarantine everything went by painlessly.

Of course, we lost grandparents - I lost my mother, it was not possible for her to come visit from Kaunas [during the first quarantine travel within Lithuania from different municipalities was not allowed]. We couldn't meet with my husband's parents also. But the most painful thing for the children was that they were not able to spend time with their cousins and their friends. Still, again, I can reiterate that we managed to come out of the first quarantine with very few negative consequences.

There were some issues with remote learning. It is completely different from usual schooling, children lost interest in it within the first two weeks. I had to spend a lot of time helping my 2nd grader with remote schooling, I had to constantly motivate him and act as a mediator between him, his unfinished homework, and his teachers. We had similar issues with the 4th grader as well, in general there were a lot of problems with homework in remote learning, the teachers' requirements were very high, and me, as a

mother, I was not able to fulfil them. Because of this the smallest children were deprived of my attention.

After the first quarantine there was a period of relatively calm spring and summer and then the number of infections started to increase again in late autumn. Since one of our children has a heart defect, to protect her from possible infection, we allowed only the oldest child to go to school, others stayed at home. The second quarantine was much, much more difficult. It was 2- 3 months of sitting at home, we did not have patience anymore to entertain the children and be happy. Apathy emerged and I understand apathy as a sign that I'm not fulfilling my mothering duties. I felt guilty. It also coincided with my return to work after parental leave and this, of course, made the situation only worse. Even though I worked remotely, it was very difficult for me, especially, since my mother could not come help me. I'm used to her being around since she lives just 100 kilometres away. But we did not see her for months and also spent Christmas and Easter separately. It was painful to see, that the children got used to not seeing her and stopped missing her.

I was not able to focus on work, I was constantly thinking about the children, each had his/ her own issues. In the end I had to leave my work, because with me working everything started to fall apart at home.

We are practising Christians; the pandemic has also deprived us of religious services and our community."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I had to spend a lot of time helping my 2nd grader with remote schooling, I had to constantly motivate him and act as a mediator between him, his unfinished homework, and his teachers. We had similar issues with the 4th grader as well, in general there were a lot of problems with homework in remote learning, the teachers' requirements were very high, and me, as a mother, I was not able to fulfil them. Apathy emerged and I understand apathy as a sign that I'm not fulfilling my mothering duties. I felt guilty. It also coincided with my return to work after parental leave and this, of course, made the situation only worse. Even though I worked remotely, it was very difficult for me, especially, since my mother could not come help me.

I was not able to focus on work, I was constantly thinking about the children, each had his/ her own issues. In the end I had to leave my work, because with me working everything started to fall apart at home. "

**Keywords:** childcare, remote schooling, female employment, reliance on family support networks for childcare, mental health and motherhood

LT07

**Title:** Covid has significantly improved my life, I'm not sure if I'm allowed to say that out loud?

**Narrative:** "I am 40 years old, I have a master's degree from Vilnius university, we live in Vilnius region together with my partner "illegally", unfortunately, Lithuania has not yet

allowed us to get married. We have two pets, we don't have children. I am self-employed, I conduct trainings, coaching sessions.

Covid has significantly improved my life, I'm not sure if I'm allowed to say that out loud? During the first quarantine I left my job and started working for myself, became self-employed. I am an introvert and need a lot of time for myself, so work from home with the possibility of online communication is a perfect combination for me. Covid has also strengthened the ties with my extended family – my father, brother, we spent a lot of time hiking around Vilnius, as travel within Lithuania was not allowed. During the second quarantine we obtained a little kitten, that was also very nice. Once we started working remotely and realized how much time we spend at home, we decided to sell our apartment and bought a house.

In respect to the negative aspects of the pandemic, I started eating and snacking more, I gained some weight. In my work I help others to deal with negative emotions and during the pandemic I realized that I have to help myself. In this kind of atmosphere happiness will not come “naturally”, you have to “work” for it. Also, in the very beginning, while we were living in an apartment, it was difficult to work together from home, we just didn't have enough space.

Another negative memory I have, is when my partner was ill with Covid and I could not visit her in the hospital, because visitors were not allowed. I couldn't even bring her coffee, some small token of normalcy.

During the first quarantine my partner was on downtime, we worried about that a little initially. However, it didn't take her long to find another job.

I am sick of all the talk about the pandemic, I understand that it's difficult for people to not think about it, but I try to avoid those kinds of conversations and even news.

We had a few hiccups, when we wanted to get a loan together for the house. We needed to consult a special consultant and the whole process took longer just because we are not legally married, but in the end everything worked out.

We are currently in the process of getting pregnant. I had this idea already before the pandemic and persisted with it. Unfortunately, reproductive technologies are not accessible for lesbian couples in Lithuania, so we must travel to Riga, Latvia. Of course, it's more troublesome, more costly, but in general the pandemic has not affected our plans in that sphere. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I am 40 years old, I have a master's degree from Vilnius university, we live in Vilnius region together with my partner “illegally”, unfortunately, Lithuania has not yet allowed us to get married.

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**Keywords:** LGBT rights, reproductive rights, remote work, the pandemic's positive impacts, extended family ties



## Luxembourg

LU01

**Title:** Survive violence and get my resident permit and the custody of my children

**Narrative:** I am togolaise and have three kids. Last November, in 2021, I was in Luxembourg for two years. I left the marital home on 21 April 2021 and ended up in the hospital because I have experienced a lot of domestic violence, abuse of me and my children. My little girl who was less than six months old was seriously injured. It was my daughter's cries that alerted the neighbour on the third floor who came to see what was going on. Her father had dropped her and she fell, I didn't even know she was so hurt. That's how it all started and afterwards when I was in the hospital and I saw that it was broken I was really angry and I said I was going to complain and they called the police, we were in Luxembourg City at the children's hospital, and the police, the paediatrician also noted things down. My other children, aged 13 and 10 (a boy and a girl), are still with their father because I left like that, believing that I could get them back like that since I don't know anything here, I didn't know that it would be so difficult for me and now I realise that I'm faced with a father who prepared himself well before bringing me and the kids in Luxembourg. When I left the marital home, due to the urgency of the situation, I was put up in a hotel by the association, with wounds all over my face and my little girl with a plaster and we stayed in a hotel and then I arrived at the shelter on 18 May because there was a room that became available, and my card expired on 7 June. I lost my right to stay here, because I had my resident permit as a family member. Normally today I had to go to the immigration office, but I don't know why they cancelled the appointment, and they didn't give me a new appointment. The reasons they give are not at all true...they tell me that my file is not in order and that I must wait for a letter before I can make an appointment when I already have the letter in which they ask me to make an appointment, I am still waiting. My daughter, who will be 16 months old soon, doesn't have a residence permit either and it's my residence permit that should unblock the situation, I must take her to Brussels (embassy) for her passport, then if I have the residence permit, that should allow me to enrol her in the crèche and also find a job. It is all going very slowly with the Covid. There is a provisional decision of the justice for a shared custody of my children. The justice system gave us family assistance, but with the covid, appointments are very rare, and until today we could only have appointments on the 10th and 11th of January, and the man wrote to me that he had the covid and that he had to cancel the appointment, so it's very difficult. I also asked for psychological follow-up for the children, which took also a long time, I fought a lot for this with the person in charge of the social enquiry because the father didn't want the children to have psychological follow-up, and finally on 10 December I received the letter authorising psychological follow-up for the children, but so far nothing has been done, we don't know when they'll be able to follow up. They only propose face-to-face appointments, because they want to see the children, to see how they react, it's hard, very hard. I have a counsellor here who helps me a lot. I thought that you only see these things in films, frankly I said to myself, no one will believe me of all that I underwent and

the children too, if someone told me that, I would say to myself that it is lies, but it is true. I'm not afraid to go back, but if I go back, all the help, all the people behind me here, I won't have that in Togo so, I prefer to stay here for the children and to be protected. If I have the residence permit, I intend to ask for custody of the children, and I intend to look for work, to put things in place and to continue my life quite simply. Children will be here and they will be quickly and regularly followed up and I think that this would make things better, because it's very important, because they don't understand things, my children were born in Africa and grew up in Africa and the father denigrates me in front of the children, saying that he paid for a plane ticket for me and that I don't want to be humble here, I wonder what kind of humility he's talking about, he's putting all kinds of things in the children's heads, it's really very complicated. I just want my children back, for the rest he can go to hell, my children are very important to me. I don't want to die! Even if I have a heart attack I will live, I want to see the end, I believe there will be justice.

**Specifically telling quotes:** It's not good for me, nor for the children. It's been 8 to 9 months that it's dragging on, and for the court too, because of the covid, it's prolonging the situation, to the point that sometimes I say, I can't take it anymore with all the messages this man bombards me with every day. I say to myself no this situation is only going to last, accusations every day, he accuses me of everything being sick, being an adulterer, if I didn't have psychological help, I don't know....I thank the association a lot. Even if the children don't have any support yet, and even if I have some, it weighs on me, it's difficult, but it's okay. Without this help, maybe I would be really crazy as he says.

**Keywords:** GBV, resident permit, justice, children, psychological support, authorities

LU02

**Title:** Being ill with the Covid increased difficulties and violence but I got the "pass!.

**Narrative:** "I am from Togo and have three kids. I left the marital house because of violence towards myself and my kids. I am now in a shelter with my youngest girl, she is 18 months. My two other children are with their father as well. We have shared custody for the moment. We were affected last September me and the children by the covid and the situation was really complicated because at the beginning the dad didn't even want me to call my children before the judge's decision to let the children come with me, not even to phone all that and when they started to come here for only a month and a half, I got Covid and the children were with me. The dad insisted to have the children back. It was to the point that he came here in the shelter to take the children by force. It was very difficult for me but also for my 10 year old daughter, because she was crying. It was my 10 year old daughter who was hit by corona at that time and after 3 days I also went for the test and I was also positive so it put us all in quarantine. I was here with my youngest daughter it was really complicated, I didn't have a good experience of the situation because I missed my children, I was in the room all the time and I was crying all the time, and just after my quarantine was lifted I went to take the children, but the father didn't

want to give them to me. He said that the child had to be tested first, whereas according to the covid centre here, they told me that I could because my daughter is also cured, she has the antibodies and I have them too, so there is no risk. It was very difficult on the phone, I was trying to convince everyone to come here and then I got the test back from my daughter and it was positive and I went back to the room and was quarantined for days, it was really long and then it was fine.

Being ill with the covid, I have now the pass, and thanks to the covid check, I can go everywhere with the children. Without it I could not do some activities with the children. I am not vaccinated because I am breastfeeding my daughter. I am afraid for my daughter, I don't know if it will affect her, so I want to stop breastfeeding before I get vaccinated.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I got Covid and the children were with me. The dad insisted to have the children back. It was to the point that he came here in the shelter to take the children by force. It was very difficult for me but also for my 10 year old daughter, because she was crying. (...) With the covid, I have the covid check, I can go everywhere with the children.

**Keywords:** GBV, vaccination, quarantine, children, covid pass, leisure.

### LU03

**Title:** No access to rights when migrating as a family member.

**Narrative:** I'm 57 years old, I come from Mexico City. I am single mother with a son of 22 now. I studied marketing and worked until I was 50. I was dismissed then because of my age. I came here in Luxembourg with my Canadian husband who was working for an IT company. For the first time in my life, I did not work, I was a wife and a mother and enjoyed it. He had a lot of jobs opportunities, and we lived a good life really comfortable. It's not that everything began with Covid, but here, he couldn't get any job when Covid began. He finished a good year 2019, and he gave himself one, two months for break without knowing what was coming up. So by the time he wanted to really search for a formal job, he couldn't find anything. So his mental and emotional behaviour and feelings turn into a nightmare for himself and that cause a completely nightmare for everybody in my home. So, he became alcoholic and very aggressive, to me and to neighbours and everybody walking next to him on the street. He was really, I don't know he still is....He couldn't afford keeping us in the house. He became very, very, very aggressive emotionally speaking and physically even, so one night the neighbours called the police. We never went back to the house because he wouldn't let us go back. At first the support services couldn't help me because I had come to the country under a private contract. My ex-husband, wrote a letter that he was taking the responsibility for us. It's a letter that the government is not responsible for us in any way. So because he had signed it, the government couldn't help us in anything, anything even though they knew through the police's statements through the school. When I got my humanitarian

visa, I called the services again, and they said, now we can help you. You will get a call. I was trying to get somewhere to live. And they said, it is all full, call every shelter in Luxembourg every week and see if they have a place for you. So I called every week, and they said we have no place, and people who are here, because of covid cannot go anywhere, so they said "we have no place, nor for you nor for anybody". We have a long waiting list, but we will put you on a mailing list. So time was passing, and passing, and then it was magical, after I had a call with VisaVI, a week after, they phoned me to say, we have a place for you in an emergency foyer near the station, just be there tomorrow morning, and I went there, and they said, you can stay here, you can beginning tonight. I had nothing, they gave me a key. For my son, he was staying with friends, he was 20 years at that time, we have always lived together, so it was hard for us. The last night I slept with him, it was difficult. I don't know if he eats, if he is cold, but he had to grow, and now, he will get married, so I think I did what I could for him. It was an opportunity for him that we came here. I've been searching for jobs, you know, but they said to me go and introduce yourself in person, don't send just the photo or CV because the minute they see I'm 57, they just don't, they don't even bother to look. People over 60 are not seen as useful anymore. It becomes like in these movies, I don't like such movies, getting ride of what is not useful. But my time is running out. Because of my visa that expires in March 22, but my divorce process is still open. And I have the next meeting in February 25 in a month, to see if they are going to give me anything or not. I don't know if I will be deported, my son will get married and make a life here.

**Specifically telling quotes:** He finished a good year in 2019, and he gave himself one, two months for break without knowing what was coming up. So by the time he wanted to really search for a formal job, he couldn't find anything. So his mental and emotional behaviour and feelings turn into a nightmare for himself and that cause a completely nightmare for everybody in my home. So he became alcoholic and very aggressive, to me and to neighbours and everybody walking next to him on the street. So one night the neighbours called the police. I could not get help as I was under private contract.

**Keywords:** GBV, resident permit, food, housing, support services, procedures, work.

**LU04**

**Title:** A deep feeling of isolation and to be useless

**Narrative:** I'm 70 years old, I'm retired, I live alone, I have two adult children, my son who lives in Luxembourg and my daughter in Belgium, with her husband and two children. What I found most terrible in March 2020 was that we were all locked up in cages, I felt it was like a horror film, there was no one, as if there was no one left. It was like that for the first fifteen days. I will always remember the year 2020, we had dry sunny weather from March to September and so I spent my time on the terrace. I live in a house where there is a lot of space, and a big garden; I was on the terrace and I was looking at the apple tree, I was seeing without observing; it was so static, I was like paralyzed. I

could have taken advantage of all this time to work in the garden, to clean the garden, I didn't do that. I was stunned. And I thought, I understand that people who are in prison go crazy. I thought afterwards, maybe they have more interaction. But I couldn't see anyone, I couldn't hear anyone, I couldn't go anywhere, it was horrible. My children phoned me, but it was to forbid me to go and buy the newspaper at the newsagent's that it was so dangerous for me. I subscribed to the newspaper, it was one less trip. And it was only to forbid me things. For them, what was important was that nothing happened to me physically, I begged them, to phone me at least once a week but they didn't. I read a lot to survive, I put myself in artificial worlds by reading stories. I used to get up early, but I have reprogrammed myself differently with this situation. I can see that we, as old people, are no longer useful. I used to take care of my little girls a lot, and then they had to cope by themselves and now they are used to it. I used to have a very active pensioner life, to take drama classes, to go to exhibitions, all that took up time, filled my life and now it's the big hole and we don't know until when. From the beginning I marked each day with a marker on the window, like the prisoners. My situation is not the most dramatic but as a small individual I have experienced some difficult things in my life that I have got over. But living like this, took my life force and I was depressed without knowing it, I started setting goals to try and give myself some energy and then I thought I see now, inside me, what depressed people must feel and in the autumn of 2021, I thought I was going crazy, I had anxieties and these are things I have never felt before, it's a destructive thing. My deliverance in May 2020 was to be able to buy masks, it was already better and here with the vaccination it is already better. One day we were on an excursion and the lady who was driving the minibus said, now if you want you can take off your mask, I was stunned, I hadn't put on a FFP2 mask because I thought everybody had their mask. When we took a break, I spoke to the other driver saying that I was shocked that everyone had taken off their mask and he said, ah, didn't the lady mention it before? I said no. And then we got back on the bus and he said, we're going to put the mask back on, there's one person who doesn't agree, I say yes it's me, I don't want to hide. I get back in the minibus, everyone puts on their mask and they start to yell at me, one of them says "you're really a coward", another one says, "why do you come to these excursions if you're so scared?" A whole world has fallen apart for me, because people I liked very much are behaving in ways I consider selfish. I can understand and admit that people are afraid of vaccines. What I don't accept is that people who respect the protection measures and get vaccinated are considered to be a follower. So I lock myself in by reducing the activities I sign up for because I don't know how to manage. The activities that created a real life have disappeared, like the flea markets which for me represent real life, a real humanity. There is an accumulation of difficulties, such as floods, and there are no positive things to counterbalance this. The only positive thing is not having to kiss people, I didn't grow up with this habit and I don't like it.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I used to take care of my little girls a lot, and then they had to cope by themselves and now they are used to it. I used to have a very active pensioner life, to take drama classes, to go to exhibitions, all that took up time, filled my life and now it's the big hole and we don't know until when. A whole world has fallen apart for me, because people I liked very much are behaving in ways I consider selfish. So I lock

myself in by reducing the activities I sign up for because I don't know how to manage.

**Keywords:** isolation, loneliness, anxiety, protection, respect, caring, mask, rules.

## LU05

**Title:** Keeping the right balance between protection and mental health of elderly beneficiaries.

**Narrative:** I am 47 years old, live in a couple, and have a child who is 17 years old. I work for a senior club in a city with an industrial past in the south of Luxembourg. Our mission is to keep older people independent, and we also have an intercultural mission because we have 1/3 foreigners and 2/3 Luxembourgers. One week before the official lockdown, we have received a call from the Red Cross which said "we are closing the senior centres for six weeks" and that was a shock for me because we had heard vaguely about lockdown but we were called on Thursday afternoon to close from Monday. We had activities on Friday and I decided to cancel because for me it didn't make sense to host on Friday and not the following Monday. As the senior clubs are for people over 60, they were considered "vulnerable public". It was a decision that was misunderstood by people because we have young seniors, people of 60 years old who do not consider themselves to be vulnerable, so for them there was a certain amount of misunderstanding and they felt stigmatised. We were closed until the end of May 2020 and we kept in touch with our beneficiaries by telephone to provide them with support by telephone and we tried to animate the social networks a little, i.e. to propose things to them, but many of them are not connected, do not master the computer tool or even the equipment or even simply the internet. The telephone was to be there, to be a listening ear if people wanted to talk and we maintained a hotline every day from 9am to 1pm and for some people it was a support. We noticed a difference with elderly people of foreign origin, often the information came from their country, so they were very influenced, if I think for example of the Portuguese public, there was a very big crisis in the spring and so people didn't want to come here at a time when the crisis was very strong in Portugal, whereas this was not necessarily the case here. We also had people who were very isolated because their children lived abroad. From the beginning of June, we resumed small outdoor activities, but we were always aware of the risks, which was also a bit complicated because we didn't always have very precise rules. It was up to me to decide if it was dangerous or not. We had to keep the balance between mental and social well-being and the health risk. We also had seniors who became aggressive towards us - we were sometimes the last social link for people and therefore the place where they expressed their frustration. For those who don't come anymore, we keep in touch by phone, for example, in January we called them to present our wishes, it's a way to keep in touch. I found the vaccination period very difficult because I was asked to put pressure on the staff and that bothered me at times. I never wanted to be pushy, I was always rather firm on the health rules, and in the example saying here I have received a dose and everything is fine. In October 2020, we went out to a restaurant and the next

day one of the people there told us that she had tested positive for Covid. We called all the people who were there to warn them and ask them to quarantine themselves, people were really panicked, I have a lady who called me crying, that's it, so I was on call all the time and all weekend. It was an ordeal to call people and tell them that during an activity with us you were in contact with each other and that's difficult to live with, but all the people who were at that outing all came back to the club and thanked us for our frankness.

**Specifically telling quotes:** From the beginning of June, we resumed small outdoor activities, but we were always aware of the risks, which was also a bit complicated because we didn't always have very precise rules. It was up to me to decide if it was dangerous or not. We had to keep the balance between mental and social well-being and the health risk. (...) In October 2020, we went out to a restaurant and the next day one of the people there told us that she had tested positive for Covid. We called all the people who were there to warn them and ask them to quarantine themselves, people were really panicked, I have a lady who called me crying, that's it, so I was on call all the time and all weekend.

**Keywords:** work, older people, helpline, sanitary measures, well-being, mental health, anxieties, rules.

## LU06

**Title:** Helping young athletes to stay fit and motivated

**Narrative:** I am 47 years old, I live with my husband and we have a child who is 17 years old and a top-level sportsman. My first personal concern was that as a young person who had been training every day, he was told from one day to the next "now you're staying at home". I was really afraid physically and morally that it wouldn't go well, so we rushed to buy an indoor bike. It's hard for a sportsman to find himself completely out of action from one day to the next, even for his body. He's lucky because we could still go out and run and we live in a big house so we had all the comforts to do so, but I found that for sportsmen it was hard, he didn't have a trainer any more, he didn't have any competitions, and that's how it has been until now. Many of his friends stopped doing sport because he was doing "sport studies" and nothing was done at school. They said "we'll see who's really motivated" but motivation involves a lot of things linked to personal circumstances. After 6 months, those who had not kept a good physical condition got injured. He has a lot of friends who got injured when they started again. The school could have put things in place. I imposed a rhythm on him, i.e. I asked him to get up every day at 8 a.m. It was my way of managing the general disorganisation, maintaining a family organisation and he told me, "I don't have classes, I don't need to get up", we had a few discussions, here's a young man and he accepted anyway. There was a phase where he started to lose his morale, he had the feeling that every day was the same as the day before, so we decided to do an activity at the end of the day that we

both chose to bring variety and do something else and so we lived through the first confinement rather well. Afterwards, there were phases when he started to live it more badly, that is to say when it was every other week at school, he almost lived it more badly because he saw his friends and then more. My son was physically injured during a training session. It was linked to the Covid crisis in the sense that it was an unsupervised training session and so he got injured, which is why even among sportsmen there were a lot of injuries linked to these peaks of activity and periods of non-activity and the difficulty of competition, which no longer existed for high-level sportsmen to keep an objective in spite of everything, and so to make progress, and so he said to me, "What's hard is not to have objectives, not to train for such and such a tournament. At the beginning of the crisis he was 15 years old, his life as a youngster was not complicated, he was not too much in the mode of going out with friends etc. Now he tells me that they have to work hard to achieve their goals. Now he tells me that the young people have the feeling that they have lived through this period with great difficulty because the other day he said to me "I haven't seen this friend for 2 years" and I told him "but the last 2 years don't count" and he said "for the young people you can't imagine" and there I felt everything that perhaps he had kept inside. He became aware of the importance of the social life between young people, that's it, and so now he takes advantage of it all the more, and at the school and sports level it's more or less the same thing again, even if there's no tournament yet. For the sportsmen it would be interesting to see what the context of those who dropped out was, he continued but it's not just motivation, you have to be surrounded, have psychological support. I regretted that the school didn't offer sports lessons by video to help them, or meditation because he did it for his sport. I thought it was a shame that there wasn't this supervision, especially in the first confinement where they were left really like that. I'm fully aware that he was in a protected environment too because in my job I paid attention to how he was doing psychologically.

**Specifically telling quotes:** Many of his friends stopped doing sport because he was doing "sport studies" and nothing was done at school. They said "we'll see who's really motivated" but motivation involves a lot of things linked to personal circumstances. After 6 months, those who had not kept a good physical condition got injured.

**Keywords:** School, education, sport, motivation, physical condition.

**LU07**

**Title:** How do you cope with only cash money?

**Narrative:** I want to tell you about the story of a man (Joseph) who came to the senior club in 2010 after an accident, he had problems walking and as his sister lives here in the locality she contacted us to see if he could participate in some activities. He has a slight mental and physical disability, aggravated by his accident. So I would not have been possible for him to come here and explain this to you. So, at the beginning, when

he arrived here, he was reserved and slowly he started to feel good, he saw that people accepted him despite his disability. He is single, lives alone, has a sister, and is 65 years old now. Before the pandemic, he participated in at least one activity every day, he is the most loyal customer. His whole world revolves around our activities and the second part of his world is his sister who takes care of him. He lives on his own, During the first period of the pandemic, he found himself all alone at home without being able to go anywhere, to see the friends he had here, and that really broke his morale. I saw him once in the nearest town where he lives, he saw me and he wanted to hug me and I said no, excuse me, we can't, and he immediately started crying. He told me about his worries and one of his worries is that he only has cash, he doesn't have a bank card. So he used to go every morning to a local bakery, to buy his bread and one morning he couldn't buy it because he was told "no sir, not in cash, by card". Because everyone was so scared, it's a big industrial bakery, so the staff didn't adapt to the customers. What also hurt him was not participating in our activities and not being able to physically touch the person he was talking to. He needs to touch people. For him it was very hard. As he had developed contacts with people here, they created a group to take turns to call him, every day, another person, without us organising it. This helped him a lot too. We also offered a service for people who were afraid to go to the supermarket and we did the same for him because he couldn't pay in cash there either. It was his sister who reimbursed us, so all this to tell you that this man could not have managed on his own during the pandemic, he could not stay on his own, he would have had to go to an institution, whereas at the beginning he had an autonomous life and the pandemic almost compromised this autonomy. Fortunately, there was this telephone network which went a long way: for example, here we started to make little videos which we put on the internet, to make newspapers with exercises, recipes, word games, all sorts of things so that people could continue to work both physically and mentally. As this gentleman cannot read, the friends who phoned him did the games with him and I think that's great, he was able to do equations, he was able to do a lot of things by phone and precisely because he had this contact here otherwise, he would have found himself in a situation where he would have had to go to a nursing home. During this whole pandemic, we did a lot of things for the elderly in institutions, but not for people who are isolated at home. I know that politicians can't do everything, but we must think about the future, all these people who are still independent, and we are financed by the Ministry of the Family to keep people independent as long as possible, and on the other hand, as soon as something extraordinary happens, we forget about all these people who have been left at home.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I saw him once in the nearest town where he lives, he saw me and he wanted to hug me and I said no, excuse me, we can't, and he immediately started crying. He told me about his worries and one of his worries is that he only has cash, he doesn't have a bank card. So he used to go every morning to a local bakery, to buy his bread and one morning he couldn't buy it because he was told "no sir, not in cash, by card".

**Keywords:** elderly, disability, cash, illiteracy, social support, autonomy.

LU08

**Title:** Work pressure on head of specialised schools

**Narrative:** I'm 49 years old, I'm a single mother with a 16 year old daughter and I'm a special educator by training I was a civil servant with the Ministry of Family in the division of disabled people when the pandemic started. I was integrated in the management of the centre for the intellectual development of children with mental disorders, mental disabilities, I was actually attached to the management. I was confronted with all this, we had to communicate the changes to the parents of the pupils, to the pupils, and to our colleagues at work, for example to set up a traffic direction in the schools and things like that and what was important was to communicate it in a strict way but also understandable for all the actors. It was really difficult to communicate everything in the right way. We often had the impression that as a centre for intellectual development we were often neglected by the ministry, which was in charge of basic schools, high schools and not specialised schools. We were always a bit in the dark and I think the minister and his cabinet didn't know what to do. We were always working, so even when the schools were closed we were working and everything revolved around Covid, tracing, who to call, who not to call, that was really the number one issue. We had other educational projects that we tried to set up, but it was always the Covid that we had in mind: who's positive, who's not positive, do we have substitutes who are the students and then, at that point, I thought well you have to change something, it wasn't just about working 24 hours a day, working a lot but it was all about the illness. We exchanged emails at the weekend, so on Saturdays and Sundays we phoned each other and I could see that I wasn't well, I had heart palpitations, panic attacks, I said to myself, well this isn't working, you have to do something for yourself and change jobs. What was hard was in fact all these measures that we couldn't control and to find out how to put them in place and the educational aspects were completely evacuated, we really tried to keep them as much as possible but it was really hard to make parents and pupils understand everything, you have to know that children with a mental handicap or a severe mental handicap needed special support for example for the tests. Normally, in the basic schools and high schools, it was a nurse's cell that did them, but we don't have a nurse working in our house, so we said OK, how do we do it then? The ministry told us to nominate 2 or 3 people to whom we would give training. We had a 2 hour training and then we had to do the PCR tests with our students, it was strange, all the students let themselves be tested, it was good because they knew the people well, it was very good. But we had to deal with the fear of the parents, at one point frustration, aggressiveness. It was hard to manage. As I was also the confidante of the management, I had to act as a link between the management and the other colleagues in the office who did not work in the field, and in addition I was the general secretary of all the specialised schools in Luxembourg and therefore of all the centres of competence, so it was a lot of difficulty in relation to the closure of schools for all these parents who found themselves with their children at home. Our teachers and our educators have done an exceptional job, It was a very difficult period because, for example, you can't put the student in front of the

tablet, it doesn't work, you have to differentiate between the students, you have to differentiate the lessons, our institutions and our teachers were very creative. For example, some teachers went every day to see all the pupils in their cars in front of the door to see them and bring them something to relieve the parents and tell them you know what, I'm coming to get your daughter or your son, I'll take him or her for a walk in the neighbourhood for an hour so that you can take a break for an hour because having a mentally handicapped child 24 hours a day for 3 or 4 weeks requires energy and here we teachers really did an exceptional job, they weren't afraid and there were almost no people on sick leave, it's exceptional, it's really exceptional, and they should really be congratulated because everyone tries to do their best.

**Specifically telling quotes:** We often had the impression that as a centre for intellectual development we were often neglected by the ministry, which was in charge of basic schools, high schools and not specialised schools. We were always a bit in the dark and I think the minister and his cabinet didn't know what to do. We had other educational projects that we tried to set up, but it was always the Covid that we had in mind. We exchanged emails on Saturdays and Sundays we phoned each other and I could see that I wasn't well, I had heart palpitations, panic attacks, I said to myself, well this isn't working, you have to do something for yourself and change jobs.

**Keywords:** education, teachers, disability, young, parents, support, rules, workload.

LU09

**Title:** A mother is refused permission to accompany her disabled adult son to hospital

**Narrative:** "I'm married, I have a daughter that is married and I have a grandson. I have a boy who is 40 years old, he's mentally handicapped. In 2020, he was at the day centre and then they phoned me and said George is not well, he's having trouble breathing so we're going to call the ambulance. We can't go with him but you go to the hospital and surely you can go with him. So I was at home and I came here to the hospital with my husband, we arrived before him because we live nearby. When he arrived, I told the emergency services that my son was going to arrive, I had to accompany him because he was mentally handicapped. They told me, no, Madam, you can't go with him, it's forbidden, and I said, listen, he doesn't speak and he might even fall out of bed because there's no one who knows what he's like. No, no, Madam, it's forbidden, you can't go upstairs, he has to go upstairs on his own, you leave him here and you go home. We'll do all the tests and we'll call you. So I went home with my husband, I was desperate because I thought of everything: he doesn't speak, if they leave him on a bed, he could fall, he could break a leg, his head. I was so desperate. But I was lucky because I have a cousin who works at the hospital and I phoned her and I said listen George is in hospital and they won't let me in, so she offered me straight away, "listen I'm going to get ready, I can go in, I can put my clothes on and I can go with him. So she went to the hospital to be with him and then she told me everything that had happened, she said to me, listen,

he did the tests and it was negative. After 3 hours they called me to say that I could come and get him. I think that's not good because a mentally handicapped person alone in hospital, who doesn't speak, who doesn't move, who doesn't know how to speak, who doesn't know anything, I think that's not good. A mentally handicapped person or an elderly person must always be accompanied by someone who is always in contact with them and I was ill for a few days. We were lucky.

When we tested him it was negative, and then 4 days later he was tested again and it was positive; he caught it in hospital. I found that what they did was wrong, I understand in a way because everyone is afraid, but we can't abandon disabled people or the elderly because an elderly person is lost if he is not used to a carer who is always looking after him or a family member. When I came to look for him, they let me in. I don't understand that, first I couldn't and then I could. I wasn't happy at all, not at all, because last year he had a problem again, we called the ambulance, but it was clearly written that he would be accompanied by his mother. When the Covid started, we kept him at home. It was also very hard because the carers normally come in the morning and the carers who come in the evening listen Madam, normally there are two carers in the morning and in the evening and they tell me, "there is only one person who will come because there are sick people and to limit contact, only one person comes and we will work together. I spoke with my husband and I said look, I'm going to look after my son with my husband, you don't have to come. They could care for other. They were exhausted. To be honest I was also afraid to come, we took care of him for only 3 weeks and it was very hard because the centre was closed, he was at home, he doesn't see the carers, he doesn't see the family, there was nothing, we were in contact with nobody. I used to go out with him, I would go for a walk in the bus or I would go to the shopping centre but not at that time. He was as unhappy as anything, there was nothing to interest him at home, no television, no tablet, nothing at all that is possible. Then, when he returned to the day centre, he missed the contact with others. Before, there were 45 of them in one room and because of Covid, he was alone with one carer. We used to go on holiday and leave him at the centre for a week, to have some time to ourselves, but now it's over."

**Specifically telling quotes:** I told the emergency services that my son was going to arrive, I had to accompany him because he was mentally handicapped. They told me, no, Madam, you can't go with him, it's forbidden. So I went home with my husband, I was desperate because I thought of everything: he doesn't speak, if they leave him on a bed, he could fall, he could break a leg, his head. I was so desperate.

**Keywords:** Health, hospital, mental handicap, care, mother, nurses, parents.

**LU10**

**Title:** Good care inside the care-residence

**Narrative:** "I am the president of a small association in our care centre for the elderly. This association is there to listen to the complaints of the residents but also to make

proposals for new things, what can be done differently. We have excellent contact with our management. We meet every six to eight weeks to discuss ideas for new things and mention complaints if any. It has already started with a new person who is responsible for the food, because we had the biggest problem there, because sometimes it was not good at all, for example, the meat was overcooked. I know, it's a big centre, but still it has to work so that the residents are happy because this is our last home. We are really well looked after by the staff. You just need to press a button if there is a problem and they come right away to see what you need. And in this committee, we work really well together and now. In relation to Covid, at the beginning it was 2 years ago, we were locked in here for 4 months. It was really hard we could only move around in the buildings, go to the restaurant downstairs, but we couldn't go out in the city. We have a little bar downstairs, we could go downstairs to eat a little cake or have a coffee or whatever and that's good. It was really hard during those 4 months because I'm used to going out every day, I'm mobile with my wheelchair, but the 4 months yes it was hard not to be able to go for a walk, just to go out in our park, it was getting long. In total, we had 4 people here on our floor who had Covid and they were immediately isolated. There is a specific floor where the sick people were really locked up so they couldn't go out and be in contact with the others here. 98% of the residents are vaccinated, the 2% who are not is because they are sick and therefore can't get the dose. Now it's working well again, for the wearing of masks it's compulsory but not compulsory in the room, but if I go out now I put my mask on. When I go out, we also must do a test when we come back in like any visitor. We are tested twice a week here now and every two weeks we have a PCR test. We are really well taken care of and even in the difficult conditions at the beginning, it was not easy, but we were well taken care of and well looked after, we could talk, the staff had time to talk. For visits, the family could come but like in a prison, behind a plexiglass and only for a quarter of an hour. It was only for people over 16. I have two granddaughters who could not come. Now I am allowed to visit them, I go to their house, one day every week. It was hard with the family, it was just by phone and that was not easy.

**Specifically telling quotes:** It was really hard we could only move around in the buildings, go to the restaurant downstairs, but we couldn't go out in the city. We have a little bar downstairs, we could go downstairs to eat a little cake or have a coffee or whatever and that's good. It was really hard during those 4 months because I'm used to going out every day, I'm mobile with my wheelchair, but the 4 months yes it was hard not to be able to go for a walk, just to go out in our park, it was getting long.

**Keywords:** Health, lockdown, covid, tests, nurses, dialogue, association, family, visits

**LU11**

**Title:** Access to basic food during the lockdown

**Narrative:** I live alone because I have been divorced for a very long time. My children are grown up, they have their own life, I have a little son. There is really the period before and the period after. Before Covid I was really doing a lot of things as an active senior, participating in all kinds of things, doing sports, volunteering, theatre, all kinds of activities and then it all stopped, I think it was the 13th of March. I still remember, I was at the bus stop, I was coming back from Zumba, and we got a message from the commune that everything is stopped with immediate effect and it was a bit strange to go home and from that day on, I never thought it would last so long, for several months, everything was really the same for me. At the beginning, I had my groceries delivered to me, it was also a whole procedure that the government had launched for vulnerable people, you could order for example fruit and vegetables, you just had to give your name, your address, the number of people in the household and that I found really good, especially as there was also something funny and I think it was marked in the list "choucrouste garnie". As I love it, I ordered it and then when I received the parcel it was less funny, I said to myself Mr Macron said that we were at war and there it was really a war parcel. The sauerkraut was in a can, and all that depressed me. I said to myself, no, I'm not going to recommend it, I'm going to try to find another solution, I went to look on the internet and I think it was also the Luxembourg government with the help of the Luxembourg post office and a fruit and vegetable wholesaler who was proposing that we have a fruit and vegetable basket delivered, so also marking for one person for 2 people and all that, I thought it was really good, so I was disillusioned when it arrived. I live on the ground floor of a three-flat building. There are three steps and you are immediately at home, it is true that at that time people were very careful. The man throws the parcel into the corridor and then leaves without even saying hello. He said "it's for you" and left. So I took the parcel in and I started to open it and I had tears in my eyes because it was a very well known and reputable fruit and vegetable wholesaler here in Luxembourg, so I said to myself that it's good quality, but the impression was that they had kept what they had in excess that they couldn't sell, and then they had done that only for old people, for the little old people. There were at least 1.5kg of tomatoes for one person, not very nice, I could only make tomato soup, the carrots and potatoes were in a really advanced state. I was so shocked by the lack of freshness of the products that I took everything out, I remembered my mother and grandmother, I put everything in water with a little vinegar. The other aspect is the isolation because from one day to the next there is nothing left. I was afraid, I was afraid because a few days after the official confinement, I was not well, I had a fever, I had a sore throat, I had flu symptoms and I had been vaccinated against the flu, so I phoned my GP and he told me not to go out, not to see anyone, stay at home. She gave me a blood test, it's normal for her to protect herself, but then we got on my kitchen table, from a health point of view it wasn't very good for me, I put my arm on the kitchen table, well I thought that wasn't very good. Then she left, I was finally negative, but it stressed me out and as I'm diabetic, I take pills, I said to myself I have to be careful. To go shopping there were queues, so I also isolated myself from my children, physically

**Specifically telling quotes:** It was a big, big disappointment and as the products were no longer fresh, I said to myself that I would cut them up and put them in the freezer and

then I didn't want to order them anymore. I took a delivery service that I already knew from before, more expensive but at least it was better.

**Keywords:** food, unsold item, elderly, war, isolation, internet

**LU12**

**Title:** Students in Higher education have been forgotten.

**Narrative:** I am 61 years old, I am married, I have a husband who is paraplegic and I have a daughter who is still studying and that is important. I am retired, I was a nurse and my husband has been on a disability pension for a very long time. The problem I encountered was that my daughter was studying in Germany (like the vast majority of young people in Luxembourg who go to university in nearby countries). And it's this side that is hard to manage, I'm not saying that it was, because it is very hard to manage. At Christmas there was a big panic because Germany had decided on certain measures and we in Luxembourg had other measures. Classes resumed in Germany after the Christmas holidays, on 9 January, and once again the two countries had different standards for the booster. Here, in Luxembourg, you have to be vaccinated if you have an invitation, for me it was a big panic, we had to go and see on the internet how to get her vaccinated before she could leave, because if you don't, it means that if you leave without having the booster, she can't go to the canteen, she has to manage to eat, which imposed certain constraints, and we got the instructions a few days before Christmas. It was complicated every time. When the vaccinations started, we received the invitation to the vaccination for our daughter, when she was in Germany. So she couldn't be vaccinated, we had to phone and you see it's always this system, you always have to phone to find out how you should do it. That's why I say that all the parents of students, because I've met other parents who have experienced the same situation, have to find the time to stop everything. We're lucky because we've always been able to free ourselves, but when you're working, it's not easy. What's more, sometimes when you phone up you get teams who don't understand the situation, who don't live in Luxembourg, and who didn't understand, for example, that she couldn't be vaccinated because she was in Germany. What do I do? She passed me on to the other colleague who explained it to me well and squarely. For the booster, it's true that it was very complicated. And you spend the Christmas holidays like that. The only solution we had was to go to the "pop-up", that's the vaccination without an appointment the only solution. But there was a delay because in Germany, the booster was after 3 months and in Luxembourg after 4 months. We are in the European Union and they are not able to make a decision among themselves that works. My physiotherapist's daughter is going to come back from an Erasmus, and she's wondering how she's going to be able to get her vaccinated: in Italy there's a problem that I don't know about because she didn't explain it to me, but she's going to come back and she won't be vaccinated for Belgium. I think that students are the forgotten ones, I don't understand how the European Union can't find a synthesis at that level!. Our Minister has worked hard to find solutions for

students but still. My daughter panics right away, so we told her, for border workers, we say that, well you follow those rules. But in the meantime, they had to have a paper, they had to do that, so while they were studying, they had to deal with all these worries about having all their papers. It was another crisis to deal with.

**Specifically telling quotes:** There was a difference in rules, because in Germany, the booster was after 3 months and in Luxembourg after 4 months. We are in the European Union and they are not able to make a decision among themselves that works. It was really a stress for my daughter. I think that students are the forgotten ones, I don't understand how the European Union can't find a synthesis at that level!

**Keywords:** Student, education, vaccination rules, international mobility, anxiety, parents



## Latvia

### LV01

**Title:** I sat at home for two and a half years

**Narrative:** "I am 27 years old women. I live in Riga, Latvia. I have been unemployed since December 2021. I studied in the bachelor's program. I worked as a customer service specialist. Honestly, when it started, when there was the first wave, when everyone stayed at home, at first everyone thought it would be short, everyone initially liked that you can be at home, enjoy the home environment. But it dragged on for a long time, I sat at home for two and a half years. Travel to work was very fragmented. From a human point of view, it remained unbearable. Everything merges into one. Home is everything and you can't take it anymore. When curfews started, things were crazier. There is me and the neighbours. It wasn't the best time. Along with studying, studying is a separate story.

In the first wave, no one was ready neither we nor the teachers. Everyone went through adaptation. So, I have not met with mine course mates and the graduation will take place remotely. The quality of studies suffered. If it were possible most would come in person, no matter how. Everyone wanted to be back, to meet.

The most difficult was the ability to concentrate. Face-to-face and remote studies are so different. Being at home is full of distractions. Listening in pyjamas is not motivating, it is not a ritual that you set yourself up for studying. Many students just slept through the lectures. That was a minus. Less motivation, no conscious study process, less concentration. In terms of quality, many teachers did not learn how to use the digital environment. There were also technical difficulties, a lot of time was spent solving technical problems. The students are also to blame - the involvement was less because the key is to listen rather than delve into the topic. No, we will not be less competitive. All the work was done with great dedication. I do not think we will be a lost generation. Because, however, we were all motivated to get an education. Yes, I didn't absorb as much as in other circumstances, I had to do more myself, in addition to study time.

I had no trouble getting the job done. The employer was responsive. All I changed was that I had to work from home. [Employer] Helped with internet, paid for it.

There were problems with the work process, when the team moved home, the group got lost, communication changed, we became egocentric, there was no cohesion, there was no working together. People became more real - the true face/ true nature appeared. No one thought is he or she is offending a person if they were in zoom. Remote is not the same as face to face communications. One can be very harsh and mean on zoom.

Do not want to come back - your save time on commuting, we can devote more time to our family, our interests, the quality of work is falling, but we are in our environment, we are ready to sacrifice the quality of work to be in a comfortable environment.

It was hardest for me to be home alone. I like being in people. I suffer so much from being alone. And there is none at home. I don't want to go through this again.

At first we were very scared, my parents and I, until the vaccine came. We were very careful, we didn't want to take risks. We didn't see each other for 3 months. Then I couldn't stand it - we met outside and in the winter. There was a great lack of communication. When we received the shot, we resumed meetings with regularly.

The girlfriends had a different attitude towards life - they attended all their entertainment illegally. I didn't meet with them, I didn't participate, everyone considered me to be 'a fool of the year'. Now I don't know if it was worth, it wasn't good for my mental health. But physical health is also a value. Now we are all vaccinated, we meet, and we communicate.

Nothing has changed for my partner and I. Everything is OK. It was hard at the beginning, the craziest thing was that you can't get out of the house anywhere, we are inside 24/7 all the time, everything is tired at home. We have nothing to share - we have nothing to discuss with each other. It started to affect feelings for each other. Then the partner started to go to work more often to make space for each other.

I do not expect anything from this country. Think better of yourself. I wasn't expecting anything. I expected health care system to be stronger. I remember when my girlfriend had health problems. And the emergency services did not come to her, even when she was having a hard time breathing, the brigade did not come. The first reaction - we will not go, because you can breathe. It is not acceptable! I want confidence that they will come to my parents. That worries me. That parents may not get help.

**Specifically telling quotes:** It was hardest for me to be home alone. I like being in people. I suffer so much from being alone. And there is none at home. I don't want to go through this again.

**Keywords:** downtime, loss-making, stress, employment, control

**LV02**

**Title:** Restrictions on Covid-19 make everyday life difficult in the province

**Narrative:** "I am 25 years old, I live in a small city in Latvia. I am on parental leave. My children are 5 years and 1 year and 4 months. Prior to parental leave, I worked for a regional newspaper. I don't work there anymore, I'm still on parental leave, but I won't be back there. I don't know yet what I will do.

I was still working in the newspaper when the pandemic started. Pregnancy coincided with covid. I had worked for a year, I was used to it, I got to know the work and the environment, there were no surprises. Covid changed everything, the specifics of the work changed, there was also panic in the editorial office, also in the company, there was a panic that the newspaper had to be closed. Complete chaos among colleagues as well. There was fear and anxiety, we didn't know how to do our job because there was anxiety. I had never experienced anything like this in my life. There have been no such crises in my life. The Big something. Purely in terms of work, the whole routine changed,

there were no events, no activities, nothing to write about. I had to start writing operational reports, holding my hand to the plus, all the most important and up-to-date information gave me something new, it was harder. Everything is over, but the newspaper had to be published, but nothing really happens. The terrible challenge. We walked the streets and looked for where we could find something. I realized that I don't have tolerance to that kind of stress. I started having trouble sleeping due to stress. I realized that I was not interested in news journalism, I had a hard time going through the news, this negative swirl. This stream of information leaves something within you. Negative currents.

Covid affected the pregnancy. On the positive side, the restrictions created security. Of course, it was difficult to breathe in a mask. I didn't get sick because I followed the restrictions.

Covid time coincides with the completion of undergraduate studies. The training took place remotely, which was better in my condition, I didn't have to go to university, I could sit more comfortably at home with a big belly, I didn't have to drive, I didn't have to suffer from nausea. It was a great gift for me. A big positive aspect.

When I went on maternity leave, I quit my job. It turned out that the company did not have an airbag. The company was on the verge of collapse, a pandemic revealed it. During the pandemic, I realized that it did not make sense to work so hard for low pay without growth. It was an eye opening experience.

The daughter had a kindergarten with on-call groups. According to the regulations, we were able to take my daughter to kindergarten because my husband and I were working. In general, she was often alone in a group or had a couple of children with her. I really appreciate it, it turned out to be individual work with my child, she had undivided attention. She gained so much, learned so much. I felt privileged that we had this experience.

I was afraid that my husband would be allowed to be present at the birth. There was confusion, could not be understood. The hospital differed from the hospital in terms of requirements, I did not understand whether a mask would be needed or not. Extra stress. Every day something changed, there was anxiety all the time. In the end, the husband was able to be present. There was also no need to give birth in a mask. It was probably the reality of a small town that I could give birth without a mask.

After the birth, we were alone in the hospital for 3 days, the husband could not come, he had to stay with our daughter. It was severe without support. Purely physically, because I couldn't get out of bed. It was difficult.

The family couldn't see me either. On the other hand, I was able to recover peacefully. My husband lost his job because of Covid. My husband is a builder, he works with Norway, they finished orders due to a pandemic. For me it was a plus that my husband was home for 3 months. My health slowly returned after childbirth. It was good that the husband was at home, that there was a complete involvement of the husband, that the husband was experiencing the growth of the youngest child.

In terms of finances, we had to think about how we live and how we spend, but it was not very difficult.

The period when the shops were closed was the most difficult. Second hand shops are our main shopping spot, it was hard that the shops were closed. It was already hard with

money and then it turns out that there are no cheap stores. My boots got torn, I can't buy new ones without trying. My husband glued the boots with super glue. That was nasty. The daughter is now in endless quarantine in kindergarten. I can't even count how many times she's been quarantined, I can't understand anymore. I have spent a lot of time with my daughter. I have a small child, have a daughter, have studies. Although it was difficult, but not bad. I got to know my child more. It was a challenge to deal with the child at home. Plus, there is another child, a small child. I had to think creatively, look for resources in myself. It gave me a lot as a person.

**Specifically telling quotes:** The period when the shops were closed was the most difficult. Second hand shops are our main shopping spot, it was hard that the shops were closed. It was already hard with money and then it turns out that there are no cheap stores. My boots got torn, I can't buy new ones without trying. My husband glued the boots with super glue.

**Keywords:** maternity leave, unemployment, child care, restrictions, financial safety

LV03

**Title:** Single mother of four trying to cope

**Narrative:** "I am 39 years old. I live in a big city in Latvia. I work in several places, but they are all related to social work. I am the head of the local branch of the resource centre for women Marta, the centre provides assistance to women who suffer from violence. As a social worker, I also work with people who suffer from addictions, as well as with families in risk group. I am a mother of four, I raise my children alone. My Covid time experience was originally related to work because I was on parental leave. At the very beginning, when everyone was surprised when life changed, I was on parental leave. I returned to work during Covid. I am very introverted, I liked that all socialization is limited, that I can work from home. In that respect, I am delighted. What bothered me was that the people around were flustered. There was a lot of uncertainty and the staff was worried because it was difficult to see how we could accept visitors / customers to ensure compliance. My attitude was freer, I behaved more calmly. It was much affected by the fact that I did not work in an industry that was directly affected by covid. The work of the municipality is convenient, it is quite certain that there will be work. Not the industry that was negatively affected by covid. There was no danger, I could work remotely. On the positive side, the employer gained confidence that teleworking has its advantages. So I don't feel hurt by covid. The sphere of suffering is my children. I have 4 children, I am raising children alone. Two of the children have pupils. In the beginning, there was distance learning from home, and the lack of technical support was deadly. We have one computer for the whole family. I did not receive any support, although several lists were drawn up and we were included in the lists, but it did not work. Schools made lists of families who needed computers. In the end, the teacher called that computers were assigned, but others needed more, and if I could give up. I obeyed and

gave up the computer offered by the school because there were families who did not have a computer at all. In general, there were no clear criteria for who was awarded the computer and why. Social services may have helped with the decision, but I do not know. I still think about which families didn't get it, about the families who don't have computers at home. And it's not a small group. The surprise was that children don't really know how to use a computer that much. I didn't realize how computer illiterate children are. At first I didn't understand how I could help. I was at work, they are at home and I couldn't help with it. I am currently facing problems in kindergartens. There are quarantines all the time. I can't track all quarantines. Of course, I was able to take the sick leaves the job provides, but the job one way or another has to be done, so I got to hire a babysitter. There were additional costs. Government communication and decision-making could have been easier, smarter, simpler. The unrest in the public space was ridiculous. I became sarcastic and nihilistic about epidemiological safety rules, I started to disregard the rules. I didn't see the point and I got tired. This time also provided many opportunities. I can conduct trainings without going to Riga. I like to work remotely. I see it as a benefit because I am not from Riga.

I did not feel any support from the municipality. At times, even food parcels were a hassle - to take a taxi, because I don't have my own transport. The packages were large, voluminous and therefore heavy. You won't even bring it home. In the end, there were high transport costs. At first I expected support, at the end I just looked at what was happening with irony. State support (a one-time benefit of EUR 500 per child) went into savings, it was not like we spent it. For the youngest children, this time does not mean anything special. They know there is a virus. Sometimes I abuse it. I say we can't go anywhere because there is a virus, not because there is no money or no time. The eldest son also liked to be on his own, to do distanced learning, he organized himself well. By the time he got tired, he started longing for school. The daughter, who is 11 years old, wanted to go to school, she could not cope with distance learning. Better to go to school. Even now, when there is there is no full-fledged study work, because there still is pandemic. Now the children are not even happy that lessons are not happening. It's hard to understand, it's confusing all the time. Something is changing all the time. Who is sick again, what classes have been canceled?

This is a test. I'm trying to remain a distant position.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I am currently facing problems in kindergartens. There are quarantines all the time. I can't track all quarantines. Of course, I was able to take the sick leaves, my employer is supportive and provides, but the job has to be done one way or another, so I got to hire a babysitter. It created additional costs.

**Keywords:** single mother, remote work, remote learning, financial difficulties, lack of support

LV04

**Title:** Addiction and gender-based violence have risen during pandemics.

**Narrative:** "I am 39 years old. I work in several places, but they are all related to social work. I am the head of local branch of the resource center for women Marta, the center provides assistance to women who suffer from violence. As a social worker, I also work with people who suffer from addictions.

Isolation, confinement, contributed to the development of violence. I think it was educational for the whole society to see how it is to be affected. How is it that you can't get away. It seemed to me that this could increase empathy. That experience of not being able to do what you want will increase empathy. Because this is the reality of living in a violent relationship.

The number of customers in 2020 was 50, in 2021 there are 94 new customers. For the local area, this number is very large. We can't even provide this service evenly. There are already 18 new customers this year. We are looking for additional forces so that we can provide timely assistance. We can't queue. If there were such cases, then the customers disappeared. It is important that we can provide assistance immediately. The Ministry of Welfare allowed the center to work in person, which was great. We worked in person. There are high risks to working remotely.

Customer profile remain the same, it unchanged. The main perpetrators are the same, the types of violence are also the same - domestic violence from partners, women are mainly those who suffer, including children. Children who have experienced violence in their parents' relationships. I can't say there is a change in regards to covid. In the stories of the victims, a feeling of helplessness appears as an additional circumstance. The seclusion created by Covid increased the feeling of helplessness. There was no way to get away. Covid was helpful to the abuser. To control and keep in fear.

The problems came to light. We cover a small percentage of everyone who needs help. I don't know if it's even a percentage.

There are people who do not seek help who do not even know that they have the opportunity to get help. People don't even have the information on how to get help. It is a feeling that you cannot do anything, you cannot change, you are powerless, that you do not even look for information. Absolute powerlessness.

Covid helps the abuser. But the situation has also exacerbated fears of the victim, and perhaps tensions have prompted them to seek help. So maybe this is the reason why applications for help are on the rise. You can no longer hide and disguise it, it is no longer possible in these circumstances.

On the field of addiction. Society has a high tolerance for addiction. Such an impression that it is a source of a joy in life. The tension caused by Covid was a great excuse for all addicts. It is important for addicts to find an excuse. Drug use was not so pronounced, gambling went online. The online environment is more difficult to control. Online format is dangerous. Those who have registered in the register can also play online. More opportunities to 'break down'. Self-help groups took place - there was a special permit to operate and meet. It was very important that they were able to communicate, it is important for the health process.

On families at risk. It is difficult for me to understand what is and what is not the consequences of the covid crisis. For the people I work with, the crisis is constant. So I can't say right away what the effects of covid are. Because they are already in crisis. The

number of minors in the addiction prevention center has increased. Parents are tired, giving in to fighting for their children. Parents can no longer sustain, they give up - it is important to earn money and have something to eat, not to control the child. Priorities are have changed, the child caring shifts toward less importance. Parental despair, which borders on the loss of humanity. That is the reality many parents face - if I take another leave [due to the quarantine in the kindergarten], I can face unemployment, that fear deprives humanity.

I believe that mothers with young children are at very high risk.

Computers were assigned to families from risk groups, families with children with behavioural disorders. From my experience working with these families, I learned that computer equipment provided by the state / municipality was often used as a manipulation tool. The children threatened to hit / damage the equipment if the parents did not do what they wanted. Parents have a financial obligation if something goes wrong with the technique. So it was like a weapon for children against their parents.

It is difficult to judge by customers how wisely the money allocated by the state was spent. There is no doubt that families with social problems received a lot of money in a form of one time benefit [ 500 euros per child]. It is not clear whether there were thoughtful purchases or debts covered. It should be studied separately how the money was spent because financial literacy training did not come with it. Because it could be combined with social service support for families in their care. Money is not deliberately wasted, but they do not know how to plan and cope.

Assessing the system - communication with the public was unsuccessful. The information was not clear to everyone, especially the at-risk families. This was not done - special communication with these families and people. They did not try to ask people for their opinion, even at the municipal level. In order for a person to have the opportunity to express himself, to express his pain. Even if nothing changes, it is good to express yourself. Great theatre of the absurd. I could no longer listen to the political debate, it seemed that there was nothing to say. Great cynicism developed in me.

**Specifically telling quotes:** Covid helps the abuser. But the situation has also exacerbated fears of the victim, and perhaps tensions have prompted them to seek help. So maybe this is the reason why applications for help are on the rise. You can no longer hide and disguise it, it is no longer possible in these circumstances. The tension caused by Covid was a great excuse for all addicts. It is important for addicts to find an excuse.

**Keywords:** gender-based violence, addiction, families in a social risk group, poverty, relationships in the family

**LV05**

**Title:** The cat saved me from severe depression.

**Narrative:** I have been a school teacher for 40 years, I am 62 years old. I live in Riga, Latvia. This is already the third academic year, the very first moment was the year before

last, in March when we were forced to work remotely for the first time. It was very hard, especially the first week, even the first day when I realized that I could not move away from the computer. All the time some works were sent, I opened them all the time and checked them. I realized that this is wrong, that you need to live differently (laughs). The experience was gained, it was necessary to learn how to work in Zoom. Slowly, other teachers were also taught, and when we got the opportunity to see and hear the students, and they saw and heard us, a moment of relief came. Well, somehow we managed, the school year ended. Last year was difficult, because we worked remotely for almost the entire year, starting in October. The most difficult thing, probably, is that you don't know whether pupils hear you or not, and when you realize that some of the students are connecting and not listening to you. Well, in general, this is the business of each student - do they want to hear or do not want to hear. The hardest part of all this remote work is the verification of the work, not even the verification itself, but receiving them. It is technically not very convenient and takes a lot of time and effort. You are tied to a computer on a short leash. When the very first time we were in a pandemic, I left the house for the first time only 10 days later. Since my husband is a sailor, I stay at home alone quite often, I realized that I did not leave the house for 10 days. I had groceries, I had no one to communicate with, everyone was afraid to visit each other. And this lack of live communication affected me, especially last year when we worked remotely almost from mid-October until June. Somewhere, probably by January, I realized that depression was starting, I was missing a living person nearby (tears in my eyes), and then I decided to take a cat. And my life has changed for the better. I had a creature that I needed to take care of. The cat saved me from severe depression. I was not very afraid of getting infected, well, somehow I did not have such a fear. I was vaccinated, I got my second vaccination in the summer, and now in December the third one. I have no fear of getting sick. This is despite the fact that I have type 2 diabetes, I had oncology, I'm already old. I want to work at a school, I want remote learning to take a minimum amount of study time. We are in a zone of very high risk, there are hundreds of students next to us every day both in the classroom and in the corridors. We have a very high chance of getting infected compared to many people. We are well aware that it is impossible to work in a mask for the entire lesson. I can't. I need to talk a lot and I can't talk in a mask. So the mask is under my nose. And the children - well, yes, for some it slides off, someone wears it correctly. Sometimes you make a comment. We are well aware that we have to sit in a mask for 7 hours ... And if I ask a student to read or answer something, then I do not understand anything that he is saying under the mask. I ask him to lower the mask, read it, and ask him to put it on again. So there is a vulnerability. we now have such a mode of work: we go to school and do not know whether we will work with the class at school or have already been sent to a remote location, to quarantine - this causes a state of nervousness. You are waiting for the school year to end faster, for everyone to return to school and work in normal conditions. Of course, recently, when so many people become infected and if this happens to me, I really hope that I will survive without serious consequences. I have had 3 vaccinations. I find that fear is cornering and harder to resist.

**Specifically telling quotes:** And this lack of live communication affected me, especially last year when we worked remotely almost from mid-October until June. Somewhere,

probably by January, I realized that depression was starting, I was missing a living person nearby (tears in my eyes), and then I decided to take a cat.

**Keywords:** depression, distanced work, distanced teaching, health, luck of IT skills

**LV06**

**Title:** The inequality stop being immigrant versus local. It started more of a vaccinated versus unvaccinated people

**Narrative:** "My name is Muhammed so you can clearly hear that I am not from Latvia originally. Now I live in Riga, Latvia. During the war in Syria I decided to leave Syria and my number one option was Latvia, because my girlfriend was Latvian. I came here and started to study in TSI, I studied computer science. I have graduated probably 2 years ago, then I started to work in Accenture Latvia. As a robotic developer. I started to work in Accenture and second day exactly from me signing the contract, we were sent home. Since then we have started working from home. Accenture sent us monitors, working chairs, they also paid us to buy headphones and what ever you want from technic stuff. They made it easy. After 2 years I can't say I fully happy working from home. I can't say I minded it, but I would like to go back to the office at least one or two days a week, just to break the routine. My wife lost her job at the begging of the pandemic, so now she is sitting home. I don't know, how would it be if she will be still working. Honestly working from home has helped me to take care of newborn child, because if it will be me going to the office all the time - my wife would have rough time dealing alone with the baby. As a survivor of the war pretty much I customized with a lack of products and disturbances of life. What was difficult for me is to understand where this is going. I mean, is it going to be the end of the world, for example, or is it going end in 1 or 2 years. It was hard for me to understand with European lifestyle where is this heading. Is it going to be like a new lifestyle that we should get used to? Because usually in the Middle East those types of things happen, we usually assume the worst, I mean we are prepared for the worst.

I don't have a big number of friends in Latvia. I had a big number of friends, but in Syria. Social interaction I had was at work. And I was deprived of that during lockdown.

I got a new kid. Yeah, that was a very, very, very difficult decision, because of the pandemic. I don't know where things are going to. I don't want him to grow up in a society where everything is happening from home. I mean, you start imagining it as one of these like, post apocalyptic movies where everyone is staying at his own small bubble. Health, in general, not only mental but physical health also went worse. I used to go to work sometimes I can like spend 30 minutes walking to work, then I get the bus and then I continue my way. Now that's gone. Regarding mental health it's got affected. I mean, I usually consider myself as guy with strong mental health. I really wouldn't imagine that working from home for two years would affect me emotionally and mentally. But it does. First of all, there's a thin line between home life at home and work. And when you're working from home this line starts to degrade. Those two concepts converge into one

and then you use start missing the time when you have to finish work. At the beginning of the pandemic, I sometimes finished work at 9PM, just because I couldn't realize it is 9pm.

And after two years, I mean, your colleges turn into icons on your desktop. It's hard to realize that this guy I'm talking to is another person he has feelings. I mean, we do talk, but if it's online, the talk is not natural. Really, talking with someone online, it's not easy. Especially if he's a colleague, it's the work if he's not a friend, it's difficult to get involved in this social talk.

During the pandemic, nothing really has changed [in regard to racism]. I mean, still stupid people are stupid people, with or without pandemic. I cannot really tell you that it has gone up or down. I could say that the inequality got oriented more against unvaccinated people than foreign people or darker skinned people. The inequality stop being immigrant versus local. They start turning the table against unvaccinated people. They really want someone to blame. But as a foreign person, not really. Nothing really has changed in my life.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I mean, I usually consider myself as guy with strong mental health. I really wouldn't imagine that working from home for two years would affect me emotionally and mentally. But it does. (...) I could say that the inequality got oriented more against unvaccinated people than foreign people or darker skinned people. The inequality stop being immigrant versus local. They start turning the table against unvaccinated people.

**Keywords:** refugee, seclusion, mental health, discrimination, fear for the future

LV07

**Title:** During the pandemic I understood, I am gay.

**Narrative:** "I am 23 years old, I was born in Riga. I'm a master's student and I'm involved in social networks, photography and volunteer work in various European projects.

Pandemic helped me to find myself, to connect with my true self, to understand that I am gay. This is also connected with the fact that I began to sit more on TikTok. The TikTok, according to algorithms, selects for you people who may be of interest to you. I got a lot of content about relationships, psychology, as well as LGBT jokes appeared on my TikTok, since I have lived as a homophobe all my life. I was very categorical about these minorities. Quarantine gave me a chance to return to myself. I spent a lot of time alone - reading, sitting in social media.

The more I consumed information, the more I understood that some of my sensations, feelings are absolutely normal. And some of these feelings form into an orientation. There were just some things in my life that I didn't pay attention to or didn't notice them, but the pandemic and quarantine helped me notice all this, make a revelation, conclusions, and also help me realize that they [my previous convictions] are all interconnected. I was able to discover my true identity. BEFORE the pandemic, I tried to

build my relationships, but nothing worked out for me. I wondered why? It seemed to me that maybe I just haven't grown up, I have a lot of toxicity, I can't have healthy relationships. In general, it was difficult for me to grasp any feelings for men, although I went on dates with them, but nothing worked out for me. I seemed to always move away from them all the time. We were constantly breaking up and it seemed to me that I was constantly being abandoned. Actually, during the pandemic, I began to notice this for myself. I stood near the bookcase, and I had a lot of posters with my female idols. And I somehow began to think about it, why I had so many such idols. When I began to delve into myself, it dawned on me ... It was hard for me to accept this, because I considered myself homophobic. But there are obvious things and facts that say that I like female characters and women, but I have never connected with such feelings. I was always told that I should get married and have children. And when I first realized that I shouldn't do something, it helped me. Since November 2020, I have started this path of acceptance. I began to accept and notice the facts about my orientation rather than denying them. I recorded all this - my sympathies, obsessions. I didn't come out, but I let it go and started talking about it like it was something ordinary. Then I got TikTok, but I was afraid to make some jokes about it, but then I started trying. People began to subscribe to me and there was a feeling that I began to enter the local community [LGBT]. Later, I even went to my first Erasmus on the LGBT theme. And yesterday, for the first time, I went to the office of the LGBT community in Latvia, which were the first to organize prides. It was my first public appearance here and it was like my coming out, because everyone around understands who you are and why you are here. I was received very warmly, almost like family. I just realized that from the beginning of quarantine to this day, I have gone a giant path of self-acceptance. In principle, quarantine helped me in some way, although this is strange.

Only thanks to social networks I was able to find support and my community. I had no one to talk to about it. Before I started seeing a therapist, I tried to talk to my friend about it, but she said it was temporary. It was painful, we don't talk anymore. When a loved one does not accept you or says that this is temporary, it is very unpleasant. It helped me understand who my friend is and who is not.

When the restrictions were lifted, and I realized that it was not yet the time for a relationship. I didn't want to give false hopes. I just made friends. There was no opportunity to see each other, and even build a trusting relationship. After all, you don't know who is vaccinated and who isn't, so you don't know if you can go somewhere. You don't know if this person developed mental health difficulties during the pandemic. Now I feel like I want a healthy relationship!

**Specifically telling quotes:** I just realized that from the beginning of quarantine to this day, I have gone a giant path of self-acceptance. In principle, quarantine helped me in some way, although this is strange.

**Keywords:** LGBT, mental health, seclusion, identity, social media

LV08

**Title:** There is no distance learning in specialized schools

**Narrative:** "In the beginning, my biggest difficulty was with the child, he stopped going to school, and since he couldn't stay at home alone, I didn't have anyone to look after him. It was quite stressful for me. I needed to solve this problem. At first, I just took him to work with me, and then, of course, nannies, but this hits the pocket very hard. After all, this is a very expensive pleasure. None of the government was worried about this, they say, solve your problems yourself.

Since he goes to a specialized school [he has a disability], he did not have any distance learning. He just didn't do anything at home all this time.

The fact that my child did not go to school and got used to this way of life and he still, in fact, lives like this. Indeed, in fact, most of the time even now, we are in quarantine for weeks. And it's hard for me that I can't pull my child together and he suffers because he doesn't get the necessary knowledge and he doesn't have a system.

I need to work, of course. Because of this situation [quarantine], I have to take sick leave, I have been on sick leave three times in a couple of months. It's good that I have a loyal boss who understands everything. I call management and explain the situation, that I need sick leave and they do not mind. In theory, this is terrible, because you are constantly in limbo. You take your child to school, and an hour later they call you and say, sorry, the school is closing - you go into quarantine for 10 days. Well damn, are you serious? Especially when there are people under your leadership, you have managed to have everything in control, and then it goes again, and you are back to point zero. And it turns out that you need to be on the phone all the time [to work]. On the one hand, it turns out that you are on sick leave, and on the other hand, you are on the phone all the time and are at work. It is wrong, it is impossible.

There is no help from government institutions. No! Zero. The state has just awarded us this money [a lump sum of EUR 500 per child]. And so that someone called us, helped - no. As the saying goes, take care of everything yourself.

I want my child to go to school. This is the only support I need to keep educational institutions open. I have a child with a disability, he goes to a specialized school, to keep schools open is necessary not only for me but for all parents in such a situation. It was necessary to somehow think over everything correctly so that the child would somehow socialize, instead of sitting at home for six months and doing nothing. My child still does not want to go to school, he just knows that he was at home and did nothing, and now he needs to go to school again. The child simply lost the significance of such words as "school", "education", lost the understanding that this should be done. He knows that he can sit at home and not go anywhere.

I feel like I must fight like a 'fish on ice'. You understand that you are dependent on the system. The system cannot be changed, and you just need to adapt to the situation and wait for better times. I can only adjust. And wait for all restrictions to be lifted and hope that something can improve. Well, let's see.

The difficulty was also exacerbated by the fact that I had to deal with one because my husband worked abroad. There was a situation that my husband works abroad and we did not see each other for almost half a year because of this whole situation. It was a difficult time, it was necessary to understand whether you can save the relationship or not. Because 5 months is a long time. You understand that a person physically cannot come to you and you cannot come. After all, the airports are closed - it was morally difficult.

**Specifically telling quotes:** The child simply lost the significance of such words as "school", "education", lost the understanding that this should be done. He knows that he can sit at home and not go anywhere.

**Keywords:** disability, distance learning, lack of socialization, quarantine, sick leave

LV09

**Title:** The pandemic prevented me from obtaining a residence permit

**Narrative:** "My name is Dasha, I am 25 years old. I do graphic design. I am from Ukraine . Now I live in Riga. I moved somewhere at the beginning of December 2021. I have been here for more than 3 months. The reason was that I got married in September. And now I have done all the paperwork and moved to Riga. Before marriage, I travelled back and forth constantly, moved between Zaporozhye and Riga, because there were no ready documents and there was no legal reason for me to be here completely. At that time, I had a boyfriend in Riga, who is my husband at the moment. And we constantly travelled to each other. The pandemic certainly had a big impact, we were not able to sustain our relationships like that anymore.

I think that we would have got married earlier, but there were restrictions on flights, restrictions on crossing borders. It was hard to figure out how and where it would be best for us to meet, and I think I would have moved to Latvia faster if not for the pandemic.

When the pandemic just started, that winter [2020] I was in Riga. It turns out right before the very first lockdown when they said that they would close the borders, I had to leave [Latvia]. I could no longer stay in Riga according to the documents, I had no permit to stay.

It was the most terrible situation that happened to me. I was in Riga and lived here for about three months. And then we were sharply told that the borders would be closed, and I had 3 days to leave the country. That's when I left Latvia. We got married and I started to do all the necessary paperwork to move to back Latvia. We got separated because of pandemics.

When I applied for a residence permit, the process was delayed. It turns out that they [responsible authorities] did them longer than usual, and now this process is still ongoing. We did everything right. We first telephoned and found out everything, how everything is going on, how I can apply after marriage in order to register here in order

to receive documents for a residence permit. We were told to collect certain documents and bring them [to the office in person].

As a result, when we collected everything and brought it, they told me that they had not accepted documents in person for 2 years since the beginning of the pandemic. I told them that the hotline told me that it is possible to come and bring the documents. It was very confusing, since we sign up for appointment two weeks in advance, as we were told to do. And no one and any point told us that they [institution] don't work in person! So, it turns out that the process was delayed due to the fact that they do not accept documents in person. Everything had to be mailed and done online. It turned out to be a very unpleasant situation, it turns out that we were misinformed, and the process dragged on.

I want all the documents and everything necessary to be done already. As a result, it turns out that because of the pandemic, everything is delayed, you always need to make reservations, it is difficult to get into institutions. You need to sign up in advance. I, as an alien do not feel support, I don't feel that institutions are trying to be helpful, they don't change because it is pandemic. I paid for the documents myself, the state duties too, I also collected everything myself. Now I have paid one fee, if after a while I have to submit something again, I will have to pay again.

There were other difficulties. I work as a graphic designer. Often businesses are not ready to work, they put various business processes on pause, and periodically I experienced difficulties with finding work. However, I can't say it had a big impact on me. I was fine. I didn't have any problems. The only problem was with the movement, well, the flights were closed.

**Specifically telling quotes:** It was the most terrible situation that happened to me. I was in Riga and lived here for about three months. And then we were sharply told that the borders would be closed, and I had 3 days to leave the country. That's when I left Latvia. We got married and I started to do all necessary paperwork to move to back to Latvia. We were separated due to the pandemic.

**Keywords:** non-resident, paperwork, bureaucracy, separation, lack of information

**LV10**

**Title:** Due to the pandemic, my business can't make ends meet.

**Narrative:** "My name is Tatyana, I am 39 years old. My job is to run a sushi restaurant. I constantly faced problems. Business was in such a very suspended state and financial turnover in the restaurant fell sharply. People abruptly stopped coming to the restaurant and the situation was becoming very hopeless. But when we went on downtime, I already accepted this situation and did not particularly stressed.

After the first downtime we went back to work and we recovered, thank God. The recovery was not long, because the second wave of the pandemic came and as soon as we got on our feet we were closed again. We already had experience with downtime,

and we were already used to this money, and we took it for granted, everything seemed to be fine. Well, again, you sit at home, you don't strain, you don't have any problems, you get some money. As they say, one quickly gets used to good things. We sat at home for a while, and then we were again called to work.

Accordingly, I was the first to be called in so that I could assemble the team again, make a rational decision on the distribution of products, on the distribution of the workforce. Well, we slowly recovered again. For the third time [covid wave], it seems to me that no one was on downtime. I remember that we worked in the third wave, despite that there was something like real lockdown. The third wave hit the hardest both materially and morally.

This is because no one was sent to downtime, we all worked. And how will you work if there are restrictions? People don't come to your institution, you incur huge losses, and, in fact, no one compensates you for this. Therefore, throughout this third wave, we were under stress. I, as a leader, for sure was under stress. I still needed to motivate my team so that they didn't become limp and went to work. Considering that there were big losses and very small incomes, my payments to the staff greatly exaggerated the income, respectively - the restaurant worked and still works at a big loss. And only now, when we are close to March 2022 it seems like it all ends, well, we can hope for some kind of clearance, but this is unsure, unstable.

One more problem loomed from all this - people got used to the fact that they do nothing and get paid for it [received downtime payments]. Accordingly, when they went to work, after sitting at home for about six months, they had this feeling that they could do nothing and get paid for it. It looks like they are all too relaxed. It took a lot of time to gather people together and bring them back to reality. Someone started taking alcohol and could not stop anymore - this also affected work. Well, all this situation, that people can't attend restaurant, due to the various reasons. It was and still is morally very straining.

Of course, the catering sector, and the tourism industry are suffering enormous losses. And my management is not interested, they need income. I must provide them with income, that is, I must organize my work in such a way that in this situation restaurant would work without losing money. And that creates a lot of stress. I have to think all the time, to control myself, not to take it out on my employees. It is not easy.

The third wave was quite uncomfortable in terms of attitude towards you [from law enforcement]. You are treated like an enemy of the people. This whole situation with the police, that they are constantly walking around, constantly impose penalties for the fact that your mask has slipped under your nose. How people are treating people has deteriorated. To be constantly under stress, that God forbid your mask will slip off and you will be fined for this, although you honestly went and took the job, did not violate anything, and you can still be fined for this. This is no good!

In psycho-emotional terms, the most intense thing I faced was that I had to fire unvaccinated employees. It was very hard. Plus, you lose your work force and in this situation, it is almost impossible to find a replacement.

**Specifically telling quotes:** Of course, the catering sector, and the tourism industry are suffering enormous losses. And my management is not interested, they need income. I

must provide them with income, that is, I must organize my work in such a way that in this situation restaurant would work without losing money. And that creates a lot of stress. I have to think all the time, to control myself, not to take it out on my employees. It is not easy.

**Keywords:** downtime, loss-making, stress, employment, control



## Netherlands

NL01

**Title:** Single woman, age 66, solo self-employed musician/singer, lost all her gigs and has started caring for others

**Narrative:** "My name is Arita, I am now 66 years old and live alone in a cottage on a vacation park in the woods. I am a singer by profession and live from my performances and workshops. When the Corona pandemic broke out, all my performances were cancelled overnight. From a traveling existence, I was suddenly in my house in the woods.

Because everyone was affected by this pandemic, I wanted to do something for others. I was concerned for the people who were stuck inside their houses and in the hospital and felt the need to somehow uplift them. Then it occurred to me that I could record and send around bird songs. Birds are the symbol of freedom.

I recorded 35 bird songs. I worked five days a week on these recordings. I had to learn the lyrics by heart, find a costume and a background to go with it, and was busy for a day per song. When the recording was finished, I sent it around to nursing homes, friends and acquaintances, and people who needed it. That's how I kept myself going by helping others. I even went on a radio show with my songs. That's something I normally never do. It was a unique experience.

My then partner was supposed to go to Greece for 4 months to take care of vacation trips with his Catamaran. But he hadn't even been there a day when everything went wrong. He came back to the Netherlands in a hurry and, because he had given up his living space, he moved in with me. We lived together for four months and it went surprisingly well. He is a cameraman and he made recordings for my bird songs. I also realized during that time how different we are.

Because I live in the middle of nature, I had more time to be in nature and watch nature develop. I experienced everything much more intensely I went to meditate by a frog pool every day.

My children and grandchildren did come over but we remained on too sides of a glass window. We didn't know what the virus would do. I thought it was a kind of theatre. I put mats in the grass and they could sit on them. Some friends came over and sang songs for us. All with the glass in between.

I had no income anymore and was convinced that I would get help from the government like many other artists. But I didn't get it. Because I had not earned enough in the period before, I could not claim benefits. I could have objected, but then I would have had to gather so much paperwork that I didn't do it. I didn't feel taken seriously as a self-employed person. I therefore terminated my business.

That meant that I had to tap into my savings that I had saved for my pension. That is now almost gone. I also had to rent out my cottage to have income. That meant that I wandered all over the country to stay with others when my cottage was rented out again. I was all over the country. I always offered something in return yet never had to pay for my stay. I also spent some time in the house of a friend for whom I did the gardening

and household to make it ready for sale. Unfortunately, during the Corona period, the daughter of that acquaintance was very confused and took refuge in that house. Suddenly I found myself in a house together with a confused woman. I couldn't really do anything and had to take care of her.

To this day I have almost no gigs. There is still so much uncertainty that it's only a matter of time before things start to happen. That's why I got out of the flow of performing. I am now more tense before a performance than before. But when I can, I'm so happy and so are others. I'm flexible though, you can't control it anyway.

All in all, I am a grateful person. I have a house, I can eat and I don't have to worry a lot.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I have come to love myself more.

I bought a new guitar as an investment in my future. A guitar that sings.

**Keywords:** Artist, single, small income, great sense of responsibility and care for others, resilience.

## NL02

**Title:** Single mother of two children, one child with disability. Currently burnout. Not vaccinated "because of intuition"

**Narrative:** "My name is Elsa, I live with my two sons aged 11 and 15 in a house in a village. My youngest son has an unknown syndrome and has a mental disability. He has the mental capacity of a 3 year old. His health is fragile. Because I like to keep him at home, I have care providers in the house every day. From the early morning until the time he goes to bed. Fortunately, he goes to school during the day but when he is ill, he stays home.

I work as a consultant for a large research firm in social issues and I work on domestic violence.

The Corona pandemic suddenly left my children and me at home. I created a workspace in the living room. My oldest son had to sit in his room all day in online classes. My youngest son was jumping and bouncing around the house, so I needed a care provider before lunch and after lunch so I could work. I often had back-to-back meetings online and in the meantime was still trying to manage the care providers for my youngest and to give my oldest son some structure. I feel I failed in all of that. My oldest son developed a game ad-diction and stole money from my account to pay for the games. He did nothing at all for school. Fortunately, I found out about it and was able to help him as a result.

I am someone who is used to carrying everything on my shoulders and I did that during this entire time. I also kept my youngest son at home because I was worried about his fragile health. And I wanted to be a good mother to my oldest child and a good counsellor for work. We had to test a lot because we are not vaccinated. But also because of the health condition of my youngest child.

I was very dependent on the ability of the care providers. That is still true today. Some

didn't want to come for fear of getting infected, also because I am not vaccinated. Sometimes there was an infection at the school of my youngest so we were stuck at home again. The school was suffering from understaffing as well so he could not go there.

My mother plays a significant role in raising my children. Before the pandemic she would travel from Belgium every Thursday taking care of the children. This was no longer possible during the first months of the pandemic, my children didn't see her for six months and that felt like missing a parent for them. I missed her too. Both as a mother but also as a care provider. She does so much for us.

My father is a medical doctor and he was so angry that I wouldn't get vaccinated that he called me a murderer. That was so painful. To this day our contact is limited. I do not have to call out for help from him.

The multitude of crisis like this caused me to develop a burnout. I have been burned out for a year now. I have developed heart problems. When I am under too much stress, my heart vibrates and rhythm disorders occur.

I still have a long way to go for my recovery. I am building up slowly but it only takes a small thing to go wrong and I am many steps back again. Whether I will ever recover, I don't know.

I have put up a log cabin in the garden to have a place where I can retreat from this overcrowded life.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Taking care of myself first is the most important lesson from this period. Like in an airplane; put the oxygen mask on yourself first.

When the burden of care is too high, it expressed itself in heart tremors. I have been in survival mode all day long.

I had to revise my whole life.

**Keywords:** Single parent; game addition; care provision hampered due to lockdown and (non)vaccination status; lack of self-care; heart problems; burnout

**NL03**

**Title:** Man, 42 years old, Nigerian, solo self-employed artist, married, three kids and no support network in the Netherlands

**Narrative:** "My name is Ogoaluwa, I am 42 years old born and raised in Nigeria. My father was a story-teller in Nigeria and that is what I am as well. I came to the Netherlands to build a life here. I live with my wife and three children in a big city.

When the Corona pandemic broke out, all my performances in museums and at the schools where I work were cancelled. I was out of a job and out of income overnight.

Fortunately my wife was still working from home and we were able to live from her income.

I greatly missed my work and the contact with the children I teach. I could only think in 'open and closed'. The school was closed, the museums were closed, the stores were closed in the beginning. Almost nothing was open anymore.

At home, suddenly everything was open. We had to work at home, live, teach the children at home. I found home enormously noisy and busy all of a sudden. We don't live very spaciouly so it was constant bustle at home.

Even though I was and am immensely attached to my work, I could easily let it go.

One day my wife came home with a new bike for my daughter. I took one look at her old bike and saw that I could still fix it up quite well. So I did and sold the old bike. With that money I bought another refurbished bicycle and that's how I became a bicycle mechanic in the first Corona period. I absolutely did not want to get any government benefits. I don't know if I would have gotten it, but I didn't apply for it. That's always so much red tape. I don't like that at all.

I like reusing old stuff. I'm all for recycling. Refurbishing the old bikes suited me just fine. I'll keep doing that. I seem to be good at it and I like it too. I just do that at home. I've never done anything other than work in the arts and this has been a discovery.

I found it very difficult for the children to be home schooled. They missed their friends. We have no real network around us. So we were on our own. One day the children had to go to the dentist and my daughter was so happy. She had an outing, she said. Normally children really don't like the dentist but on that day in the first lockdown period it was an outing. When she said that I was deeply touched. What have we gotten ourselves into? I found it a confrontational moment.

What I also found confronting was that my family in Africa didn't pay any attention to the difficult situation we had ended up in. Normally, disasters and misery take place in Africa and we are used to then direct our attention and help there. Now it was the other way around. Corona did not affect my family in Africa much and people did not die from it at all, while we were here in a frightening situation. They didn't care about us here at all, it felt. That was an enormous disappointment to me. There seems to be little attention paid to how we are doing here.

Up to this point, I have very few performances scheduled. I don't know where I stand. People are still very cautious about scheduling performances. I don't want anything to happen to make the confidence disappear again, because then I'm out of a job. I'm going to let it all go for now and try to trust that there will be opportunities again.

My faith helps me with that. I know that in the end we will all get through this and learn our lessons from this period.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I realized how much I enjoy my work/performances when it suddenly fell away.

I've never done anything other than work in the arts but discovered I am good at and enjoy repairing old bicycles .

What a disappointment that my family in my home country was not at all attentive to our situation here.

I had a dream in which I already saw that calamity would come upon us. I prayed for everyone who had to deal with it

**Keywords:** Storyteller, no formal Dutch education, African descent, no income, flexibility/adjustment

## NL04

**Title:** Woman, 86, widow, three adult children, 8 grand children, was hit by car before first lockdown. Has never been more scared than during this pandemic

**Narrative:** “My name is Annemarie. I am 86 years old and live alone in a detached house with a beautiful garden. I am still completely independent. I do everything myself in the house.

A few days before the first lockdown I was hit by a car while driving to the dentist. I was hit in the side and fortunately was able to get out of the car on my own. The next day at the hospital it turned out that I had broken my upper cervical vertebrae and also my sternum and a couple of ribs. I was put in a neck collar and allowed to do almost nothing. I could also do almost nothing because of the pain. I sat upright on the couch all day and slept in a bed downstairs in the room.

The second time I had to go to the hospital for a check-up, it was deserted. There was hardly anyone there. They didn't even want to take a picture of my neck at first because of the risk of contagion from the virus. The doctor had to force them to take that picture. From the first day my children came to help me with everything. They stayed for a few days and nights and then the next one came to alternate.

For my oldest daughter the mental stress from the pandemic was too hard and she slowly went into psychosis because of all the Corona stress.

I have been terribly afraid of being infected with the Corona virus. I was at home a lot but because I couldn't do anything myself, I had to rely on help. First from my children and later from home care. With everyone who came in I worried whether it was safe. There is no way to tell who is carrying the virus with them. I felt so vulnerable. Could Corona be my end? I love life and for the first time death came into the picture like that. I did fortunately have many friends with whom I could talk about this fear. Everyone around me had this fear like I had. I had a lot of support from my social network. We didn't meet up with many friends at the same time anymore but we did meet up with a few. That provided a distraction. Fortunately, I have a large garden where we could sit in good weather. This also allowed me to meet my children and grandchildren in safety.

What I missed most was my dance group and sometimes going to the theatre. I don't have that much left because I don't have many social activities anymore. Then the things I enjoy are extra important. All that was banned and you have to find a new way of doing your social life. I went out more one on one with friends and went for a walk with the neighbour across the street. Every day we walked a bit and we built up the walking to an hour.

Being flexible and adaptable were my most helpful traits. I lived through the war and did learn to be able to adapt each time. But despite that, the fear remained. The fear was greater than in the war. That has to do with my age. I was a child when I was detained in the Japanese camps in Indonesia. There you could see the danger coming and you could take it into account. I was young and could stand it. Now I am older and feel vulnerable. I couldn't see the danger either. It was invisible but continuously present. You can't contain it and so I feel I lost control more. You can't see the virus but you can

see the war.

What touched me greatly is that a good acquaintance of mine died of Corona after her grandson, who was infected, visited her. That grandson felt so guilty. Imagine, it's so nice when you as a grandmother can see your grandchildren and suddenly that could be fatal. I thought that was just devastating. Another acquaintance of mine committed suicide during the first Corona period. She couldn't handle it. Such intense events do stay with you.

What it has brought me is that I now walk every day with the neighbour across the street and that I pay more attention to things in my house. I now have more confidence in the future because now they know more about the virus. I hope I will be able to travel again. That's at the top of my list. When you get older, those are some lost years.

Fortunately, I am an optimistic person. I think that's my strength.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I was less afraid in the war than during the first Corona period. I could see the war and I could not see the virus.

I do keep a close eye on what is going on in the newspaper regarding the virus. The same thing is repeated over and over on television, but the newspaper gives me solid information. There I see that the graph is moving in the right direction.

Being flexible and adapting are my most helpful qualities.

**Keywords:** Resilience, vulnerability of the elderly, anxiety for virus in relation to war experiences, importance of social network, dependency on children, anxiety in meeting relatives and friends

## NL05

**Title:** Single mother, 56 lived with her autistic son during 2020/2021, now son lives in residential care facility; solo self-employed as mindfulness trainer. Lost many assignments and income. Gained more peace of mind both for her son and for herself.

**Narrative:** "My name is Edith. I am 56 years old and until recently lived with my youngest son who has autism. I am (solo)self-employed and have a practice as a trainer and coach in Mindfulness. I live in the city centre. I have no car and do everything by bike. Before the pandemic I was often on the road for work. My son was at school then and during the day we would see each other very little. In the evening we were usually tired and hardly spoke to each other. When the pandemic started, my son and I suddenly found ourselves at home from school and work. In the beginning there was no online education. I did work online pretty quickly but a lot of work also fell away. We came to a standstill, so to speak. I was home more than ever and that gave me peace.

Every afternoon my son and I would go for a walk. He was 18 years at the time and just at an age when was willing to join for a stroll. Now he would never think of it anymore. During the afternoon walks, we had long conversations with each other for the first time in ages. During those conversations, my son really acknowledged for the first time that he has autism and how much he is affected by it. He often falls silent and has problems

with compulsions, he is over-stimulated easily. Only because of the lockdown we discovered this. For the first time he was open for help.

During that period at home nothing came out of his hands. When the online lessons started, he could hardly concentrate. I also found it difficult to concentrate for work. Everything felt as a burden and working from home made me extremely aware of this. My son was home and present all day. Sometimes he would stand by the fridge for 1.5 hours making a sandwich or he would sit on the couch endlessly busy with his phone. With a lot of trial and error, he graduated his secondary education in the first year of the pandemic. Don't ask me how because he didn't do anything for it. But because he attends special education and they had extra leniency with the students there, he still passed the exams. After that he wanted to go to a higher education but because all education was online it all came to a dead end after a month.

Then we went into the trajectory of admission for a residential home. It costs me a lot of energy at home to guide him and there was no other way out but to admit him for a residential home. Fortunately, a spot became available in a special clinic. At first this demanded a lot from me but when things went well I could finally let go of the care. My son is now in a supported living project and works in a lunch café for people with disabilities.

During the Corona period I discovered how important it was for young people to be able to reflect on themselves and everything that is happening around them. Now I provide mindfulness training in schools and online to young people who need it. I also started to re-think my work and my business relations. I stopped working for my biggest clients because I found the pressure too high and the path they wanted to take didn't match my purpose in work.

I also needed to recover from the intensive covid period with my son. I'm now taking some time for myself and considering possibilities and opportunities for my future. Both privately and in my work. I am now coming home to myself.

I have lost my faith in politics in recent times. I deliberately did not get vaccinated. I am so angry at the government forcing young people in particular to get vaccinated for a QR code so they can do fun things. That confidence is not going to come back overnight. But despite that, I look back on an intense but valuable time.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Without the Corona period, my son would never have been admitted to residential care facility.

I came home to myself.

I lost faith in politics.

**Keywords:** Single Mother; low income; not vaccinated; covid lockdown time for contemplation; Rest and reflection, new opportunities; renewed contact with her son.

**NL06**

**Title:** Erik, age 48. Director of an organization for specialized youth care. His co-workers and he were getting caught up in the urgency of the requests for help and the risk

contagion at work.

**Narrative:** “My name is Erik, I am 48 years old and I am the co-founder and director of a large region-wide organization in specialized youth care.

The Covid-19 period has had a tremendous impact on me, my staff, and the children, youth and families we serve.

During the first lockdown we saw the most immediate effects. There was fear, insecurity and a lack of perspective. Both the young people and their parents were suddenly in a new reality that no one was prepared for.

As social workers, we had a big question: how do we stay in touch with this vulnerable target group? Our work thrives on personal contact. When we see and hear what is happening in a family, we can make interventions. Then, with lockdown measures imposed, we only got part of the information and we could not always assess what was needed.

We saw three groups emerge in the lockdown. The first was a group of youth who thrived just fine in isolation. These were often youth with autistic spectrum disorders or social anxiety disorders. Their world was suddenly a lot clearer.

The second group consisted of young people and also parents who had to adapt to a new situation and had difficulty doing so. They had to give up their autonomous way of life and that caused problems. This caused internal tensions and tension in the domestic sphere. They became depressed, started gaming more, school came last. Parents had their hands in their pockets and could do very little because there were so many restrictions.

Then there was a group of families with whom there was already a lot going on before the Corona pandemic hit. They were under even more pressure. Here, for example, the violence and aggression increased and addictions grew. This happened to families in various parts of society. But you could see that with families with smaller housing, even more stress was created.

That marked the beginning of the quest for us to keep in touch. We met with young people online and outside. And in the third group of families, with a careful testing policy, we still visited. The heart of our work is that we operate in the social context of the family. We had no choice in our feelings than to take risks for the well-being of our clients. Fortunately, we were able to keep our youth drop-in center open. These are the most vulnerable young people who would not make it without this structure and days with us. Before you know it, they end up in the clinical circuit.

And of course we were not able to guide all young people and parents equally well because of the restrictions and measures. This means that now that society opened up again, we give extra attention to those young people who need our help more than ever. You can see that the Corona period has led to more requests for help and that new complaints have arisen among children and young people. Think of mood problems and gloominess, eating problems, anxiety disorders and social isolation. We are now developing new services for them.

What I missed enormously during this period is the involvement of the municipality in our implementation tasks. At the beginning of the Corona crisis, there was a weekly letter from the municipality to check on how the assistance was going and whether anything

needed attention. Now that we are coping with the damage of the crisis, we hear nothing. While there are now more problems in children and families than ever.

I am also afraid that now that everything is opening up again, young people will want to catch up on what they missed out on and will also start smoking, drinking, partying etc. excessively. This could still have major consequences.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "If we had stopped providing aid, the damage would have been bigger. Now we took risks but the families remained afloat.

Many young people had trouble giving up their autonomy during the first lockdown.

We became more creative in the forms of assistance.

**Keywords:** Social welfare assistance under pressure; problem families further in trouble, new youth problems emerging; remaining connected and in contact in people's homes despite lock-down measures; concerns for the future and well-being of young people.

## NL07

**Title:** Singing teacher, lived with her husband who became leader of an anti-vaccine group, could no longer give live lessons and has turned to all online opportunities to sing and teach together. Collapsed completely after the first lockdown, marriage ended.

**Narrative:** "My name is Olga, I am 59 years old and until a few months ago lived together with my - now ex - husband in a village near medium-large city. I work as a singing teacher and am the conductor of a number of choirs and ensembles.

When the Covid-19 restrictions and measures took effect I could no longer do my job. Singing was almost immediately blacklisted as a risk of infection and all my lessons and choir rehearsals were stopped. I immediately panicked. I love my work but I also have to live from it. In the silence of everything that disappeared, I felt the storm brewing in my head. How was I going to give lessons? How was I going to provide myself an income? And how could I keep in touch with my students and my choirs and ensembles? I delved frenetically into all the online possibilities that existed. Thanks to my extensive network, a lot of things turned out to be available.

My ex-partner had absolutely no eye for my situation and didn't support me. Not financially but not mentally either. He was only trying to unravel and distribute Corona conspiracy theories.

Within a few weeks, I was teaching online from a room at home. The singing lessons; the ensembles and the choirs. I made a huge investment in equipment to build a kind of digital studio and create optimal sound. It was my only chance to teach but I hated it. I was running 70 hours a week to make sure everything ran smoothly. They were complicated programs and I studied endlessly. Despite all the hours I worked, I lost a third of my income, which is not very high anyway.

Meanwhile, my partner became more and more entangled in the web of conspiracy thoughts. He constantly bombarded me with his latest insights and was also angry and

grim all day because he saw the Covid period as an ultimate act of dictatorship. The virus had been created in a laboratory to wipe us out and inject chips via vaccines so that we would function like robots. At first I tried to listen to it and put it aside but as the first vaccination programs emerged it became more grim.

As a singing teacher, I was eager to be vaccinated so that I could do my job again when society opened up. But my partner was devilish about that idea. When I would get vaccinated I would have to leave home and he would have to divorce me. My back was against the wall. From him I would get no help to survive financially. And if I didn't get vaccinated, I wouldn't be able to teach in the time it would take to go live again.

I had continuous pain in my heart and felt like he had put a knife to my throat.

By the time summer vacation came around and there was some peace and quiet, I was completely exhausted. I was shaking all day. I couldn't rest either because at home the tension kept building up.

In the meantime I have been separated because I decided to get myself vaccinated.

I am now coming to rest a little. I am furious with a government that has absolutely no compassion and attention for artists. I received no financial support while I bitterly needed it. They just left us out in the cold. If I had had support I wouldn't have to work 70-hour weeks to make ends meet.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "My ex-partner called our choir members QR code fascists when we asked for QR codes at the entrance for our concert.

In the past, as a singing teacher, I was always looked upon with admiration. When singing was blacklisted, I was treated like a pariah by some because they thought I was a source of contamination.

If I had to ask my ex for money, he would have thought me a beggar.

**Keywords:** Solo self-employed musician; singing blacklisted and made suspicious because of contagion risk; husband active believer in conspiracy theories; mental violence, led to divorce and to exhaustion; felt not taken seriously as an artist by the government

**NL08**

**Title:** Woman, 31 years, who is in a wheelchair due to a severe form of rheumatism. She needs 24 hour care. Works for a municipality as senior communications advisor. Had to isolate herself completely to avoid being infected or else no caregivers could come. Became severely depressed by the isolation.

**Narrative:** "My name is Lisanne, I am 31 years old and live independently with 24 hour care support. I have a special form of rheumatism and can do very little without help. Since my birth I have a disability with my arms and hands and I can hardly walk. Because of this I need care for daily functioning.

I graduated in communication sciences and have a nice job as a senior communication officer at the municipality.

When the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, I immediately isolated myself. Many people think that I have fragile health and would not survive such an infection. But that is actually not true. My health is good but I am 100% dependent on care throughout the day. If I were to get infected, no caregivers could come to me to help me and then I can't do anything. I can't take care of myself or eat or drink.... For that reason, I was so careful.

I am someone who has a great need for social contact and I have a lot of contacts. But I couldn't see anyone anymore. I also had to work at home and didn't see anyone during the day or at night except the people who were taking care of me.

When that lasted longer I became depressed. I can't do without people around me at all. I felt so lonely. And there was so little perspective.

It wasn't until the summer of 2020 that I was able to meet my friends again. In the following year, I went to choir rehearsals for the first time. From the summer of 2021, I felt freer again and could be in the middle of society again. As a result, I felt happier and my life became full and rich.

I do have to say that working from home gave me a tremendous amount of peace. At work it is often busy and then I can't concentrate well. I became more productive by working from home and things went better for me. I really liked that. At the beginning of the Corona period I was still on a temporary contract. I was uncertain about the contract extension because there was so much ambiguity because of working from home about how they evaluated me as an employee. Furthermore, I couldn't ask questions when I couldn't work something out. Before, you could just go and talk to a colleague in the hallway but that possibility had disappeared with working from home. I also heard this from my friends who are all around thirty and had just entered the first phase of a contract. For some of them the contract was indeed not extended due to cutbacks or uncertainty about the future. Fortunately, this was not the case with me.

The special thing about this past period is that I got to know my current boyfriend. Because we could not see and visit each other, we first kept in touch online and by phone for two months. This allowed us to get to know each other in a easy pace and when we first met, we already knew so much about each other. That has been very beneficial for our relationship.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I immediately self-isolated myself when the pandemic hit: My health is good but I am 100% dependent on care throughout the day. If I were to get infected, no caregivers could come....

I can't do without people around me at all and there was so little perspective.

Working from home gave me a tremendous amount of peace.

**Keywords:** Young woman, living on her own with a disability; 100% care dependent; constantly safe-guarding possibilities to receive daily care; Social isolation resulted in depression.

**NL09**

**Title:** Man, 67 years old, diagnosed with Leukemia before the Corona pandemic and

just received stem cell treatment. His fragile health put him in total isolation. At first, he felt like one of many who had to be careful for his health and was no longer the only one wearing a mouth mask. But his isolation lasting longer than that of most people.

**Narrative:** “My name is Frits, I am 67 years old and live with my wife in a nice house with a garden. I like working from home when my health allows.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, I had been at home with Leukemia for a year. I had just had a stem cell transplant and my health was consequently extremely fragile. I had been walking daily with a mouth mask on for six months before the first lockdown. To the store, a museum or in places where I could encounter many people.

My freedom was severely restricted, but before the pandemic I could still decide for myself who I want to visit and where I went. With the first lockdown, that freedom was a thing of the past. I was terrified of a Corona infection and no longer saw anyone or went outside. It was the end of visits to family, a museum, a store and going on vacation. I was cut off from any kind of contact.

The trips to the hospital to measure my blood levels became my outings.

During that first period, I caught a cold. That cold cost me 40% of my lung capacity. This frightened me so much that the fear of a Corona infection became even bigger. I realized then how vulnerable I really was.

It helped me in a way that everyone was restricted by the measures during that period. It helped me being more compliant than I would usually be.

What I missed most was to do ordinary daily things. Running errands, visiting someone or going for a walk. But I also missed the control to make choices. I wanted to visit my family but when there were more than 4 people, I stayed at home. A cremation of a dear family member of my wife had to be postponed even though I would have liked to be there.

Sometimes I did see people but then they always had to come to me and we kept an appropriate distance. We often met outside in the garden. But I still experience that as a glorified sick visit. I appreciated that people showed a lot of understanding for my situation but now I become a bit rebellious because of that feeling of dependence. I would also like to visit an old colleague sometimes.

In the meantime I have been vaccinated 4 times and I am starting to itch to go out again. The other day I was in the city and I find that a real kick.

At 8.20 AM I am at the bakery to buy bread before the first customers arrive. I also walk to the market to do my shopping in the open air. When it is too crowded for the stall, I walk around first until it is quiet.

Soon I will visit a former colleague and then my wife will take me there. I can no longer drive a car or ride a bike as a result of the long-term medication.

This summer I have two short trips planned in the Netherlands. I am looking forward to that.

What helps me is that I am now fully vaccinated and my white blood cells are okay. Seven-ty percent of my fellow sufferers from the first period have already died.

I have also started doing new things like drawing. I used to make drawings during the night shifts I worked. I have now redone a few drawings and that gives me satisfaction. I have been given special drops for my eyes to improve my vision and so I can do more

things like working in the garden.

What also helps me is the support of my family and the understanding they have for me. Who knows, maybe in a while there will be a longer vacation.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “Before the pandemic, I could still decide what I did or who I wanted to see. After that I was completely cut off from any form of contact and activity. A walk around town without going into the stores I now find a thrill. It helped me in a way that everyone was restricted by the measures during that period. It helped me being more compliant than I would usually be

**Keywords:** Vulnerable health; good support system; isolation; understanding of others, loss of self-direction

## NL10

**Title:** Woman aged 57 with a mental health vulnerability. Crashed completely in the first lock-down as all solid ground disappeared from under her feet due to the loss of structure and limited contact with her daughter.

**Narrative:** “My name is Sarina I am 57 years old and live alone in a small senior home in a quiet village. My daughter lives with a foster family during the week and comes to me on the weekends. My daily structure is very important to me. The gym, my daytime activities in the flower store and at a petting zoo and the appointments with people who support me in practical matters. On the weekends my daughter comes and we do a lot of things together.

When the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, all structure suddenly fell away. Just before that my mother had had a car accident that really shook me. Then I already became more anxious and had panic attacks. But when all the doors were locked as well, I collapsed completely pretty soon after that. I didn't know anyone personally who was ill from Covid-19 but still we all were afraid of it. I wasn't allowed to go to my mother because of the dan-ger of contagion even though I really wanted to help her.

What I found most difficult is that my daughter was no longer allowed to come to me and that the foster family did not allow me to hug and touch her. I love my daughter so much and am so happy when I see her on the weekends. Now once a week we are allowed to walk together for an hour in the woods. Whenever we were out of everyone's sight, I would give her a big hug.

As the lockdown period got longer, it became harder and harder for me. I was seeing things that weren't there. I no longer knew what to believe and what not to believe. When I asked my psychiatrist or nurse for help, they would only talk to me on the phone. I was not longer allowed to come in for conversations. After a while I didn't know whether they had my best interests at heart anymore. I had nowhere to go and no one to come and help me. That's why I fell into a psychosis. It had become too much for me.

During my stay in the clinic where I had been before, I slowly calmed down and I regained oversight. I didn't have to do it alone anymore. There were people around me,

there was cooking and I started drawing and painting again. I went to a store for the first time and bought something for myself. My daughter was fortunate enough to come and visit me and slowly I crawled out of the deep valley.

When society opened up again, I could also go to my day care and to the gym. I even went on vacation for a few days with my daughter.

I am still vulnerable and this period is not easy. I have had to work very hard to recover again. Every day is another fight to keep myself going. I hope society never locks up like it did once again.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “When the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, all structure suddenly fell away.”

“What I found most difficult ...that the foster family did not allow me to hug and touch my daughter”

“I saw things that were not there and no longer knew who I could and could not believe. Every day is another fight to keep myself afloat”

**Keywords:** Loss of structure in daily routines due to covid, and psychological vulnerability led to psychosis; hampered contact with daughter in foster home; remote care assistance led to worsening symptoms, no network.



## Poland

PL01

**Title:** "Pandemic Coma"

**Narrative:** "I am Adam, I am 21 years old, I study sociology, I live in the dormitory with 4 other students, currently I do not work, I live in Kraków.

I belong to the group of people who due to the pandemic situation for the first time in history was forced to prepare to secondary school certificate remotely. That was due to general lockdown and hygienic restrictions. It meant a lot of stressful situations linked to teacher's inability to transfer the knowledge properly and fully by the means of electronic communication, and resulting in me devoting most of my time to self-study the topics for exams. This situation led to my fears of being not enough prepared for them. Maybe I had a better pace of learning alone but I think I would get better grades if I was allowed to study stationary. Moreover, the term of the exam for the certificate was not fixed and was postponed several times. Finally, we had exams in June and July (usually they are in April and May). That resulted in shorter period of time that applicants had to send/submit application papers to chosen academia. I had to stick to the deadlines. It was quite good because I knew exactly where to go, didn't have to wait in long ques, and I was allowed to send missing documents by post. When it comes to studies, I have to admit that I miss contact with other students and teachers. This whole 'integration thing'. We only had time to meet during the first week of our studies. Later we had to switch to remote learning. Regarding exams here I have to admit that remote ones seems better as I have a comfort of being in my own space - room and if somebody else is in as well we can cooperate and support each other in a sense. However, I think that technical problems with remote learning impact the quality of the learning process and social relations within it. Pandemic situation has also its positive aspects. As I didn't have to go to classes every day I had more time for myself or other activities than studies. At the end of my first year of studies I decided to search for a job. I found one as a medical sector consultant. I worked as person responsible for scheduling the terms for vaccination appointments by phone. I worked from home, using my own computer equipment, and I had a very flexible work schedule. I worked 6 months there. I used to pick up the phone 150 times a day, approximately for six hours. Performing my role was connected with few unpleasant for me situations. Sometimes people that called were aggressive and nasty, treated me as a computer bot. Moreover, there was a lot of confusion caused by frequent changes in governmental regulations and misinformation provided by the mass media which resulted in people's hostility. However, thanks to the pandemic I started doing other creative things. I made a podcast and won a competition. Nevertheless, the pandemic has taken me away my hobby - dance classes, and social contacts. Without being able to meet, due to the lockdown and closure of cultural centers where we met to had classes, my contact with other people has ended. Other negative side of the pandemic and remote learning and working is significant reduction in physical activity and therefor worsening of my health condition. I haven't danced for a year and a half, didn't exercise, just ate fast food and set in front of the computer. I have

gained weight. We have now some physical exercises at the University. I attend them and I feel the difference. I have better physical and psychical condition. Thanks to governmental loosening of pandemic restrictions I could also get back to dancing and to my 'old friends'.

I would like to also share my experience of gender-based violence which I and my work colleague had. Once a young man called me asking to schedule a term for vaccination of his mother or grandmother. I did it but he didn't hang out the phone. I heard him screaming on her, insulting her. That was traumatic as I could not intervene. We had a 'work with difficult cases guide' updated regularly but reading about such things is something different that experiencing them and trying to act. It was hard because I didn't know how I should react? We didn't have access to psychological support, so I had to deal with that along other people experiencing this kind of situations. My work colleague experienced very similar situation. She heard on a phone that a man beats his partner. She reported this to the management but we don't know if they did something with this. I am vaccinated. I think I did the right thing as this allows me to enter restaurants, cinemas, theaters. I also hope that it will result in collective immunity being achieved. It also gives me freedom of action.

Importantly, I was a member of a religious community. Due to lockdown restrictions and parents being afraid of us being infected by the virus we were not allowed to meet in person. The community is now very reduced in terms of performed actions and social contacts. Most of its members felt into the 'pandemic coma'.

Sitting at home most of the time is stressful. Luckily, my parents have a cabin in the country side, in the middle of the woods. Me and my parents used to run away there to take some physical and mental rest from what is going on in the city."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Switching to distance learning in March 2020 changed my situation. It was time of intense work and preparation for the secondary school certificate, and not all teachers were able to explain things to us well or even organize them (...). For instance, when it comes to math (...), the teacher gave us problems to be solved, without explaining what it was about and how to do it. (...) I could learn at my own pace, but I could have achieved better results in the stationary mode."

"The remote studies prevented us from integrating and meeting other people from our studies. (...) There were also no classes at the university, workshops or face-to-face contacts with the lecturers. Some of them I don't even know, I only know their initials displayed on the control panel of the distance learning program."

"I started working as a consultant of the National Vaccination Program. (...) I was answering phone calls, signing people up for vaccinations, sometimes changing their appointments. (...) Sometimes people called, with an aggressive tone, very rude. (...) There were also some allusions and threats towards the consultant. We were treated as bots answering the phone. (...) Sometimes the regulations changed from week to week. Therefore, we also had to change our work depending on what the government said, what the standards will be. (...)"

"The pandemic has also taken away my passion - dance. I have been dancing in a folk group for 13 years. But because of the pandemic, I didn't have the opportunity to

exercise for 1.5 years. (...) due to the pandemic, all cultural centers were closed and we were unable to meet. (...) Nowadays it is difficult to return to the state from before the pandemic, and to this physical condition.”

“Sitting in front of computer to attend remote classes is very tiring. Due to the lack of exercise (...) I gained weight. (...) Now it is better because the physical classes are actually taking place, I can meet people. I have also returned to dancing and even went abroad with the band. (...) I can see that through this physical movement I can take better care of myself and my well-being.”

“I have experienced one violent situation, but I know that my colleagues have had more. (...) I witnessed a situation when a younger person enrolled an older person for a vaccination appointment, probably the caller's grandmother or mother, where, after the end of the conversation, this person insulted the other person and called them names. (...) it was traumatic. I didn't know if I should focus on my work or on resolving conflicts”

“There was also a situation that we were all informed about in the chat. My friend heard in the receiver how the calling man was beating a woman. (...) According to the script, I should call the police immediately and report it. I don't know if this has been reported. But it's hard for me to imagine that we report such a person to the police as part of our work. Firstly, it's hard to call yourself, and secondly, we had limited data access, so we didn't really know where exactly it was taking place. Besides, it could be a presumption. (...) unfortunately, we lacked training on such difficult situations. It was included in the script, but it was not enough.”

“The lack of workshops and face-to-face contacts with lecturers affects the quality of learning. (...) We did not use all the tools that were available for distance learning. Non-verbal communication in contacts with others is also important, and this was not the case here. The younger staff was better at all this, in the sense that they used various tools to work together, brainstorm, etc. and sometimes it was sitting, listening and reading the 90-minute lecture displayed on the screen. This is what the elderly usually did. (...) Besides, it is difficult to cram into speech during distance learning. It is easier for someone to interrupt live (...). In remote classes, you had to wait your turn, when someone interfered, it made noise, everything became incomprehensible. (...) remote classes demotivated to take any notes, because you could download a presentation or take a screenshot. If we were learning stationary, we would have to take notes, and this is already some form of learning. It is also easier to ask the lecturer about unclear issues.”

**Keywords:** second school certificate exams, remote learning and working, hostility, positive and negative aspects of pandemic, GBV, deprivation of social contacts and physical health.

**PL02**

**Title:** The pandemic of uncertainty

**Narrative:** "I am Michał and I am 42 years old. I live with wife and two kids – a girl (5 years old) and a boy (2,5 years old) - and a dog. We live in an apartment. I work since March 2021. I consider my economic situation as rather good.

Considering care for our children I must admit that it's form and main caregiving persons have changed due to the pandemic. First of all, at the beginning of the pandemic I was still on parental leave associated to a birth of my younger child – son who is now 2 and a half years old. Our daughter was attending the kindergarten then. But when the pandemic started the insecurity has started to flourish in our life – we were concerned about our health: feared of being infected, and lack of vaccinations. That affected our decisions on sending our daughter to day-care facility. There were long periods when we refrained from sending our daughter to kindergarten and then I had to take care for them both. In March 2021 when I have been starting my new job, our son was in adaptation process in creche, we all got infected by SARS-CoV-2. It meant that when in the middle of very important time in our lives – starting a new job and changing the form of caregiving – we all got ill. And it lasted for a long time. Especially for our children who were experiencing post-covid side-effects, for instance our daughter's fever lasted for couple of months. This meant having them at home all the time and providing them proper care. Our son was supposed to come back to creche after summer 2021, but nor our son has not done it fully, nor our daughter came back to kindergarten. They both have shorter or longer periods of absence. Nowadays, both are cared for by their grandparents. It has changed: since the pandemic care for our children is mainly performed by our children's grandparents, my or my wife's parents. It requires a lot of physical strength and resources from them. They need to feed them, play with them etc. Me and my wife work now and they care for our children. It affected our time we can spend with our children – we have to get them to their grandparents and pick them up, sometimes it's already late evening, we are all tired. Maybe this time isn't the happiest for our family but it is not so bad. Engaging grandparents to provide care for our children was good solution but, for all parties, tiring. Sometimes our children were not willing at all to go their grandparents so then I stayed with them at home and tried to work, but working with two children proved to be very problematic. It was also exhausting time which resulted from my wife's fear of our daughter being infected at the kindergarten. We had to decide what to do, what is the best for her and us from day to day, from week to week. Everything was uncertain. And that changed when the vaccine was invented. My wife, when we got ill, has already taken the first dose of the vaccine. Now, we are all (except our son) vaccinated. I believe that it gives me protection from the virus and allows to travel. Due to our pediatricist recommendation we had to go the hospital with our children. My wife was experiencing this illness very badly so we decided that I go with them. It was a nightmare. We spent there a couple of days. I felt stressed that this is something very serious. Except that we were all in one room and couldn't go out. It was care for 24 hours 7 days a week for two children. It was very tiring experience. When we get back home we all felt tired being in a constant lockdown. Before the pandemic we were very active – we did sports, went outside the city etc. During the pandemic we had to suspend all activities, including those of our children. We decided to change this and we started going to a house in the country side to provide ourselves and our children with some rest. I remember first lockdown, when we couldn't do anything, that was

terrifying. Everything was uncertain.

Coming back to me starting a new job. I couldn't use the benefit provided by the government which was for main caregivers of small children. I was then on probation contract. I don't think that pandemic has changed my working life. It gave me a possibility of remote work, which I use most of the time. I go to the office sporadically. My new employer has provided me with all necessary computer equipment so we didn't have costs here. But I am considering going back to the office to lower electricity use. Working at home gives you possibility to juggle the time when providing care for children but is also expensive. Now we divide care between me and my wife. Due to our daughter's vaccination both of our children stay with us these days. I hope that they both will be able to come back to day-care facilities soon.

I must also admit that the pandemic has affected very negatively my social and cultural life. I don't go to movies or meet my friends at the bar because of my fear of being infected, that something could happen.

I also think that pandemic has revealed different treatment of parents by our pediatricist. From the beginning of the pandemic, as a main carer, I went to doctors with our children. Several times the pediatricist made comments that questioned my competences and knowledge I have as their father. The same I was experiencing during our stay in hospital. I felt being treated differently."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It was the pandemic that caused that childcare for our children was provided more and more often by grandparents, that the participation of my and Ola's parents in care for our children has increased."

"My wife and I work now, and grandparents take care of the children. This situation also affects the amount of time we have for the children and ourselves, because we have to pick up the children, bring them back, sometimes it is quite late already."

"The involvement of grandparents in caring worked well, but it was tiring for everyone - the children had to be transported, and sometimes they did not want to go anywhere, I had to do my job somehow, being at home and having them on my head, but it is not easy to work with two children."

"When it found out that we were sick, the pediatrician told us that we had to go to the hospital if children are sick as well, it was a terrible idea for me, I went to the hospital with them, because my wife felt the worst of the four of us, she was exhausted. We spent few days there, it was dramatic (...), I was stressed that it was some serious disease. Doctors in safety uniforms heightened the horror of this. Plus, it was tiring to be in one room all the time, not being able to leave. (...) Here [in the hospital] it was 24/7 care. I got tired tremendously."

"I am currently considering returning to the office for economic reasons. To lower our electricity bills. (...) My wife and I see the cost of working from home on the bills. Working at home is more convenient because it is easier to take care of a child for a while, (...) you can juggle this time (...) "

"All this covid pandemic is a time of uncertainty for me. All the time I felt uncertain what was going to happen."

"Our sporting activity has also decreased. Work, taking care of children, lack of strength in the evenings. We have to organize some weekend trips. Pool. We also suspended our

children's sports and other activities during the pandemic. Currently, they are slowly returning to them. But I still have this fear in my head that something will happen."

"At the beginning of the pandemic, I took care of children and I went to the doctors with them. The doctor doubted my competence regarding knowledge about them and about their health. In the hospital, I also felt that I was treated differently"

**Keywords:** uncertainty, vaccination, care for children, remote work, gender stereotypes

**PL03**

**Title:** The Panini Effect

**Narrative:** "I am Halina and I am 68 years old. I work at university, I am academic teacher and researcher. Since 2019 I receive my retirement benefit, but I still teach to have two incomes. This is very important for my life situation. I live near Kraków. I drive to work half an hour. I live with daughter who has a serious depression. And sometimes with son, who visits us, to help in care.

Three days a week I care for my mother who lives 100 km away from Kraków. I combine professional work - new challenges, didactics, research projects, reviews of articles and theses, science committees - with caring for my mother and my daughter. Caring for my mother is very challenging, tiring physically and mentally, and time consuming. It is hard to work afterwards. My mother is 94 years old. In 2006 my mother and my father got sick. My father had progressive dementia, and my mom issues with hip-joint. My father died in 2014. Now, my mom has a serious disability, since 2016 lays in bed and requires 24/7 care. She has kidney and bladder problems so she use diapers. That all means I am responsible for changing her diaper, physical and mental support, preparing and giving her food and baths. I come to my mother's place every Friday and I stay until Tuesday morning to care for her. I have two other female carers who support me in care when I am away. Our caring plans has changed due to the pandemic. We already had a situation that one of the carers got infected with coronavirus, and I consider this time "as dramatic time for care", I had to replace her constantly and care for my mother. And it is hard to find replacement if something happens to those carers. I would stay then alone with my mother. But pandemic allowed me to work from home and then I was able to care for my mom. The other carer who also works as a nurse at the hospital already took several tests if she is infected, we are all the time scared that she can have it and pass it to my mom. My mother, who has a disability, depression and does not want to be vaccinated, is extremely vulnerable group in this pandemic. Due to the pandemic her social life has diminished, she used to meet friends, neighbors visiting her at home, and now people come with their face covered and not stay long. I would say that it is hard to be all the time responsible for my mother's care. You need to constantly be in move, do groceries and fight with fear of infecting your vulnerable mother. I was already three times vaccinated. If I got sick then I have nobody to take care for my mom during weekends. I pay a lot for my mother's care. I have to pay for two houses - electricity, heating, garbage, water etc. It is hard to perform the role of a carer. It gives me satisfaction, but this is hard

physical and mental work. And this is very burdensome. I don't have siblings so nobody to share this role with. My son tries to support me but due to his work he is not able to be here very often. I don't know how long it will last. I consider my situation as under the Panini Effect: I can't move, constantly care and care, I don't have time for my own life and needs. I don't meet friends anymore. Now my life is fully dedicated to care and professional work and thinking what happens next. When I mentioned my mother about going to a nursing home she gets very aggressive. This is a taboo topic in Poland, hard to process. I think that children caring for their parents are heroes. But if I and two other carers gets sick there is nobody to care for my mother. She would die. Pandemic time raises anxiety and different moods - mainly fear.

Regarding my professional work: I don't have contact with my work colleagues because usually I work from home. It was a dramatic experience to not meet my students. I think that remote teaching has its negative consequences on teaching quality. Teaching remotely does not give you a satisfaction from what you do. My research work was minimally affected by the pandemic. We had to change the methodology of the study but it hasn't affected project's results and outcomes. But I can feel the effect of pandemic on my economic situation. I had to buy a good quality Internet, a camera and a microphone. I can borrow a laptop from work but still work on my old one. But I need to admit that it is hard to find care, especially for a bedridden person. My physical health has worsen, I become tired very quickly. I need more rest. Caring is an emotional, physical and mental process. Coupled with organizational and managerial work. I need additionally buy food, diapers, everything what is required when caring for a disabled person. I care for my sick daughter too. And Polish new law has taken me some part of my retirement benefit which worsen my economic situation. I provide for my sick daughter. And this is this Panini Effect - some people are trapped between caring for parents and caring for children. We need sensitive policy making that meet diverse family situations. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I used to have a group of friends with whom I had coffee, had dinner, and now life passes like this: work and care, care and work and constant thinking whether everything was provided in this care."

"During the pandemic, it was clearly visible that students did not read and did not focus on study. They turned off the cameras. It is not a friendly working time. It affected the quality. It is not the same as face-to-face meetings with students, conversations with them, discussions ... "

"Internet costs have risen enormously. I have to pay for two - at home and here at my mother's place. (...) I bought a camera with a microphone, I have a laptop, but it is already used. Last week, the institute purchased new laptops for several female employees, including myself. But I haven't had time to turn it on yet. (...)"

"The system of institutional help will not offer me someone else because there is no one. There are thousands of people who need care and few of these carers. I can search on my own, I have tried it once, privately. (...) It is very difficult to find a person to take care of mom. Not everyone wants to come to the person who is lying. The situations are different. They are afraid of covid, they have children. But on the other hand, there is this physical work behind that care for a not walking person. (...) however, these carers prefer

people who walk.”

**Keywords:** care, professional work, economic and social costs of care, fear, panini effect

**PL04**

**Title:** ‘There is nothing to argue about, you have to act’

**Narrative:** “My name is Katarzyna and I am 22 years old. I study cultural anthropology and ethnology at the university. I work at the museum and I am activist in several queer NGOs and students organizations advocating for the rights of queer people. I live with my parents, grandmother, sisters, 2 dogs. I have a house with a garden, I own my car and have a driving-license.

The pandemic has affected us to a very great extent. My whole family had covid. And one of my grandmothers died because of it. It was traumatic experience, very unexpected. It was also a time of social fears, connected with president election and LGBTQA ideology campaign which was full of hate towards queer people. And the time of being lock downed. A lot of my development possibilities were taken from me. Pandemic, lockdown and president election campaign altogether have raised my level of frustration. I couldn't properly work, study, was forced to stay at home. So I decided to be active in other spheres of my life. I have chosen LGBTQA organizations. Due to a low quality of my studies I was able to be active member of several organizations of this type. We received mails from our teachers with tasks and assignments. It took me a lot of time. I also missed meeting my peers. Pandemic has change my life in a sense that it has broken up my life rhythm - studies, internship, work and included engaging values in my actions. I think the death of my grandmother had meaningful impact on radicalization of my opinions and attitudes. I don't want to speak with Covid-sceptics. I believe acting is the most important. My family accepts and supports me fully. But I am not contacting my other relatives, because they were sceptic about covid pandemic. Pandemic was hard for me when I couldn't meet with my friends and people I do projects with. I was all the time closed in my house and frustrated about not being able to properly study or change anything. And this resulted in worsening my mental condition. I didn't have anyone to talk to about this. I had problems with concentration because of everything being in one place - online - and my work performance was not very productive. My younger sister gave me some support, talked to me several times. But it is not same when you meet with people you organize events, etc. Having a garden was nice during the pandemic - we could rest there, walk dogs. Covid was very severe for my father. He has side-effects and does not work until now. It affected my attitude. My mom only works, we try to save money. The uncertainty connected with his health status motivates me to already considering finding a job after studies. Previously I was saving for my own and now I would do it for our family. We are having lower income, but it wasn't destructive for our family.

Remote teaching is very destructive for social relations. Body language is important in communication. Sending emails was very weird because they were strict and fully

informative. No relations, no emotions, pure drama. Relations with peers have got better when we were allowed to study on site. Pandemic has not affected my economic situation very badly. Due to lockdown and remote learning I didn't have to rent an apartment in the city and didn't commute to the university. So I had some savings which I used to buy myself several times better internet connection and a new computer camera.

I was also infected with Covid. After this I had problems with concentration, talking. My physical condition has also worsen. I didn't have any health support during my illness. I called doctor but they provide me with nothing. They treated my grandmother similarly when she went to the hospital. She wasn't attached to a life-support machine. They gave her oxygen from time to time. And that was it. Doctors said to us that giving her a ventilator is pointless because it can be used by some younger patient and because she is prone to death. We couldn't visit her. We got information on her health condition. And that was okay, but contacting her was also hard because we had to ask nurses to help us and pass her the phone so we can talk a bit.

I support obligatory vaccination. I am vaccinated as well. One of organization I work organize an event. And we are limiting it to people who has covid passport. Of course, I am open to developing a new solutions for people who can't be vaccinated for some health reasons but now it is that way that only vaccinated people can attend it. But here in Poland I don't feel any difference considering being or not vaccinated. When I went abroad I could feel it. Abroad, it is required to show certificate if you want to go to a restaurant, theatre, airport, etc. In Poland I wasn't checked at all. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "The pandemic affected my life situation quite drastically, my whole family fell ill with covid. And my grandmother died of covid. It was traumatic experience because it was unexpected."

"The pandemic, the lockdown, being at home all the time and the presidential campaign together made me very frustrated, so I started to get active in other spheres of life. (...) I met asexual people on Facebook, (...) it was meeting new people and expressing my energy to change. (...) I was even the face of the LGBTQA campaign. It was also that time when I became involved in the activities of the other LGBTQA association. I started doing things there, get involved in some projects and now I'm on its board. Worth mentioning that I was able to get involved in activist life because my studies were of very poor quality. In the first semester, we received e-mails from the teachers stating what books we need to read and how we should work with them. It took a lot of time - 5 hours a day. (...) There was also a lack of peer contact. (...) I was very frustrated because these studies are not as I would like them to be, that bad things are happening in Poland, that I would like to change something. The pandemic took me out of my steady rhythm of life (...) and began to engage my values. My grandmother's death influenced my radicalization. (...) At work, I was spit on several times and called names because I had to keep an eye on the number of people in groups that I was showing around the exhibition. I was insulted daily. (...) I felt a hatred towards these people, that they behave in such a bad way, that they do not wear masks, they do not believe in the virus. I used to think: you could exchange arguments with someone, but now I don't think so. There is nothing to argue about, you have to act. "

"Thanks to the pandemic, I realized that people do not care about the health of others."

"My dad went through covid quite hard, it was not without complications. He is currently on sick leave. "

"I had to buy additional internet several times to be able to learn. New camera - several hundred zlotys. "

"These respirators were kept under the counter (...) they were buried in these various departments, places where they waited for special people. (...) people were equal and more equal. (...) My dad also waited a year for rehabilitation after covid."

**Keywords:** frustration, activism, post-covid effects, life-support machines, equality

**PL05**

**Title:** The pandemic and LGBTQ activism

**Narrative:** "My name is Alicja and I am 45 years old. I live in a city in the north of Poland, with female partner and my 14 years old son. My son was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. I am full time activist. I work in LGBTQ NGO. My income consists of my son's allowance.

I consider worsening my mental condition as a main effect of the pandemic's lockdown. In December 2019 I was diagnosed with depression, in March 2020 the pandemic started and, even though I was taking drugs, my well-being has worsened. It is connected to being isolated from people. I am extraverted person and I need social contacts to live. Moreover, at the beginning of the pandemic I was living with my son and two trans people who were in homelessness crisis. One had dissociative disorder, the other had depression and alcohol problem. We were four mentally ill people on 56 square meters, in my apartment. We were all pulling each other down. I was single then and I didn't have anyone to talk to. Because of the lockdown my all activities had to be suspended. We tried to do some meetings of support groups online but it didn't work. Less and less people were attending them. I was also making a movie when the pandemic started. At the beginning of April 2020, I should have shot some scenes for the movie but because of the governmental restrictions we were able to come back to the movie one year later. And then, last year (2021), I was already preoccupied mentally with new projects. Lockdown meant closing of schools and my son was at home. He has a lot of energy, constantly talks about something. So focusing on intellectual work with him was very hard. He didn't have online classes, because he attends a democratic school and they didn't provide pupils with online teaching. It lasted 3 months. Because we live at the attic we could explore our roof and other roofs of our building. We couldn't go out because of the governmental restrictions on free movement, also my son felt uncomfortable wearing a mask. So we started going to the roof. Our neighbors were making comments on that. Pandemic has also changed my whole life as an activist. I was in constant move, going to equality marches or organizing them. I was also very active socially, meet my friends, party with them. And now it is all gone. I don't feel this need to meet them, party anymore. I was tired. And until now I haven't come back to that life.

One of my friends came to live a while with me, because he had online learning. We watched a lot of Netflix series. Later my son came back to school, in a rotation mode. It was good because there was a big garden and a fountain made especially for him. Because of the hygienic restrictions all fountains in the city were closed which upset my son very much. At that time I was very depressed. I even had thoughts to become vaccine tester so either I die or I benefit mankind and the pandemic ends faster. I wanted to come back to normal life. We didn't organize any equality march in 2020. But we organized the Abortion March, here in Szczecin, in October 2021. Considering fears of losing a job or income, I didn't have them. My son's father lost his income as an artist. But we managed. We had a lot of food supplies at home.

Regarding my work in NGOs and with queer youth the period of the pandemic was 'not cool at all'. According to restrictions on free movement and total lockdown queer people were trapped in their houses either with violent parents or not accepting them for who they are. This queer youth didn't have a chance to meet their partners. Online support groups didn't work out because of this situation. It was hard for those people to talk with somebody about their problems when their parents would hear everything from the other room. Pandemic has also destroyed our volunteers' network. Without social contacts and engagement in actions we lost almost all of the volunteers. But the queer youth suffered the most. We have noticed an increase in the number of suicides in 2021 and in needs for psychological support. Being closed at home, having no privacy and reluctance of some psychotherapists to work online have diminished our ability to act in this field. In June 2020 we started meeting people in need on my roof. Of course, only some of the people from our previously formed support group were able to come, some were not allowed by parents. Some youth were kicked out of the house or run away. One boy lived with me for a week. Other person lived with me for 10 months. It was a trans person who was not accepted by parents. I also fed this person. I also opened my doors to another person, underage, who finally was taken away from me by their mother.

My son didn't want to go out because of the obligation to cover mouth and nose. But always somebody was at home when I had to leave so he never stayed alone. The pandemic had also other side-effects on my son. My son asked me about different things concerning the pandemic. But after some time my son started meeting his grandmother who said him the opposite things. For him it was very stressful that two important persons in his life talk different things on the same topic. He called this state "confusion". Once he said that the most problematic in the pandemic was not seeing his father for a longer period, 'confusion', lack of working fountains in the city, obligation to wear a mask and no school.

I am vaccinated. I took three doses. My son and partner as well. I trust science. Travelling, which is very important part of my and my son's life, is easier when having a Covid-passport. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Since we live in the attic and it was not possible to go outside for a while, my son also felt bad in the mask, so we started going up to the roof. (...) The neighbors often shouted at us that we were walking on the roof as if it was doing them some harm. "

"My experience of the pandemic was associated with a big change in my activist life - I

went to equality marches, (...) I was on 24 out of 30 that took place in Poland in 2019, I was on the move all the time - it all disappeared for the entire year 2020. (...). I also stopped visiting friends in Poznań, meeting my friends there, going to parties. And now it's all closed. (...) I was never able to go back to this life again. Even when they opened the clubs, I was (...) after the pandemic, I didn't feel such a need, we were tired. And in fact, I haven't come back to this life until now. "

"I had a really terrible depression, to the point where I was looking for information whether or not they were looking for volunteers for vaccine tests to apply, because I thought to myself, 'I will only die and at least have peace', no? And if I don't die, I will serve humanity and it will all end sooner."

"Considering all the things that people were afraid of, such as losing their job or earnings, we had the freedom of these fears. I am on benefits so I was not afraid of it. It was worse with my son's dad, who lost all his income in the art industry in Germany, but somehow we managed it. We had supplies in the pantry."

"When it comes to my work and youth, very bad things happened here. Because all these restrictions hit this queer youth very hard. Especially where their parents are violent or not accepting them. The young people who were in the closet had no excuse to leave home to school to meet their partners. And these young people, who were outside the closet but without parental approval, were doomed to their parents for 24h, seven days a week. Also for this reason, this online psychological help did not exist. Because how would they talk to someone behind a thin, paper wall. It couldn't be that way. This state of affairs was difficult for many people."

"As far as these young people are concerned, in 2020 there weren't many more of suicides, but more self-mutilation compared to 2019. But there were many more suicides in 2021. Our friends lost their queer friends."

"The multitude of people who come to us with the need for psychotherapy is huge. This is about ten times more than in 2019. It may also be the result of the growing awareness of our organization and the possibility of using help, but since last year we have had an amazing avalanche of psychological needs."

**Keywords:** worsening of mental health, LGBTQ non-government organization, LGBTQ activism, LGBTQ youth suicides, masks.

**PL06**

**Title:** Pandemic and (freeing oneself from) violence

**Narrative:** "I am Zuzanna and I was born in 1935. I am retired. I live in small town 45km away from Kraków. I live in my home, alone. From 2015 to October 2021 I was sharing this house with one of my sons, his partner and their four kids. Because we didn't get along, some parts of this period I lived with my other son, and when he died in 2019, I stayed in his apartment for a longer period. It was possible thanks to the pandemic. It changed my life situation in couple aspects - economic and social for sure.

Let me start from the beginning. In 2015 I agreed my son to live with his partner and, at

that time, her two small children in my house. As time passed, it turned out that me and my son's partner did not like each other, which caused both of us to outbursts of anger, and to fights and constant arguments. I decided that I didn't want to share my home space with them and asked them to move out. They tried to do this several times but without success. Meantime, two more children from this relationship were born. I consider this time as very stressful, uncomfortable and annoying. My other son had an apartment in the city centre, two big rooms. I was using one of them from time to time, when I wanted to take some rest from the situation in my house. We both - I and my son's partner had 'Blue Cards' as we were violent against each other. I was abused, mobbed, I was given orders. We didn't talk, we send each other internal letters. I remember that when the pandemic started my son's partner was disinfecting everything that I touched. That was terrifying. But before that, in December 2018 my other son had a stroke. After 5 months on Intensive Care Unit he died and left an apartment in which my family lived for generations. The only problem was that the apartment belonged to the city. After consulting a legal counsel I decided to fight for this apartment. I considered it as an asylum, place where I can stay for a longer period, maybe until death, and free myself from bad relationships at home. I wrote an application for the possibility of renting this apartment to the city office, I personally met the mayor. When my efforts did not bring results, I decided to resolve it in a judicial manner. And then came the pandemic. Proceedings were suspended for some time or were delayed. It gave me some additional time to live in this apartment. Of course, from time to time I was visiting my home and staying there for one, two weeks to check if everything was okey. But it was hard to stay in one house with a person who doesn't respect you. Everything was lock downed so I had no place to go, nobody was visiting me. After that time I get back to the apartment in the city centre. From that time I had to pay for two houses - my own house and city's apartment. I paid bills twice. My granddaughter was taking care of me, as I am not that young anymore, and I have some chronic diseases of the heart, legs and hands. She was helping me with groceries, laundry, cleaning. For some period I invited my cousin to live with me as she returned from Germany and had no place to go. She lived with me for six months. She never paid for nothing and moved out one day after we had an argument. I offered her help because it was pandemic and she used me. I was quite happy in the city apartment as friends visited me which wasn't so common at my house. But finally, after unfavorable judgement for me and lost appeal I was informed by the City Council that I need to move out from the apartment at the beginning of 2021. I didn't want to do this. I also knew that there was this law prohibiting evictions during the pandemic period. So I felt safe and convinced that I can take my time to organize everything for the early spring to move out. I moved out from the apartment in March 2021 and came back to my house. Maybe with different intensity, but everything came back to the same point. We were not talking to each other, only exchanging letters, shouting at each other and fed up with the whole situation. After some serious argument my son and his partner found a house for rent and moved out in November 2021. Since then I live alone in this big house. My son took half of the furniture and I had to buy new ones, which already costed me 8 thousands zlotys (1800 EUR). My granddaughter takes care of me. I don't have contact with my son. He doesn't care. I was sceptic about the vaccination. But when I realized that my granddaughter was infected by Covid-19 and

she could pass it to me I decided to vaccinate myself. Now, I am after two doses. Hopefully now I am protected and my granddaughter can visit me again and help me in daily activities. When she was in isolation and quarantine for almost 3 weeks it was hard time for me. I was alone. I had to do anything on my own. I had to manage everything.”

**Specifically telling quotes:** The respondent didn't give me a permission to record the interview.

**Keywords:** violence, care for elderly, worsening of economic situation

**PL07**

**Title:** Pandemic, cancer, protests and work

**Narrative:** “My name is Marcin and I am 30 years old. I live in Kraków, I work as administrative officer at the university. I am also a doctoral student. I live with my male partner. I consider my economic situation as rather fine. I have some savings.

I don't quite know what affected my situation most - was it the pandemic or my mother's illness. My mother had a cancer and she had a relapse in 2018. When pandemic came, my mother was feeling very bad, she had subsequent metastasis. It affected my life in a way that due to the pandemic's lockdown my mother had difficulties in accessing health care. Making hospitals dedicated to Covid-19, lack of available doctors, and relocation of the hospital building affected my mother severely. It was hard for me. I am from small town in the South Poland and my mother was coming to Kraków for treatment. Once a week, or once a three week. It was the only moment we could meet each other because I didn't visited her so often because of my work and my studies. I took my parents to different places to catch up. My mother, usually, took chemotherapy well so we could go together to museums, botanical garden etc. Then the pandemic started. Pandemic and fear of being affected and infecting my mother caused that we had to limit our contacts. That time I was also under treatment. I had a depression since my mother had a relapse in 2018. I was diagnosed with depression and social anxiety. I went to psychiatrist and later on psychotherapy. It was a dramatic time in my life, but when my mother was coming to Kraków, I was putting myself together. I didn't tell her about my illness because I didn't want her to worry about. I was my mother's biggest support. And the only person with who she could talk about her sickness. I didn't want her to feel that it is her fault that I am depressed.

Considering my mother's treatment I would say polish oncological health system is a drama. You don't have access to information about your illness, what are the perspectives. Nobody informs you what and why is performed on you. There were also moments of big confusion when doctors said two different things on my mother's ability to survive the operation. You don't know who can be trusted. At the beginning of the 2020 my mother was informed about starting some new chemotherapy, but then in March 2020 pandemic came and everything was suspended. The topic has disappeared. After some time doctors decided that they are going to change the method of treatment,

but we didn't know why because nobody informed us. Moreover, relocation of hospital building coupled with information on making this hospital Covid-dedicated caused some uncertainty on location of my mother's treatment. It was a dramatic experience for her. She came to me and told me about people in masks and troops. My mother during her chemotherapy was staying at my place and when she was in hospital I was with her also, I was just sleeping at my place but beside that all the time with her.

Considering my health. Just before the pandemic my doctor gave me some referral for medical examinations. I was very proud of myself that I managed to set the dates for all of them. But then the pandemic started and everything was cancelled. I haven't done them until today. I don't know what to do, because I wasn't informed how to proceed - either wait for their call or take care of it once again in some time? In December 2021 I felt very bad and I went to the hospital ward. But after 9 hours of sitting with all those people in masks, without fingers I left. I wasn't able to watch all of this, those sounds of ambulances with covid patients.

Regarding my scientific life. In 2019 I started running a research camp with students. It was planned for two semesters. Subject of the camp concerned Polish protests on abortion. The idea was to gather students to research protests that were organized at their place of origin. The first semester was a preparation for the second task: conducting interviews with people taking part in protests of our interest. Because of the pandemic conduction of interviews had to be suspended for next six months. As this study was part of my doctoral research this situation affected my thesis and research material. I felt disappointment because we were not able to realize the plan for this research camp. I came back to conducting those interviews summer last year. I didn't want to conduct them online because I had doubts about effectiveness of the method in such circumstances. I prefer face-to-face contact. I was also teaching some classes at the university. But when the pandemic started I had to switch to remote teaching. At the begging it was okey, because for everyone it was something new. People were closed in their homes so they needed some social contacts. But later on, I used this tool - online meetings, for the purpose of supporting people who can(not) attend protests and want to share their experiences. I was running 'protests' shifts' to ease the tensions caused by the pandemic and constitutional court judgement regarding abortion. I had to stop doing this in October 2020 because my mother's health has worsen. Finally she died. It affected my scientific work. Protests, as I already mentioned, are the main subject of my PhD. When my mother was sick I wasn't attending the protests because of fear of infecting mum and after my mother's death I couldn't go to any because I was too tired. My mother's death plus the pandemic has affected my thesis and my research in that way that I was not feeling mentally very well so contact with people had to be suspended. So did my research.

The pandemic has affected my professional life very positively. Before the pandemic I was working part-time. But sitting in the office was pointless for me because I was managing my work through e-mail box. And when the pandemic started it was possible for me to work from home. After some time we were asked by employer to come back to office. Finally, after some negotiations we had more flexible work possibilities but I decided to quit. Also because of my mother's illness, I was hoping to give her some more time of mine. But meanwhile she died. Later I was appointed an administrative position

at the uni. It gives me different perspective. Administrative work is less valued than scientific work. So are administrative officers. They are constantly forgotten. During the pandemic scientists had a right to work from home but not administrative workers. Or at least not all of them. It is a director of a department that decides who goes when to stationary work and they don't care if you are a single mother and have children to care for.

The pandemic has a lot positive effects. As an anxious person I didn't have to go places and meet people I don't want to go or meet. Because of more free time I developed my graphic skills and now it gives me additional income. Lockdown was also a time when you could give yourself a rest from other people, less was expected from you regarding social contacts. Beginning of the pandemic was a 'wonderful' time because everyone experienced the same - being trapped in their houses. It was also the time when people had more empathy towards each other. Other positive aspect of the pandemic is 'animals in the city', less cars on the streets, new cycling paths.

Going back to doing research during the pandemic. Once I was doing a research project I realized that we care for our interviewees' but not about the interviewer's health and well-being. We as researchers are also part of other social networks. We have to take care of people from those networks too. Taking my situation as an example, I couldn't conduct face-to-face interviews because of my mother's health. For me it was something obvious. But science evaluators do not take into the consideration different life situations.

I was vaccinated because of the health reasons mainly. Of course it gives me also freedom to travel and conduct my research. I wasn't infected. I believe the vaccine protects me. I want to share with you some good example from Vienna where it is a rule that either you test yourself before entering any public space or you are vaccinated. Polish solutions are dramatic."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "From April 2018 to November 2020 I was accompanying chemotherapy, in the ward at the hospital, and finally cooking for the family for a few days ahead. Mom sometimes laughed: 'I think it's the parents who bring the jars when they come to their children-students, not the other way around.' Of course, I didn't have to do anything, I didn't have to impose on myself or assume these roles, adjust my whole life, but I didn't want to, and probably couldn't, otherwise. (...)"

"I think that, in a broader sense, only Covid-19 clearly showed that disease is not a problem of an individual, but a whole spectrum of various factors and institutions that shape it and are shaped by it. Are the moves of the rulers who are not coping with the pandemic annoying? Unfortunately, this team, as well as all the previous ones, do not cope to a similar degree, or they completely disregard health policies. The huge problems and underfunding in the health sector did not start with the current pandemic. In the case of cancer, this leads to a situation where you do not receive some kind of appropriate treatment regimen because you do not yet meet the ministerial requirements ..."

**Keywords:** cancer, care for mother, researching protests in Poland

PL08

**Title:** Pandemic and insomnia

**Narrative:** "I am Maja and I am 28 years old. I was born in Kraków but I spent my childhood near Kraków. I moved to Kraków again to study. Last four years before the pandemic I lived in London where I was a sex worker, I was a stripper. For one year I was working in the office. Now I live in Kraków, alone. I rent apartment. I am unemployed. My biggest problem was that during the pandemic I had a depression problem coupled with insomnia. It was hard time for me emotionally. Maybe an effect of moving back to Poland. I didn't want to be back. In March 2020 when the pandemic started and everything has been closed I was thinking about working online - post some photos or videos. After some time, I decided that this is not my area of performance so I don't want to do it. Later on I decided I would meet clients. But I wasn't able to accomplish this because first three months after returning from UK I spent with my parents. I decided to find another job. Meantime my mental health was worsening. After two months living with my parents I have finally found a job and an apartment. I started working in a call center in an international company and moved to Kraków in July 2020. August was an adaptative month for me. When I went to work I felt into 'adaptation whirl', I had strange working hours - from 11.30 until 20, so my social life was somehow taken away. I had constant problems with insomnia. I recall this time as very bad. In January 2021 I had to go for a sick leave because of my critical sleeping condition. My manager decided to change my working hours so I have more flexibility in work. My treatment took 3 weeks. I worked in this company until July 2021. Meanwhile I started working as a stripper. I was working on private parties. But it was all occasional. I also started working at the club in Czechia. I didn't have any problems when crossing the border because at that time I was fully vaccinated. I tried to manage. I worked as a stripper until October 2021 when the season for this kind of parties as bachelor parties has ended up. Now I am registered as unemployed person, since September 2021. I am searching for a work, also as a stripper. I meet some clients privately. And that's it. Pandemic has affected my economic situation drastically. I had to resign from working at the club when I decided to move to Poland. When the pandemic started in UK there were all clubs closed so I couldn't work there either. The company I worked for started mass dismissal of people, so I lost my job. This situation for sure has resulted in my bad mental condition. Limitation of contacts with people close to me was the trigger. Pandemic didn't affected my psychiatric treatment. I have appointments regularly. I had no problems with scheduling a date for appointment or being informed about my treatment. But I consider living with my parents as rather harsh experience. We had no privacy, we didn't have enough space, we were all in one apartment figuring out what to do next. Fortunately, we had some conflicts but they did not affect our relations. It is hard to find a job in sex work sector in Poland now. Clubs are closed, online advertisement platform as well so we don't have a space to promote ourselves. I can try to work in a club but working conditions there are not fair - sometimes they don't give you money on time, sometimes at all or give you less money. I tried to get some unemployment benefits but I wasn't entitled to any because

I didn't work for the company required full 12 months. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "When I think about pandemic period nothing good comes to my mind. There is nothing that this pandemic can teach me or, I don't know, somehow impact my world view, relations with people (...)."

"I took the vaccine to protect myself and other people from the virus." "

**Keywords:** insomnia, depression, sex work, return migration, lost of income, unemployment

PL09

**Title:** Pandemic kills music and small businesses

**Narrative:** "My name is Robert and I am 58-years-old man living in a small town. I live with my partner and 4 children. We rent a house. On a daily basis I work in my mother's firm. I run this business every day. I have a part-time contract but in reality I work more than I should.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed my financial situation a lot. Firstly, when the pandemic started in March 2020 we were obliged - as an effect of general lockdown - to close our business. We were closed for almost two months. After opening it again, we didn't have clients. People stayed at their homes, were afraid of the virus, didn't need cloth reparation and cleaning - and that's what I do for a leaving. That meant no income. But bills and rent had to be paid. We opened again in May 2020 but still it's quite. It didn't happened to me only. Other entrepreneurs in the whole city, and especially here in the city centre, experience the same. They either closed their businesses or sit in the corner playing with their phones and waiting for clients. I decided to change opening hours of our service point. Before the pandemic we were open from Monday till Friday for 8 hours a day and on Saturdays for 4 hours. Now I only work weekdays 6 hours a day. In May 2020 I applied for a governmental loan for small businesses and received 5000 zlotys (~1200 EUR). I used this money to pay bills - for rent, water, electricity, health insurance. The loan was non-returnable if you kept the business for several months after receiving it. Today I had two clients. I have 1700 zlotys (~375 EUR) for a month from this business now. From this money I pay bills and for my private expenses I have maybe 400 zlotys (~80 EUR). There was more rounds of these loans but we weren't eligible for the second one and we didn't make it on time when we tried third time. Other governmental solutions were not dedicated for us. So the state helped me only once in the last 2 years. I wanted to close the business at the beginning of this year (2022) but I negotiated a 50% reduction in the rent, for a six months. We will see what happens. I am considering closing the business in July 2022. I have a fondness for it, because I have been dealing with it for over 20 years. But situation is not very bright for me here. At the beginning of the pandemic where there was a demand for masks I sewed them to earn some money. I sewed masks for a friend who had a medical shop. I earned 1000 zlotys (~220 EUR). Now I don't even sell them from the counter.

Secondly, as a musician I was deprived an income by governmental restrictions concerning cultural and artistic life. When pandemic started and people in power decided that they close cultural centers, clubs, public places we had to cancel all our concerts. We played around 140 concerts a year in the last years. In 2020 we played few ones, at the beginning of the year, later we performed some online. We came back to concerts in May/June 2021. And now we see that less people attend them, some clubs had to be closed due to the pandemic and lost of income. The same, we have less places to play in. on the other hand, for some places we have to wait. For instance in Ireland - where we are supposed to play - the clubs are booked for another couple of months. In sum this significant deterioration in my income meant that I was forced to take a loan to pay off arrears, pay bills, have some money for a leaving etc. If I decide to close the business I don't know what to do next. In meantime I may become unemployed and without any income. Money from concerts are not 'certain money'. There are months when we have a lot of concerts but there are others that are pretty inactive. I haven't been vaccinated. I am not afraid that I won't be able to play concerts. At the concerts there were different solutions already implemented to meet hygienic restrictions - for example dividing people into sectors for vaccinated and not-vaccinated people. But now they are abolishing all the restrictions. All of the restrictions are usual smoke and mirrors. Moreover, it were the publicity that was checked not the musicians. But, in case of people coming to our concerts it was also easy to deceive the system. You only declared if you are vaccinated without showing any certificate of Covid-passport."

**Specifically telling quotes:** The respondent didn't give me a permission to record the interview.

**Keywords:** lost of income, small business, music

**PL10**

**Title:** Education during the pandemic

**Narrative:** "My name is Julia and I am 46-years-old women, teacher of math and director of the elementary school. I have a husband and two daughters - 22 and 16 years old. The pandemic has for sure impacted my health. Due to the fact that I have a thrombosis I couldn't get vaccinated at the same date in February 2021 as other teachers, but I had to wait for a specific vaccine. Then, in May when I could done it I have to wait my turn. This long waiting caused my fear of being infected. And then what? I am among 600 other people - pupils and staff. I was scared the most about the kids. That was stressful situation. Of course, we had to stick to the Ministerial restrictions of measuring body temperature, cleaning hands, wearing masks but it is not all so simple to do in school. Different situations happen and then you don't think about cleaning your hands or putting a mask on your mouth. Moreover, wearing a mask all the time is very tiring. Considering my professional life I would say that our school wasn't prepared for such a big change - online teaching. It was a surprise for us. We lacked computer equipment

and online platform we could use to perform classes. Lack of equipment was the biggest problem especially from March 2020 to June 2020. But I was in school - as its director - quite often and therefore I had a possibility to get infected by the virus. And it happened. In November 2020 I had a coronavirus. My thrombosis didn't help here. I was feeling very weak, couldn't eat, just drink. That fatal state lasted for 2 or 3 days. But when I recovered few days later I get back to work right away. There were things that couldn't wait longer. In my home we all had coronavirus. My husband had a serious cough and our daughter had flu-like symptoms. In 2021 I get vaccinated. I was very happy that finally I could do it. Comparing 2020 and 2021 I must say that in 2020 more adults/teachers and staff were infected by the virus, but when this trend was opposite in 2021 I was happy I could be vaccinated as soon as possible. I put a lot of effort into organizing distance and stationary learning. It was logistically hard, especially when we were obliged to change the hours of functioning of some of school's departments (for instance library) or services (meals for pupils). I consider year 2021 better or different comparing to 2020. As I said I could be vaccinated, adults and kids that were sick with the virus gained natural immunity so for instance teachers were more available. I didn't force anyone to get vaccinated, it was everyone's individual decision. Due to the governmental hygienic restrictions we were obliged to change school regulations, change of working hours of our departments. Because of that we had a lot of paperwork. Everyone at our school is obliged to wear a mask. But there are few exceptions like children with Asperger's Syndrome and some children who due to some chronic diseases can't wear it. Of course there are also children whose parents do not believe in the virus. Sometimes we had to argue with them. Masks cause a lot of misunderstandings. I can also see the change in people's behavior. They are now more nervous and stressed than before the pandemic. They have more fears and are more careful.

When it comes to pupils and remote learning I would say distance learning gave them a hard time. For some children the whole situation with online teaching was stressful. They didn't want to turn on their cameras or take part in the lessons. We have children who logged in to the system but we couldn't be sure if they were there if they didn't speak at all or show their faces. Other children turned off their cameras, lied about problems with computer equipment - camera or microphone - to not attend online classes. It means that we need to spend now more time to see if we taught them what we wanted. We have to check if remote learning brought effects. The other aspect I see as a consequence of the closure of school due to the pandemic is that kids has also changed. They need peers in daily life to develop properly. After summer break in the first year of the pandemic we organized some integration events for our pupils so they could get used to each other and ease themselves from computers, especially when we didn't know what will happen next - remote classes again or stationary learning. I can see that remote learning affects children not only physically - they are more tired - but also affects their knowledge and acquired skills. They have also become more malignant towards each other. They learned how to hurt somebody by using computer. School's psychologist and pedagogist all the time have new reports from parents with their children problems. They ask them for help. Their children start having depression. We already have few pupils who due to depression have individual teaching and started psychotherapy. When it comes to teaching platform and computer equipment due to

the lack of both of them, when government closed schools we firstly contacted pupils and parents by electronic diary. We sent them explanation of the material and some homework to do. We also dedicated a lot of time for consultations - in groups and individual - so we were sure that our pupils get proper knowledge. Of course due to different life circumstances - sickness of a teacher or some pupils - it took much more time than anticipated. Considering school's computer equipment, as I mentioned we lacked it. We took part in governmental project 'Digital School' twice. Received laptops and tablets were used by both - children and teachers. When parents report a need of a computer we signed with them an agreement. But we didn't have enough computers for all children. There were families with four children and only one computer. How they were supposed to learn something if they didn't have their own tools for learning? I put also a lot of effort in organizing trainings for teachers, pupils and parents to familiarize them with learning platform and other tools we use in teaching process. In October 2020 everyone was ready for remote learning/teaching.

We can't forgot about children with special educational needs. We have 43 of them in our school. They have a right to remote learning provided in school. That meant also a necessity of having laptops and teachers on site. Classes for some of those pupil has to be shortened to 30 minutes. Teachers also had to replace each other because some of them were sick, some have contract for only 20 hours of supporting the learning process a week. As I mentioned before it was hard logistically to manage. Of course we also had children whose parents didn't have proper condition for their child to learn from home. Then we accepted that child and we also had to organize care and place for them. Sometimes there were situations when one teacher look after them in different classrooms.

Getting back to my infection with coronavirus and my work. I didn't have time to rest after the illness. I had to get back to work. Firstly, for a first two days after my sick leave I worked from home, then prepared myself during the weekend for working on site and get back to it very fast. I must say that after one and a half year of being infected I have not yet recovered fully. I feel different and more stressed now. As an effect of governmental restrictions we had a lot of paperwork. We had to change a lot of internal regulations, prepare and sing agreements with parents for computer equipment rental. We were obliged to check people's body temperature, make lists of people who entered the building. Papers and papers. A lot of data to be properly archived.

I forgot to mention that internet access was also problematic. We had this problem as a school. When much more people work online then everything works slower or stops working. But it was more problematic for families. They had radio internet or with data limit. Sometimes it caused situations that children couldn't attend classes because they didn't have internet access at home. Now I can see that it has changed. Parents use their '500+' child benefit to buy computer equipment to their children or upgrade their internet connection."

**Specifically telling quotes:** For technical reasons recording of the interview is not able to provide quotes. Only voice of the NR has been recorded. However, NR took careful notes and they served as a basis for the narrative. Narration from the interview was written few hours after its conduction so, probably, it covered everything that was

mentioned by the respondent.

**Keywords:** education, digital divide, teachers, children, vaccine, chronic disease



## Portugal

PT01

**Title:** Selling and delivering essential goods during Covid

**Narrative:** I live in a small village in the inner country, I'm married and mother of two. I own a mini market in the village. My major memory of the beginning of the pandemic was of the fear. Of people around me and also myself. Fear of the unknown. Me and my husband never went home. I needed to keep the shop open, it was an essential activity. My husband also needed to maintain working but he was able to combine online working with in presence working at the company. He is the manager being responsible for a lot of processes, so it was important that he went there every day. The company never closed. I remember so well of people being afraid of everything. Washing all and afraid of touching, afraid of being close to other people. At my shop was complicated, I changed all the procedures. During the first confinement I had a big raise in the number of costumers. A lot of people coming and saying that they felt safer in buying in a small shop than in the bigger supermarkets. I already had an informal delivery service for older people or people with mobility problems in the village. But during the first confinement the request for home delivery raised tremendously. I suddenly had new clients from outside the village, even from the cities, that wanted me to take the products to their home. People were very stressed. And still are, I believe. People sometimes don't understand the rules imposed by the health authorities and get upset for some of the rules, for example not touching some products and therefore not being able to choose what the pieces they want. I also had some problems with people wanting to enter in the shop and even entering despite the rule fixed at the door of a limited number of clients inside the shop. It's been tiring dealing with all this. With my family the worst part was with kids and the schooling. My son was in primary school and had home schooling but my small girl was at the pre school and still is so she stayed home without any kind of activity. And I couldn't stay with them. None of us asked for the family assistance license, we couldn't. What we did was to adapt our schedules to provide them support the maximum that we could. My husband went to work much earlier in the morning when I was still home. Then he returned at 10 am and stayed working online until lunch time, when I close the shop and come home until 4 pm. During that period I did a longer lunch break, usually I open at 3.30 pm but during the confinement periods I only opened after 4 pm, people knew because I put a lettering in the door. Also people did not come so often, they tended to do shopping less than they did before the pandemic. My husband tried to return home as soon as he could but sometimes my kids needed to stay a little bit alone. Also my father lives next door so he took a look on them. But it was difficult times because usually they were here in the shop with me at the end of the afternoon and in that time they couldn't. Financially we had no problems. As I told before, the pandemic even made me sell more, especially in the first phase. In 2021 the sales were more close to what it was before. So we didn't suffer money difficulties due to the pandemic. And as we never went home, we didn't have the isolation effect some people told me they were having. The old people that come to the shop suffered much. They

were afraid of dying and were home alone without anyone to talk to. Coming to the shop and meeting neighbors is very important to them, my shop is a little a meeting point here in the village. I also like talking to them, mostly the old ladies, listening to their problems and so.

**Specifically telling quotes:** New clients called with a list of things to buy and asking of I could take it to their home but saying: "Do not to enter!! Leave things at the door!" Some even required that I wear gloves...

**Keywords:** essential workers; online schooling; conciliation; fear; work overload

PT02

**Title:** A material impoverishment versus an enrichment of human relationships

**Narrative:** I'm a Brazilian living in Portugal for 9 years now. I came here to do my master degree and then I liked so much living here that I decided to stay. I'm doing PhD in Cinema in a medium size city in the inner country of Portugal. When the pandemic started I was teaching some classes with my supervisor and already a bit late in my research. I felt very afraid during most time of the pandemic. I was afraid of getting Covid and of my family and friends getting it. Then things in Brazil got terrible, I lost familiars and friends already so I got really depressed. During this time I suffered a severe depression and I even got internated for it in 2021. But now looking back I can see that also good things happened to me in this time. I met new people due to some activities I participated during Covid, support activities that the university developed. I met a person. I am gay and I met someone special but he is not from here and due to the pandemic we could meet often because of mobility limitations and also due to social distantiation rules. But we talked a lot by phone and vídeo conference. One of the things that happended during the pandemic was that I got much more close to my parents. I was very apart from them because of my sexual orientation we never managed to talk about that. But know we did, not with my father but with my mother. We talked openly about the issue and I'm feeling much more close to them. Also with my father, with both of them, I now spend a lot of evenings chatting. We turn the conference call and we stay connected, me and them watching tv, doing things at each home but being togheter and commenting things. We even see films togheter using a platform that I discover where people can be assisting the same film. I do that with friends too. Also the pandemic showed me that I have a lot of people that are real friends. Who care for me and tryied to help me. Finantially I had many difficulties because I wasn't able to focus on my PhD, I got very late. Also the value of real (Brazilian currency) decreased much and my funding is from Brazil so became very difficult for me to mantain my living standard. I couldn't pay my tuition fees and needed to look for a job but then I couldn't dedicate to PhD. I become so depressed with this finantial problems and also afraid of Covid that I let myself be dragged in a downward spiral. I saw a lot of people suffering the same problems, a lot of Brazilians and other international students were having this

kind of problems and I believe that the university should have had more sensitivity to our situation. The old lady whose house I lived in, in a rented room, went living with their son and his wife and they wanted that I went also. They are real family to me; they worried so much with me. But I felt bad because I can't cook and staying home the entire day due to the pandemic I felt I was doing them my servants, cooking for me. Before with Mani (my landlady) I usually had my meals out at the university. Because of all this recently, I moved to another city where I do not know anyone to work in a call center but things are going well. I hate this job and my contract has bad conditions. I believe I did a bad choice coming here, I had another proposal for working in a project and I regret my decision now and I am considering to return. In addition, Mina and their family are insisting for me to return. So it is interesting because now doing this reflection for this interview I realize that a lot of good things also happened in this period, all connected with the wonderful people I have in my life.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I cannot say that he is my boyfriend because we do not feel comfortable assuming a relationship yet. None of us has a car and we live far away from each other. The pandemic mobility constraints prevent us from travelling so we have not been together more than 5 times since we met in an online dating site.

**Keywords:** Depression; Homosexuality; Friendship; deprivation; Social distancing

**PT03**

**Title:** Covid in the aftermath of widowhood

**Narrative:** I live alone in a medium size city in the inner country. I have 8 children, all adults already. Currently I live from a social support subsidy because most jobs I had were non declared. I used to be a rich person long time ago but my life changed very much. When the pandemic started in 2020 I had lost recently my 17 years long partner. I was adapting to live alone after having lived a life surrounded by a lot of persons. These days I remember my kids being small and the house a mess with them screaming and running and me desiring to be alone. Now I am alone and I miss so much that confusion. But after 3 years now I finally started to find comfort zones and new routines. The pandemic was specially tuff because it increased my loneliness. What prevent me from feeling worse was my family, some of my kids kept very close and contacting by phone and video call, and also a project I am participating where I found real friends and a very important support. This project gathers single mothers of this region (3 councils in the innercountry) and started before the pandemics, in 2019. We were able to adapt to the online environment and to keep the connection even during the confinement periods. When things got better, in the summers of 2020 and 2021, we returned to in presence meetings. Together we produced a theatre play and it was very important to me to be in the stage playing my role with some of my children and grandchildren and also people from the community assisting. This project and the people I met there were a very important support during the pandemic. Now we share feelings and concerns by our

WhatsApp group and we help each other in practical issues. Until now I already had Covid twice. First time was one year ago, I got the Delta variant. My daughter, both her kids and my son in law also got it. I stayed home but I had everything with the support of my kids. It was difficult, I had several symptoms. NOW in January and already vaccinated I got Omicron. I had no symptoms but it was terrible because due to being infected I had to miss the presentation of our play in a festival in Lisbon. WThe entire group was supposed but it was complicated because me and other people got Covid. It was a great stress to our "team leaders" (in fact I feel they are parto f the group like us but they are from the associations that promote the project. My group took a picture of them at the stage with the Che Guevara t-shirt I use at the play. It was really important to me.

**Specifically telling quotes:** Sometimes I am at home smoking and looking outside the window and I say to myself: Didn't you ask to be alone and peaceful? Well now you are. Enjoy, you asked for it!

**Keywords:** Aging; loneliness; loss; friendship; participation; poverty; solidarity

**PT04**

**Title:** AN almost normal live during pandemic context

**Narrative:** "I am a divorced woman of 72 years old. I am retired but I still work part time as a housekeeper to earn some more money. My pension is very low. I am mother of 2 and grandma of 6. I live alone in Lisbon suburbs.

When the pandemic started I didn't felt much the impact of it since I was already spending much time at home. I like very much being at home. For me what was more difficult was to adapt to the online schooling of my grandson. When he is with his father (his parents are separated) he comes here to my house after school which is very close to my house). During confinement his father kept working (he is a Uber driver) so my grandson had classes at my house. I had difficulties to help him as I don't understood much of computers. One other difference in my life was that I started to do more shopping in my neighbourhood and less in the bigger supermarkets. I noticed that the small market near my house increased the sales since the pandemic started, they employed 8 people now and when they opened it was only three, the three siblings who own it. They also started to deliver groceries home for those people who were more afraid of going out or had mobility issues. I hadn't requested it, I always went out during the pandemics. But not much, just to buy food and other goods and medicines at the pharmacy. Another thing that changed was that my fitness classes closed. I used to attend classes at a gym of a day centre for seniors and water aerobics at the municipal swimming pool. The swimming pool is already open again but the senior center is still closed. It is closed for 2 years now. I miss the classes but I see that people that were there for the entire day, watching tv and doing activities is really in need now. Sometimes I meet people that used to go there and I can see their quality of life decreased a lot, they

comment they feel lonely and sad. I also travel less these days. Not here, I keep using the public transports, I am not afraid of using it. In fact public transports in Lisbon are currently more empty so I don't see any danger in using it. My daily life is pretty much the same. But I see less my older son and his kids because he lives in the center of the country and since the pandemic started he visits me less and I also go less seeing them. On the opposite my younger son maintains the same rhythm of visits, he comes very often to my house, alone or with this son when he is parenting him, he shares the custody with his ex wife. I also see less my siblings and cousins than I used to see before the pandemics.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I keep using the Lisbon public transports, I am not afraid of using it. In fact public transports in Lisbon are currently more empty so I don't see any danger in using it

**Keywords:** public transports; caring; low pensions; home; grandchildren

PT05

**Title:** Running from Covid, back to the past

**Narrative:** I am Victor, I'm 61 years old and I'm a single man with an innate physical handicap. When the pandemic started I was living in Lisbon in my flat and was unemployed. I decided to come to my home village because I didn't feel safe at Lisbon moving by public transports and living in a flat. Here I have my car and I live in a house with space outside and have a small garden. At the beginning I came just for a while but then the pandemic didn't pass and now I am living here for 2 years now. I'm starting to consider the idea of selling or renting my flat at Lisbon now. The pandemic made my totally change my life. In Lisbon I had several friends and was considering joining a biological agriculture project. At weekends I used to go to the cinema or theatre. Now I live a very different life in the village. I also have a lot of friends here but their interests are very different from mine and due to the pandemics I spent much more time at home. I dedicate a lot of time to my garden, to cultivating the land and cooking. All my siblings are emigrated in Canada. Since the pandemic they haven't visit anymore, we just talk by phone and internet. I like living here but I miss part of the lifestyle I had in Lisbon. Here everybody knows each other and being a single man I can't go out often with the same woman friends without starting rumours that we are dating. At the same time most of my woman friends who are alone are too occupied with their kids. So I have less company here to go for a walk. And there is scarce cultural offer. But to go back to Lisbon it's no option to me until it is considered completely safe in terms of health. Now I am waiting to see how things evolve. There are a lot of plans I had to this decade of my life, things that I do now or I won't do any longer like getting a caravan and travel. If the pandemics continues I need to decide what to do with my life.

**Specifically telling quotes:** The pandemic completely changed my life. Being a person

with a fragile health condition I had to move from Lisbon and return to my home village and adapt to a new lifestyle.

**Keywords:** Fear; lifechange; moving home; public transports; safety

**PT06**

**Title:** Working at a pharmacy during pandemics

**Narrative:** My name is Maria, I'm 38 years old, I'm married and have two kids. I live in a small village in the inner country. I work at a pharmacy from Monday to Saturday and do some cleaning works to get an additional income. The pandemic brought much more work to the pharmacy. We already did home deliveries; I work there for 10 years and since then I always saw this service. But with the pandemic it increased a lot. Being an essential worker I never stayed home except for now when I got Covid. We kept working during all the confinement periods, doing additional work due to the deliveries and recently to the boom of covid tests. At the beginning what I noticed more was the fear in people. People were so afraid. Not only at my job, the clients, for example my parents, they were afraid of us, of me. With me working in a pharmacy, all said it was me who would bring the virus. After all it was not me now who brought it, actually I was the last one in my house to get infected, it was my husband who brought it from a colleague of his. It was difficult seeing less my parents and even worse to see they were afraid of seeing us. But I understand, I guess older people thought that Covid might cause their death. They were afraid of dying. Then at my home the more difficult was to conciliate work demands with the home schooling. I could take the license to stay home with my son, who was at primary school so my husband took it. But he is not very keen in computers, he doesn't understand how to use it, so it had to be me to help my son entering the class online. I managed to adapt my schedule, so I was here early in the morning to help in entering and seeing the tasks for that day. My husband would stay with our youngest daughter who had no classes since she was just 3 years old when Covid started. But the price for staying longer in the morning was to leave my job later in the evening so that complicated my life a lot. Also my son suffered for not being able to play with his friends during confinement periods. It was quite difficult for all of us. I believe it left marks in the kids that will last long.

**Specifically telling quotes:** My parents, they were afraid of us, of me. With me working in a pharmacy, all said it was me who would bring the virus.

**Keywords:** fear; online schooling; work overload; family distancing:

**PT07**

**Title:** From mothering to surviving during the pandemics

**Narrative:** I am a 45 years old married woman, mother of 2 girls. I live in a medium size city in the coast, near Lisbon. I have a degree in environmental engineering but I have worked in several jobs until now, most of them not connected with the area. When the pandemic started I first did not believe in it. I was joking with my husband who was following the situation since the end of 2019, saying he was sort of paranoid. Then suddenly it became absolutely notorious everything was quite serious and concerning. Still I must say that 2020 was not a bad year for us as a family. During confinement we even had a great time together. Both me and my husband were able to adapt to online working but as commercials with several companies closing we had much less work to do. Less work and no concerns of losing income, we had much more time for our girls so we did a lot of things together at home like cooking, playing, having fun together We talked about things we never had time before. In my building we are just 5 families living there and one has a supermarket so we organized as a group to do shopping lists and this couple brought the groceries to each flat. IN the second confinement this didn't happened. I believe that in the first confinement people were solidal and showed their best. In the second people were very tired and was completely different. The worst part was social life and social distancing from people. I do believe it is a terrible thing and presently from my point of view there is no reason at all for maintaining this kind of rules. I have a very close relation with my parents and my two sisters. Also with my partner mother and his sister. So it was very difficult to being apart. That first Christmas, we stayed a part and it was terrible. The last one we didn't stayed, we were together And you know the thing was in the Christmas of 2020 we stayed apart and were afraid that the kids could infect my parents. All the 3 of us, me and my sisters were afraid of this. Then in January 2021 we wanted that the kids saw their grandparents so we visited them. My father was already infected but he didn't knew so all of us got Covid. It was bad because all of us had symptoms but my father and my mother got worse and my father was intubated. It was terrible those days, without knowing how he was, without seeing him. And then later that year I got sick. I was already sick, with symptoms long time ago but I didn't pay attention. IN 2021 things got real worse and I ended up in hospital, doing two operations in two days and in the second I really thought I was going to die, I was so weak. The pandemic worsen everything. Not in terms of attendance from doctors, when I was attended it was quite good. But exams took longer and then when I was in the hospital not being allowed to see anybody was terrible. I could only thing "I'm going to die, what is going to happen to my daughters?" My partner one day said in the hospital: Do whatever you like but I won't leave here today without seeing my wife. Ans he saw me and it was really important to see him. Then all the time after coming home, it was a long recovery process, during that time I thought a lot about life. I changed job. I moved to a new job where I have more time to me and my family.

**Specifically telling quotes:** In the first confinement people were solidary and showed the best of themselves. In the second was the opposite and I believe now people are really tired of this situation. From my point of view there is no reason to maintain such a strict rule.

**Keywords:** medical operation; surviving; quality time; social distancing; family

**PT08**

**Title:** At home (more) alone

**Narrative:** "My name is Paula, I'm 69 years old and I am retired since long time. I live in a medium size city in the coast close to Lisbon. have a chronic disease which got worse during this pandemic period. Presently I live with my husband, my mother-in-law who is in her nineties and our dog.

The pandemic brought fear and distance to our lives. It was very disturbing knowing that a lot of people were dying and knowing people that died. At the same time being afraid of situations where people don't take care and living in a big building with a lot of joint owners, being obliged to meet a lot of people daily. I am administrator of the condominium and recently I had to call the attention of one person that keeps not using the mask inside the building and in the elevators which upsets the others. We have in the building a lady who lost both her husband and son in law for the Covid, for her is being very difficult to overcome it and crossing with someone that doesn't respect the rules is very disturbing. In January 2021 before vaccination me and all people at my home got Covid. We also contaminated the family of my older daughter. Me and my husband got worst, my mother-in-law was asymptomatic. I had terrible diarrheha for two weeks. My husband went to the hospital as he was with lack of oxygen. I stayed here at home for 2 weeks, very sick, without talking with him because when he was intubated, he was unconscious and having to care for my mother-in-law despite having no forces. It was really difficult, my support was my younger daughter who came several times a day bringing supplies and leaving it at the entrance and walking the dog. Thanks to her I never needed to ask for more help. It was terrible feeling so sick and concerned with him and still having to make the meals to my mother-in-law She was fine but she is not used to do nothing. She lives with us for 9 years now and she doesn't help with the house, she behaves like a visit. And during that period was the same.

One other thing that upset me much with Covid was missing my granddaughters from my older daughters. Usually they stay here after school while their parents are working. One of them, the older even has lunch here everyday because she attends the school of the neighbourhood. In the confinement periods I missed very much them. We are a very close family, us with our three daughters, their partners and all the grandchildren. Being away from them and not being able to help my daughters with their daily needs was very difficult. Then when my older daughter got sick (not Covid) and need to be operated and suffered life risk, all the distancing rules were really difficult and made us suffer very much. She was unconscious so we couldn't speak to her. Fortunately that we knew someone working at the hospital as a nurse so we got more information that is usual.

Now that we are vaccinated I feel more safe. But I keep staying much at home. Actually I already was a very homely person before Covid. I feel good at my home, I don't understand why people go out just to shop windows or to show themselves. It is true that for my health I should walk more. But walking causes me pain so all this together

plus Covid I prefer staying home.

**Specifically telling quotes:** We have in the building a lady who lost both her husband and son in law for the Covid, for her is being very difficult to overcome it and crossing with someone that doesn't respect the rules is very disturbing.

**Keywords:** caregiver; chronic disease; aging; family; routines

**PT09**

**Title:** Learning to be a care giver during a pandemics

**Narrative:** " I'm retired now but I was a tailor my all life. Currently I live alone in a small city in the north of the country. When the pandemic start I was about to find the sickness that would kill my wife during the first confinement. In the 16th March 2020 my wife felt bad and after a complicated process of diagnosis we found out that she had a brain tumor. All the process got more complicated due to Covid emergency but she was given 5 to 7 days of live. I decided to bring her home and she lived for more 37 days with me taking care of her. So all the experience of the first confinement is difficult for me to isolate because I was living this intense period. Al the support I needed I was able to get it. But for sure all was more difficult because of the pandemics. We live in a flat so all the shopping need to stay in the marquee for 24 hours to disinfect. When me or anyone else came from outside I did a long disinfection process to avoid contagion to my wife. My two sisters in law helped taking care of her but after seven pm I stayed alone. One of my sister in law is a nurse so she took care of her while I went out for shopping for example. She couldn't receive any other visits and I believe that was bad for her. Later the funeral was also complicated due to Covid constraints. But it was amazing because that day, not in front of the church but uphill there were more than one hundred people saying goodbye to her. I was quite afraid that the police did something since clusters of people were forbidden but they did nothing.

After my wife death I stayed alone in our flat and at the beginning was quite difficult. I tried to maintain the same routines we had. I still do. We did a lot of things, always together. We were runners, we used to dance, we participated in several associations. I decided to go back to the activities, taking her with me. That Christmas of 2020 I decided to animate our town so I distributed cribs in secret for the town during the night. People were much intrigued about who was the responsible for that. When they asked me if it was me I said no. Then one night they decided to observe and they caught me putting one crib. But it was really a nice project, last year I also did the crib distribution, now people know it is me but we have fun the same. My wife had a large crib collection. Late 2019 me and my wife entered a project called Trousseau. After she died I though of returning to the project but it was running online due to confinement so I didn't returned. But when the in presence sessions restarted I joined it and I still make part of this project. It is very important to me to know people and to talk about important issues.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “All the experience of the first confinement is difficult for me to isolate because I was living this intense period. All the support I needed I was able to get it. But for sure all was more difficult because of the pandemics.

It was quite important to me to keep the routines that we had before, when she was alive and were there was no Covid. I do my best to keep doing the things we used to do.

**Keywords:** caring; terminal patient; social participation; active lifestyle; routines

**PT10**

**Title:** Moving and integrating during a pandemics.

**Narrative:** “I’m a 19 years old student. I used to live in Brazil but we moved to Portugal in December 2020 for several reasons and also due to Covid. I live with my parents and my 13 years old brother at a small city in the inner country. When the pandemic started I was beginning my second year of high school and I was enjoying much. I attended a Waldorf school so each year has a different structure. The second year of high school is the more reflexive. I was enjoying much all the disciplines, specially the artistic ones. I was learning how to cut the rock. The in the 15th of March the schools closed all and we came home. I never returned to school again while at Brazil. Schools didn’t reopened more. I had classes online. We were afraid in that time, when my father went to the supermarket it seemed like a war I remember he returning and taking all his cloth, it was impressive. All that environment plus being always at home made me feel depressed, it was quite difficult to be always home. Then in December we emigrate to Portugal. When my parents told me we were coming here for this region and will live in a small city at first I was upset. I couldn’t see me living in a small place, I considered myself a big city person. But After all I enjoyed very much and now I don’t see me living in Brazil again. When we arrived is was almost Christmas vacations at school so I only went to school in January 2021. I attended school in presence for 3 weeks and then all closed again. I immediately liked the school, the teachers and the class. So it was bad coming home. But contrary to what have happened in Brazil here online classes were very good. Comparing the two periods, I think that my school at Brazil in 2020 wasn’t able to adapt well and this school here was much better doing it in 2021. Besides having the classes with the rest of my class, I had extra classes with the teachers, Support classes just for myself to help my integration. Also my colleagues were worried with me and started to send me messages, knowing that I didn’t knew anyone. I now have very close friends in my class, I’m quite happy. Three other girls started to discuss the contents with me and we formed a study group still while in online school. This year is running smoothly. I feel very adapted, I had the Covid vaccine and I feel that things are almost normal now, except for the masks that are quite annoying. I believe the health measures that the Portuguese State has taken were quite adequate. It might have been an exaggeration to reopen the nightclubs so early. But now I believe that the right measures are being taken.

**Specifically telling quotes:** My adaptation to the new school was easy because online

schooling here (Portugal, this school) was very well organized. I had personalized classes with each teacher to support my adaptation as a recently arrived migrant student.

**Keywords:** emigrating; integration; online schooling; resocialization



## Romania

### RO01

**Title:** The academic pressure paired with the lack of support associated with prolonged online studies resulted into burnout and drop-out for a student just before entering her 5th semester online

**Narrative:** "I am a 23-year-old female anthropology graduate living in Bucharest. I took my BA degree in anthropology in 2020 and then I applied straight for master studies. After a one-year-and-a-half attempt to pursue my studies with online classes, I grew more and more disillusioned and lost motivation so I decided to drop out of my MA programme halfway through my second year.

When the pandemic began I was just starting my last semester of BA studies and was looking forward to writing my graduation thesis. I had high hopes for my thesis research and I had started that academic year with a lot of enthusiasm about my fieldwork, only to find that I could not access my fieldwork because of the pandemic. Since the lockdown covered the months destined for fieldwork and I could not really meet people and do the field research, my ethnographic research turned into simple online interviews. I was really disappointed and confronted with the impostor syndrome, so in late May I decided to give up writing my thesis. Then after making the announcement, I felt so relieved of pressure that I actually started to write my thesis. I ended up graduating somehow, but with a subpar thesis by my standards. I still do not know what my key findings were and instead of making me proud, the thesis haunts me as a failure.

I felt no significant support from the university and the department. I could see that the professors were themselves under quite a lot of pressure. One of them spoke out during classes about how the pandemic was affecting him. My thesis advisor was struggling with personal issues of her own and trusted me to cope independently. There was only one course where we were asked to reflect on what was happening around us.

At one point I asked a professor whether we could receive free psychological assistance as a student service offered by the university. After a while they did propose some forms of counselling, but the service only became available some four months into the pandemic, after the end of the academic year (so also after my graduation). It was not even promoted enthusiastically, and for these reasons I think no one used the service in the end. Speaking from a personal point of view, the way it was organised made me not perceive it as a safe space and a real solution.

The decision to enrol into an MA programme so fast after graduation proved to be an unfortunate decision. Looking back, it was a rushed choice, especially since I was not well emotionally. But I did not want to be left behind or to lose touch with academia, especially since I wanted to apply to a PhD programme in the future. I wanted to quit all the time since I started the master. Everything was done solely online. I did not know my colleagues or my professors, as this was a different university from my BA studies. We would only meet online; it was anthropology taught online. It felt demotivating, uninspiring and alienating. I just could not connect with the classes. I would sit in the online class and I would wonder where the spark was. I would hear references to

anthropology, we were obviously studying anthropology, there was an anthropological perspective applied to the talks, but it did not feel like anthropology. It was all due to studying online. I had no model of anyone who became an anthropologist as a result of studying it online.

Additionally, my attention span was very small, regardless of how interesting a class was. I kept pushing Alt+Tab every five minutes. I knew it was a result of my anxiety. When I have acute anxiety I cannot stand still, I keep wanting to do something else. I wanted to participate and unmute my microphone, but I was paralysed. My finger was on the Unmute button, but I felt my heart racing and my palms sweating.

So I would just give up trying to speak. I would always doubt myself, thinking: 'Do I really have a question to ask or I just want to hear myself speak? Ok, so you are an impostor!'. Once I dropped out of the master, I felt relieved. The pressure was off. Now I am soon starting a job, which is not a dream job, but at least it gives me a break from my thoughts and from the pressure to perform academically. The job has targets, needs a routine effort and it gives me immediate reward, such as the salary, unlike the master, where the rewards were very abstract. It also offers me a respite to know myself better and make better decisions. Otherwise I would have just risked graduating from the MA as an impostor, without really learning anything. I want to gain real knowledge, otherwise it would just be a wasted opportunity."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "The decision to enroll into an MA programme so fast after graduation proved to be an unfortunate choice. Looking back, it was a rushed decision, especially since I was not well emotionally. But I did not want to be left behind or to lose touch with academia, especially since I wanted to apply to a PhD programme in the future."; "I just could not connect with the classes. I would sit in the online class and I would wonder where the spark was. I would hear references to anthropology, we were obviously studying anthropology, there was an anthropological perspective applied to the talks, but it did not feel like anthropology. It was all due to studying online. I had no model of anyone who became an anthropologist as a result of studying it online." ; "[During the online classes] my attention span was very small, regardless of how interesting a class was. I kept pushing Alt+Tab every five minutes. I knew it was a result of my anxiety. When I have acute anxiety I cannot stand still, I keep wanting to do something else. I wanted to participate and unmute my microphone, but I was paralysed. My finger was on the Unmute button, but I felt my heart racing and my palms sweating".

**Keywords:** university drop-out, online classes, academic support, mental health, anxiety, alienation

**RO02**

**Title:** Confronted with the isolation and alienation associated with the pandemic restrictions, academic struggles and symptoms of long Covid, a young female student falls into depression and is confronted with self-esteem issues

**Narrative:** "I am a 23-year-old female anthropology graduate living in Bucharest. I took my BA degree in anthropology in 2020 and then I applied straight for master studies. Halfway through the programme's second year, I grew more and more disillusioned and lost motivation so I decided to drop out of my MA programme halfway through the second year.

The lockdown had a pretty severe effect on my mental health. I empathised a lot with how the pandemic hit the vulnerable categories, such as the homeless or the victims of domestic violence. I connected emotionally with their struggles, which increased my anxiety levels.

At the beginning of the pandemic, during lockdown, I would go out for walks in order to calm myself but I was very wary about coming into contact with other people. So I created my own coping mechanism: I decided to channel my attention towards objects in the public space and to photograph the material marks of human activity, such as two half empty bottles of beverages on the street kerb. It was a way of focusing on the surroundings and being more present, but in a safe way. And it also felt like I had a professional activity. This helped me ease my anxiety and I also managed to turn this into a school project for a visual anthropology course. That was also the spring I was supposed to write my graduation thesis. It was all so overwhelming. I was cut off from my parents and grandparents, who were in my hometown. My grandparents had comorbidities: my grandma had a heart condition and my grandpa had kidney failure. Neither of them seemed aware of the risks of Covid-19 infections. In addition, there was a lot of peer pressure from my colleagues. Everyone I talked to seemed to have been really advanced with their theses, at a time when I did not even begin my field research. I had frequent panic attacks and anxiety and I started looking more seriously into psychological therapies. I did receive free online assistance from a support platform and then only after a few more months I took up regular therapy.

In October 2020, right when I started my MA studies and I was trying to adjust, I caught Covid. I had a really bad illness experience. I was too dizzy to walk, I was immensely sleepy and really confused from the lack of smell and taste. Being stuck in my home and in a monotonous routine for two weeks was not the worst, but the loss of smell was terrible. I felt very sensorially deprived. Having to stay at home meant I was also cut off from my key anti-anxiety plan: walking. I was always in the same house clothes, such as old sweatpants and stained sweaters. Even if I showered, my body felt completely deformed. I would ask myself: Where is my body? Why can't I see my body underneath these ugly large clothes? Because when you go out you try to match your clothes, to create an outfit. The same happened to me during lockdown. I felt like a rectangular stick figure with two arms popping out. No make-up, nothing to identify yourself by. And the same with shaving my legs. I could not justify shaving if I wasn't going out, but at the same time I did not feel comfortable with myself. I imposed myself to do it more often, just to remind myself that I have a body, that it can be aesthetic, not just something I use to go to the kitchen to cook. After I did all this I felt better. Then I cut my long hair on a whim and it made me happy.

After my Covid quarantine ended, the long Covid started. I could not climb the stairs, I got dizzy all the time and as I fell into a deep depression. At one point my depression was so intense that I could not get out of bed anymore. I couldn't go to the fridge to take

food out. I could not manage to go to the door and pick up an order. Often I could not bring myself to open the delivery app on my phone. I felt like I was wrapped in jelly and isolated into outer space. My movements were really slow and my perceptions were altered.

My roommate was really supportive. She started cooking for two and feeding me cooked food. It cannot describe how much this meant to me. I was familiar with depression, but this was too much. I got the phone number of a psychiatrist and she prescribed medical treatment. Despite the treatment I still could not finish the first semester of my master programme and sit for my exams.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I felt very sensorially deprived. Having to stay at home meant I was also cut off from my key anti-anxiety plan: walking. I was always in the same house clothes, such as old sweatpants and stained sweaters. Even if I showered, my body felt completely deformed". "I felt like a rectangular stick figure with two arms popping out. No make-up, nothing to identify yourself by. And the same with shaving my legs. I could not justify shaving if I wasn't going out, but at the same time I did not feel comfortable with myself". "After my Covid quarantine ended, the long Covid started. I could not climb the stairs, I got dizzy all the time and was I fell into a deep depression. [...] At one point my depression was so intense that I could not get out of bed anymore".

**Keywords:** depression, anxiety, long Covid, self-care, alienation, body image, psychological support

## RO03

**Title:** Divorced woman in her late forties with health issues and no stable job struggles to raise her teenage children with no financial support from the children's father

**Narrative:** "I am a 49-year-old divorced woman with two teenage children. I used to have a small distribution business with my husband. I was very active, I only stayed home when I gave birth to my children and a couple of months afterward. The business had me spend much time driving. I would spend hundreds of kilometres driving, even while I was pregnant, which, according to the doctors, most likely affected my back and legs and left me with chronic pain. I also have a heart condition which is not diagnosed clearly. After the divorce I have worked for a while with my sister and then I was unemployed. This issue with my back and legs prevents me from standing up or sitting for too long and a hernia, which prevents me from lifting weights. For this reason, I had to quit my job in January 2020 and then right away the pandemic started. I started to work temporarily as a sales assistant in the shop of a family friend. He used to be a friend of my ex-husband's. I go to work daily, but do not work regular hours, depending of what is needed that day. He is not very committed about paying me, so there is always the risk of not getting paid in one month. Now, for example, my salary is two weeks late. His business has been struggling since the pandemic started, sales are down. The shop sells mainly Turkish sweets and confectionery, so the business depended on the fairs and

festivals, such as the Christmas Market and others.

I was very lucky during the pandemic to find support with my landlord. He did not ask for rent for three months in the first year of the pandemic. Last year he also cut down the price of rent in order to help me get by.

Because of my health conditions I cannot find a proper job now, as most jobs that I am qualified for, in the retail sector, require standing up for long periods of time. My age is also an impediment in the search for jobs. Once you are passed 45 years old and have some health issues on the side, it becomes a lot more difficult to find a job and to be able to cope. I should have made more medical investigations for my back pains, but you know how us women are, we tend to neglect these health-related concerns when it comes to ourselves.

My husband emigrated to Sweden six years ago. We divorced eleven years ago but he does not pay child support or alimony. He always claims that he struggles with money. I chose not to take legal action because of the children. I do not want them to see their parents fight. I try to encourage them to have a good relation with their father.

I sometimes apply for social welfare. I do not do it often; I am quite embarrassed to do it. I am trying to gather up the courage to reapply now, because I am much behind on my utilities and administration bills.

I tried to shield my children from the pandemic's effects. I am really proud of how they cope. Even at 16 and 18 respectively, they started to earn their own pocket money. My son has a scholarship and my daughter is saving to buy tools to become a tattoo artist. Online schooling was a struggle for them, because they had to study on their phones. Our laptop had broken down before the pandemic started and we could not afford a new one. They are very good children, but my heart sinks to see them confronted with financial worries. My daughter, for example, likes to eat fruit and vegetables and there are moments when I just cannot afford to buy her fresh produce. Just last evening we were shopping for groceries together and she wanted cauliflower, broccoli and sweet potatoes. I chose a small cauliflower head and weighted it and it cost more than the equivalent of 3 euros. I just could not afford it.

I dream of opening my own small business, but I cannot raise the money. I would need around 5000 euros.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "My age is also an impediment in the search for jobs. Once you are passed 45 years old and have some health issues on the side, it becomes a lot more difficult to find a job and to be able to cope". "I tried to shield my children from the pandemic's effects. I am really proud of how they cope."

**Keywords:** labour market, unemployment, precarious work, gender care gap, divorce, child support

**RO04**

**Title:** A Roma woman with no education and no stable income struggles with raising and protecting her children during the pandemic, while she is threatened with eviction

**Narrative:** “I am a 36-year-old Roma woman with five children. My whole life was a struggle. I was neglected by my mother and was raised in a children's home since I was 11, where we would only get food, boarding and beatings, but no education. I cannot read or write. I had a very short career as a boxer for two years. I got married at 15-years-old and had to quit boxing. My husband is deaf and cannot speak, so we communicate through sign language. We get by helping people around the house, with cleaning, painting, cutting wood, gathering scrape metal and other odd jobs. My husband does the same type of work. We normally work together, because it is hard for him to communicate with others without my mediation. He is trained as welder, but cannot do his job because he cannot communicate with people. I would have to be with him while he works.

I am denied social support; I still need to clarify why. So in addition to the money we earn from our odd jobs, we have my husband’s disability pension, of about 70 euros per month, and children’s child support. I would very much like to find a job as a cleaner in apartment buildings, but everyone rejects you when you do not know how to read or write. We are increasingly threatened with evacuation. We do not have official property papers for this house, which used to be my father-in-law. The authorities declared this house abandoned.

Two of the children are of school age. They perform very well in school. After school they attend a day centre organised by the city hall, where they stay until 4 p.m. They do their homework, take an afternoon nap. This helps me a lot, as it allows me to work more hours while they are away. Our other son is 17 years old, is working on a construction site during the day and attending a drop-out recovery programme in the evening. I am grateful he does not get into trouble like other boys who steal. I also have two daughters, they are 16 and 18 now and do not live with me. They are both married and each of them has a child of her own. My 16-year-old daughter’s husband was just put in jail and I am really miserable trying to convince my daughter to come back home and let me take care of her and her son. She won’t listen, she has no support. I am afraid she might do something risky.

My youngest son had viral meningitis and is very prone to respiratory infections. He was in the hospital for 3 months when he has an infant. So during the pandemic I was panicked that he might become ill again. During the first months I did not work at all, to avoid exposing myself and him to the virus. We survived with food from the social canteen of the local authorities. Now I stopped going, because they only hand out cooked food and it is halfway across the city. I cannot transport the food and I cannot leave them alone for so long. What if they electrocute themselves?

Because of my son’s meningitis, I was so afraid of the pandemic. And to think that other people don’t even believe in the virus. I asked the teacher of my youngest to let me know whenever a colleague of his is sick so that I can keep him home for a while, to protect him. When the children do not go to school or to the day centre because of the risk of contagion, I cannot leave home to work anymore, because I need to supervise them, as there is no one that can help me with childcare. I could really use some time when the children are all in school, because this would leave me time to work more hours, while they are in school. Otherwise, I am stuck in this vicious circle.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “Because of my son’s meningitis, I was so afraid of the pandemic. And to think that other people don’t even believe in the virus. [...] I asked the teacher of my to let me know whenever a colleague of his is sick so that I can keep him home for a while. When the children do not go to school or to the day centre because of the risk of contagion, I cannot leave home to work anymore, because I need to supervise my children. There is no one that can help me with childcare”.

**Keywords:** extreme poverty, cycle of poverty, living conditions, health, childcare, schooling

**RO05**

**Title:** Retired woman who just lost her mother-in-law to illness recalls the hardships of her mother-in-law's and hers mother's hospital stays under the pandemic restrictions

**Narrative:** “I am a 65 years-old retired woman living with my husband, who is also retired. I have just lost my elderly mother-in-law a few days ago to hearth failure and Covid. My mother was also in and out of the hospital this past year and she is still not well. We shared the caretaking of our two mothers with my sister. When my sister was admitting my mother into hospital back in my hometown, I would care for my mother-in-law here.

All this process was extremely painful, because there were strict regulations forbidding you to enter the hospital, under any circumstances. We could not have access to our loved ones while they were in hospital, we had no control over their hospital conditions, over the quality of their care. The pandemic hid the behaviour of the medical personnel towards the patients from the patients' care-takers. You leave the patient in the hospital and then you only receive vague information from a nurse whom you had to call. The staff never calls you and we could not leave a mobile phone neither with my mom nor with my mother in law, because they do not know how to use them. In the case of my mother-in-law’s hospital admission the relation with the medical staff was slightly better, in the sense that the doctor would provide you with updates over the phone, but we still could not contact the patient and check their state ourselves or let them know that we cared and thought of them. We could only send them food parcels, but had no certainty that the parcels reached them or that they helped to access the food. Imagine waking up somewhere with no connection with your familiar ones and no control over your situation.

My mother-in-law was hospitalised for more than a week, and although she was quite old, she was 92, I believe that the Covid-19 infection contributed greatly to her sudden passing. We are still not sure how she caught Covid. She protected herself well. She would only see us and a neighbour of hers, who was helping her out sometimes. Even with all this isolation, she caught Covid. She was admitted into hospital with two negative tests and after three hours she tested positive and then her lungs were affected. The

doctor was getting ready to release her and we were looking to purchase an oxygen machine, as the doctor had warned that she would not be able to breathe well on her own. Then over the weekend she suddenly took a turn for the worse. When the doctor called to warn us she was passing away, I insisted and pleaded that my husband was allowed to see her one last time. She was nice enough to make this concession for us. Unfortunately, by that time, she could not speak and had blurry eyes. She looked at my husband and probably recognised him, but she turned her head away. My husband was very much affected by this perceived avoidance, he thought that his mother felt abandoned in the hospital and couldn't help but blaming himself for not being present enough.

A similar thing happened to my mother when she was hospitalised in December 2021. She has Alzheimer's disease, but it has only affected her walking; she does not have nervous fits or anything and yet she was immobilised in bed while she was committed in the hospital. The nurses lifted the frames of her bed, to prevent possible rages, which were simply not a real risk in her case. She felt humiliated and traumatised by this and we could not do anything about it as it happened, because we could not learn about it until after, when she told us herself. In addition, due to being immobilised in bed, she needed assistance to take the food that we sent her out of the ward's refrigerator and to consume it. As we could not visit ourselves and monitor the situation, the nurses did not help with that, they were just interested in keeping the food parcels for themselves.

This period took a hard toll on our elderly parents. We could not take them to see specialised doctors as often as we should have, out of fear of putting them at risk. We can never be sure if they made the right decision while trying to balance their general health and the risk of catching the virus. Having someone ill in the hospital during the pandemic must have felt like an abandonment for the patient, especially because of not being able to communicate with their family.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "All this process was extremely painful, because there were strict regulations forbidding you to enter the hospital, under any circumstances. We could not have access to our loved ones while they were in hospital, we had no control over their hospital conditions, over the quality of their care. The pandemic hid the behaviour of the medical personnel towards the patients from the patients' care-takers". "Having someone ill in the hospital during the pandemic must have felt like an abandonment for the patient, especially because of not being able to communicate with their family."

**Keywords:** elderly patients, caring for the ill, experience of abandonment, health system, hospitals, experiencing loss

**RO06**

**Title:** Sexual worker describes how the pandemic shaped the work in the field and how the workers organised to fight for rights and member protection

**Narrative:** "I am a sexual worker with several sources of income. I work independently, as escort and I also have a part-time job at an erotic massage salon, where I am formally employed, with a registered work contract. As a sexual worker you have a hard life. Considering that sexual work is not recognised, you are always in a grey area. Only erotic massage and video chat are legal in Romania. If you have to work on the streets it is much worse, because you are fined all the time.

During lockdown (March-May 2020) the massage salon was closed and my independent work was also interrupted. Because I have a work contract I could receive technical unemployment benefits, but the majority of sexual workers were cut off from any source of income during that period.

When we could open again I also resumed my escort work, but the field of sexual services was significantly affected by the lack of tourism. We relied somewhat on foreign tourists, who stopped coming to Romania during the pandemic. Their numbers fluctuated back to the pre-pandemic situation during the last summer and perhaps the situation has slightly improved in the last six months. The local economic crisis took its toll on people's income, which reflected in their spending priorities. They are more reluctant to spend money outside their basic priorities, so luxuries such as sexual services are affected. Both the earnings and the number of clients are below their pre-pandemic values. The pandemic also brought changes in the line of work, as many workers switched to providing online sexual work. I tried it and found it is not for me, but, again, I am lucky to have the privilege of choice. In addition, the many sexual workers returning to Romania during the pandemic after working abroad created quite a bit of unbalance between the offer and demand of sexual services.

I am vaccinated and, as far as I know, I did not contact Covid-19. I believe that sex workers should have had the possibility to receive the vaccine earlier, during the second stage of the vaccination campaign, when they offered the vaccine to the lines of work most prone to exposure. I think I am lucky for not contracting the virus, considering that you cannot really rely on a protocol such as asking clients to provide you with a negative test when you meet with them. At the massage salon their temperature is measured and they are asked to wear a mask. We also wear masks in the communal areas, such as reception and even in the room, when the type of service allows it. We are confronted with a large number of clients who refuse to wear a mask or ask that you take off your mask. It is a very risky work, especially with this type of virus.

I consider myself privileged among sex workers because I benefit from formal employment, which grants me rights to medical insurance, social security and seniority in labour. My line of work is prone to risks and vulnerabilities, which include the lack of pension and medical insurance in old age. There are quite a few sexual workers in their sixties who are still forced to work at this age in order to support themselves. Working on the streets, as they did, is criminalised to such an extent that you simply cannot save money and cannot access benefits because of the huge and incessant fines. You cannot even open a bank account unless you pay all the fines. I am additionally lucky for being able to work on my terms as an escort.

In 2019, together with some colleagues we have founded an association advocating for the decriminalisation and recognition of sexual work, access to social and health services and justice etc. We created an emergency shelter for sexual workers, but we could not

support it financially on the long term we discontinued it last year. It was mainly used by trans or Roma workers working on the street. During the pandemic we created an emergency fund for mutual support and we offered advisory for those eligible to access the Covid-19 state support schemes. So basically we took the role of social workers. The association's activity intensified during the pandemic and we focused on community support, as we had to respond to workers' needs. The association went into snooze mode during the summer of 2021 because of the burnout of several members, but now we are resuming activity and applying for funding. The public advocacy activity is also affected by the stigma associated with this line of work, which discourages colleagues from risking public visibility.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "During the pandemic we created an emergency fund for mutual support and we offered advisory for those eligible to access the Covid-19 state support schemes. So basically we took on the role of social workers. The association's activity intensified during the pandemic and we focused on community support, as we had to respond to workers' needs. The association went into snooze mode during the summer of 2021 because of the burnout of several members". "[During the pandemic] many sexual workers returned to Romania from abroad and there was too much offer for very few clients. This affected everybody's work and led to a general precarity". "I consider myself privileged among sex workers because I benefit from formal employment, which grants me rights to medical insurance, social security and seniority in labour. My line of work is prone to risks and vulnerabilities, which include the lack of pension and medical insurance in old age. There are quite a few sexual workers in their sixties who are still forced to work at this age in order to support themselves. Working on the streets, as they did, is criminalised to such an extent that you simply cannot save money and cannot access benefits because of the huge and incessant fines".

**Keywords:** sexual work, recognition, informal labour, precarious labour, health risks, advocacy

## RO07

**Title:** The pandemic worsened the access of medical treatment and care, as well as the discrimination of HIV-positive gay persons in Romania

**Narrative:** "I am a 29-year-old gay man and gay-rights activist. I am HIV positive. As I am aware of my privileges, I try to make good use of them and I live publicly as HIV-positive in order to make a case for the cause and to advocate for the rights of HIV-positive persons. The pandemic was a hard blow on the gay community in Romania. We were confronted with a medical crisis and a community crisis.

In September 2021 there was a terrible nationwide medication crisis for HIV, cancer or auto-immune diseases. This drug crisis happens annually, usually in January-February, because the state stalls the approval of the annual budget, but this crisis deepened with the pandemic, because the state cut the funds for drug subsidies and supposedly

diverted them for the medical emergencies associated with the Covid epidemic. The HIV drug crisis in fact signified a lack of reason from the state, who does not follow its medical, legal or moral commitment towards its HIV patients. This comes in a context where HIV patients are already distrustful of the authorities and the doctors.

To be more specific, during the pandemic we were cut off from our curating doctors, we were cut off from HIV drugs and the budget for monitoring analyses was also slashed. The monitoring analysis is needed to attest that the patient responds to the treatment. There are also those not yet diagnosed, who need to be put on drugs with the highest emergency.

Once I came out as gay I reached out to a much larger gay community and could learn that there are HIV patients in the country diagnosed in October and they still did not begin treatment after 5 months from the diagnosis.

The situation was always fragile and the pandemic made it much worse. The crisis increased the patients' mistrust in the authorities and it is really difficult for patients without moral support or access to information to keep the faith and pursue treatment. They stop seeking their doctor, they stop trying to secure the necessary medicine, they turn to denial. Some of them do it out of mistrust and others even do it as a gesture of revenge against the system. These reactions were always present, but now they have exploded to a full-blown crisis. Hardly a day passes that we do not receive a message or a phone call from someone threatening to commit suicide or to stop taking their medication.

One of the solutions comes from a friend's organisation. She has many contacts in Europe and she secures drug donations but cannot cover dozens of medication schemes. Plus, sending them across the country is an additional expense. The drugs are critical, but they are just one piece of the puzzle. You also need psychological counselling, monitoring. There is a second non-profit organisation which offers psychological counselling and peer support. I will start helping out next month.

I had a good relation with my curating doctor even during the pandemic, but that is due to my privileges: I pass off as a white, non-Roma person, I can be assertive and show off my knowledge and demand the best medication. The personnel are quite discriminatory in the way they screen patients with many questions which should be off-the-grid, such as the patient's place of work. I was told plainly that they do not give out the expensive treatments to patients whom they suspect are predisposed to not take their treatment seriously, such as people whom they believe are drug users or are suffering from depression.

If you browse through the National Strategy against HIV and AIDS, you will also find an engagement to provide psychological support, but that is not at all enforced.

There is quite a lot of misunderstanding of HIV from the medical personnel. I experienced it when I got my first dose of Covid-19 vaccine. I ticked HIV-positive on the medical form and the nurse panicked and insisted to ask me whether it is safe for me to receive the vaccine, instead of encouraging me to opt for it, considering my condition. She asked me whether I take HIV drugs. Then she ran to the coordinating doctor to inform him and he told me that there was a risk that my retroviral medication will come into conflict with the vaccine and will neutralise the vaccine's effect. He also recommended that I stop the antiretroviral medication for around a week, in order for

the vaccine to take effect. And then, to add insult to injury, he warned me that if the vaccine is not effective, I would be wasting a precious dose. I confronted him and went ahead with the vaccination and then I made a big scandal in social media in order to make a point. There is a 40% vaccination rate among the HIV-positive population in Romania, a very low rate for immunocompromised patients. My vaccination experience made me think that if there was someone more vulnerable in my situation, outed and confronted like that, they would have likely been discouraged from receiving the vaccine.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “The drug crisis in fact signified a lack of reason from the state, who does not follow its medical, legal or moral commitment towards its HIV patients. This comes in a context where HIV patients are already distrustful of the authorities and the doctors”. “I was told plainly that they [the medical personnel] do not give out the expensive [HIV] treatments to patients whom they suspect of being predisposed to not take their treatment seriously, such as people whom they believe are drug users or are suffering from depression”. “[The doctor from the Covid-19 vaccination centre] told me that there was a risk that my retroviral medication will come into conflict with the vaccine and will neutralise the vaccine's effect. He also recommended that I stop the antiretroviral medication for around a week, in order for the vaccine to take effect. And then, to add insult to injury, he warned me that if the vaccine is not effective, I would be wasting a precious dose.”

**Keywords:** access to antiretroviral medication, HIV-positive, stigma, mistrust in the authorities, denial of treatment, patient screening

**RO08**

**Title:** Victims of domestic violence were extremely vulnerable towards their aggressors under conditions of lockdown

**Narrative:** “I am a social worker for a shelter for victims of domestic violence located in Bucharest. We provide temporary accommodation, psychosocial services, as well as legal advice and reintegration support for women and their children. Most of our beneficiaries have minimum or no education and low income, not because domestic violence is prevalent in these categories, but rather because women with higher social status are more reluctant to admit their vulnerability and seek organised support. During lockdown (March-May 2020) the number of requests for shelter was very low. Because the victims were forced to shelter in the same space as the aggressor, they could not access support information and could not contact organisations. Our centre was mostly empty. We did receive calls, but mostly ‘dead’ calls, as we call them, meaning that the caller would hang up after calling or would whisper and then hang up too fast for us to be able to help. The lockdown was very convenient for abusers because it would isolate victims from their families, colleagues or other forms of support and it also allowed them to supervise their victims around the clock. Right after lockdown ended,

the phones started ringing intensely, as if the victims could escape and can go out. Our shelter filled in two days.

The number of police reports does not tell the full story, as many of the victims who were abused during lockdown no longer had visible wounds by the end of this period, so they could not obtain the medical certificate necessary for filing in a complaint once lockdown was over and they could go to the forensic medicine offices. By then they had no other solution but to leave their home and go to a shelter.

The Covid prevention regulations, even after lockdown was lifted, made it more difficult for us to provide our support services. For example, after lockdown, we had to close our centre 14 days in a row, with nobody coming in or out. Additionally, regulations required that we ensure an isolation ward outside the centre, which was impossible to organise. Our rooms are all in the same building and share a kitchen and bathroom. This left us with no other solution than to us close our centre for that period of time. We also had to shut down the centre twice, when we had cases of Covid-19. Many beneficiaries are reluctant to receive the Covid-19 vaccine, despite our recommendations. Without a vaccination certificate they were not allowed in court rooms, so they could not pursue divorce or custody trials. Some of them lost their trials because of this and luckily they could ask for a retrial and become vaccinated in the meantime. As measures of Covid-19 prevention at the centre, we were managed to secure mask donations and hygiene materials in collaboration with the other non-profit shelters. We also organise hygiene workshops with our resident beneficiaries.

The solutions should have been provided by the authorities, but the authorities' response was very disappointing. They online provided a hotline for victims and nothing more. The police response was very diverse. For example, a lady contacted us while her husband was at work (luckily he worked long hours as a truck driver) and we managed to agree on an escape plan with her and the police came and stayed with her until she finished packing, they took her statement on the spot. But in other cases the police officers would come at the scene and refused to issue the restriction order which they were authorised to issue. They would falsely claim that they cannot issue the order in the absence of visible wounds on the victim, ignoring the psychological and socio-economic abuse caused by the aggressors, and also the fact that aggressors often avoid leaving visible violence marks. We also saw victim blaming and appeals to reconciliation from police officers called at the scene of domestic violence during lockdown. Our key support in relation with such police shortcomings was our pro-bono lawyer.

For example, when the police abusively forbade us, the association, to be present with the victim during questioning, we provided the victim with this lawyer who succeeded in changing the police officer leading these investigations, even twice in one case. The police officers can be very aggressive with the victims. Trauma therapy is also provided by our organisation for three years.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Right after lockdown ended, the phones started ringing intensely, as if the victims could escape and can go out. Our shelter filled in two days". "The number of police reports does not tell the full story, as many of the victims who were abused during lockdown did not preserve visible wound by the end of the lockdown, so they could not obtain the medical certificate necessary for filing in a

complaint once lockdown was over and they could go to the forensic medicine offices”.

**Keywords:** domestic violence, victim-blaming, police abuse, isolation of victims, shelter, 'dead' calls

## RO09

**Title:** Non-binary, neurodivergent student faces extraordinary financial struggle to survive and attend to their mental health care during the pandemic

**Narrative:** “I am a queer non-binary neuro-divergent 23-year-old student. I have ADHD, anxiety and depression and sensorial sensitivity. I take medication and I see a psychiatrist for my conditions. The therapy and medication are very expensive for my family budget, so I struggle with the uncertainty that I will not be able to afford the mental care I need. I have been raised by my single mother. I currently live with her and we rely largely on her income in our household. She sells produce at the market, but she is not formally employed. So during the two months of lockdown in 2020 she could neither work nor receive compensations and she has been struggling ever since. This episode of uncertainty made me panic.

For a few months during the pandemic I relied on money from an LGBTQ association that handed out food vouchers for the underprivileged members of the queer community. I received about EUR 400 worth of vouchers spread out over four months. They were very useful. Our additional income is my university scholarship, which barely helps me cover my medication and psychiatric sessions, which are not supported by medical insurance.

We live on a very busy and very noisy street, with traffic and people screaming at each other and from staying isolated in my apartment but also exposed to this mayhem for so long I grew overwhelmed by everything and I believe I had a psychotic episode, I thought everything was directed against me.

I am vaccinated, but my family is strongly anti-vax and very immersed into conspiracy theories, so there has been quite a lot of tension in our home these past months. I am under some pressure to protect them and not expose my non-vaccinated grandmother for example to the virus.

I was admitted into university in 2019 and had mostly online classes starting with the second semester. Now, in my 6th semester, we have resumed many face-to-face activities (labs, seminars). I feel less comfortable during face-to-face classes than during online classes, as my non-binary and neurodivergent identity exposes me to bullying from professors and colleagues. I chose to pursue a technical field for my university studies. I am very much into poetry, I considered journalism or sociology as fields of study, but I eventually chose the technical field because I knew I had to secure a well-paid job after graduation. I knew my family couldn't support me for longer. Out of the technical fields I chose a major that had less competition, because there was less risk of failing the admission exam.

During the pandemic, I was supported to buy my medication with funds raised by a MAD

support group, as well as by a couple of associations in the field of LGBTQ rights. I consider myself privileged because I have these networks of support, even if they cannot solve the problem in the long-term. But I am still very much preoccupied by the unfairness of having to pay so much money I cannot afford out of my own pocket despite having health insurance. The insurance covers 50% of the psychiatric care as long as I see a psychiatrist who works with public health insurance, but I had to change my subsidised psychiatrist in February 2021 because I felt they were invalidating my experience and suggested that I abuse my ADHD treatment. I have to pay the full fee for the services of my new psychiatrist. My mental health has declined over the pandemic and my needs for emotional safety cost more. For example, because I grow very anxious in crowded areas such as public transportation or in the streets, I need to pay for Uber to take me where I need to go.

**Specifically telling quotes:** The financial part was the worst. My mother does not have a work contract, she works in the market. When the markets closed down we had no source of income. I panicked. I was so overwhelmed. Somehow I liked being isolated, but I was overwhelmed by the seriousness of the situation. Having ADHD and no resources, I was too paralised to do anything and my anxiety grew to extremes. I started to picture that the police was out to get me. A friend died during that time. It was all too hard to process.

**Keywords:** neurodivergent, bullying, mental health, mental health costs, queer community

## RO10

**Title:** Stay-at-home mother of two recalls living with the stigma of HIV diagnosis and reflect on her family's responses to the pandemic

**Narrative:** "I am a 35-year-old stay-at-home mother of two, living in a southern town in Romania. I am HIV-positive. I became infected when I was 3 years-old, in the 1990s, from a neglectful blood transfusion administered in the hospital. My husband is also HIV-positive. I took all precaution that my youngest daughter does not know what illness my father and I have. I had to tell my eldest one, so that she does not come home crying. We live in a small town, people gossip about my HIV diagnosis and my daughter is isolated and discriminated against. During the last two years, with the added isolation of online schooling, my eldest daughter did not have many friends.

A few weeks before lockdown was declared, my youngest daughter contracted the flu and she needed to be hospitalised. Ever since that moment my children did not see any doctor. My family doctor would not receive us for consultations. I could not reach her on the phone either, it was just the nurse answering. They treated us terribly. As chronically ill, we need analyses, prescriptions, that we do not have access to in 2020. The doctors were not available even when many of the restrictions were lifted. It felt like it was every man for himself.

As HIV patients, we have to go to Bucharest every month to receive our anti-retroviral medicine. Our HIV doctor made every effort to ensure the continuity of our treatment during the pandemic, despite some drug crises. When our prescription drugs are not available, our doctor does everything possible to find something else that works for our particular needs. There are two small organisations in our town which defend the rights of HIV positive persons, so we receive some moral support from this side and we are also in contact with an NGO based in Bucharest.

The HIV medication has several side-effects, among which anxiety, panic attacks and insomnia. I struggle with insomnia right now. I suffered from all of them during the pandemic. I try to fight them by going outside. Or I try to focus on my children or my husband. He is my pillar of hope. My husband is the wage-earner of our family. He is a taxi driver. I envied him during lockdown, because he was allowed to leave the house on account of his job. He struggled with his work during the pandemic. As there were no clients in the first months, he started to deliver groceries to people in lockdown or in quarantine. The food delivery services had not yet been introduced to our town. Even if the job exposed us to the virus, luckily he did not catch the virus.

The children stayed at home from school a lot. My youngest daughter now thinks that this is how kindergarten works: you go for a few days and then you take a break and then you go again. Now she does not want to go daily. The eldest could not cope with online schooling, so we had to intervene with some private tutoring. Now we cannot afford private lessons anymore.

I have a long story of discrimination because of my HIV diagnosis, especially by the medical staff. We are thus discouraged from telling doctors and nurses about being HIV-positive. Just last autumn, in 2021, I fell down the stairs and ended up with some spine trouble. I went to the emergency room and because our municipal hospital is small, there is a common database with patients. They took out my medical file that had the HIV diagnosis listed. The nurse opened it after administering me a painkiller shot and, when she discovered my diagnosis, she went into a nervous rage. She screamed at the top of her lungs, for everyone to hear: "You mean you have AIDS and you did not tell me?". There were ambulance drivers with patients present, mothers with children were there. I was mortified. I wanted to report the incident to the Nurses' College, but none of those who were present would admit what they had witnessed, even if some of the people were acquaintances of mine.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Just think that this Covid that we are all experiencing right now is the HIV of the nineties". "The HIV medication has several side-effects, among which anxiety, panic attacks and insomnia. I struggle with insomnia right now. I suffered from all of them during the pandemic". "The nurse opened it after administering me a painkiller shot and, when she discovered my diagnosis, she went into a nervous rage. She screamed at the top of her lungs, for everyone to hear: 'You mean you have AIDS and you did not tell me?'. There were ambulance drivers with patients present, mothers with children were there. I was mortified".

**Keywords:** nosocomial HIV infection, discrimination, small-town, medical system, motherhood, care

## Serbia

### RS01

**Title:** CORONA-19 lockdown brought back my childhood memories on the second World War

**Narrative:** "I'm Rose, 88, and I've been retired for 31 years. I have been a widow for over 20 years. I live alone, but I am not alone because my children (daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren) visited me during the lockdown (on a distance, of course!), I had my memories and my daily routine. As soon as the Government of Serbia declared the state of emergency on March 15, 2020, I started keeping a diary. From March 15 to May 6, I wrote down every day what I was doing, what I heard on television, what was interesting to me that day. I also turned my attention to keeping the normality of everyday life. I am, as they say, committed to an active ageing! I used to have regular walks, go out with friends, and travel around Serbia. I have missed all that during the lockdown. So when they announced that persons 65+ had to remain locked in their houses, I decided I would not give up. I have two terraces, one is 7 meters long, and then I walked on that terrace ten times every day. To keep in shape, I often climbed and went down the stairs in my building. Not having an elevator in my building saved me from heart diseases all these years: that and my flowers. I have a lot of flowers that I grow, but I also press them into the herbarium. Oh, to see only that herbarium of mine! I tried to preserve my spirit as well as my body. As I was a member of an association for years, which organized trips throughout Serbia, I decided to describe my travels. That's how my story "Journey with Covid-19" came about. It also won the first prize in the competition for the best short story of 65+ people.

However, I missed personal contacts, hugs, family lunches, touches of my loved ones. That love of travel came to me through my job, which I did for over 35 years. I worked in foreign trade for the military industry. It was a very advanced industry at the time. For example, I imported the first IBM computers to Yugoslavia! I am satisfied with my pension. I am not a burden to anyone to support me. And because I take care of myself, I'm still in good health. For example, I eat everything in moderation, a lot of fruits and vegetables; I do not overdo it. I like to eat a salad before meals; an apple every day, they say it's healthy. I am constantly trying new recipes. I'm still making lunch for myself. During the state of emergency, I also cooked for a neighbour who lives upstairs above me. He is a widower, so there is no one to cook for him. And also to the neighbour below me who have no one to take care of her. The hardest thing was for older people who didn't have children or someone else to care for them. My friends whose children are abroad have suffered greatly. We talked on the phone every day. It was a consolation to them. Everyone was amazed at how easily I accepted the situation around Covid-19. But, my daily life is a routine that keeps me healthy. First basic hygiene, then breakfast, around half past 12 I drink coffee, then I watch the news at 12. I regularly followed the

sessions of the Crisis Committee at 3 pm; I adhered to everything they recommended. I trust the doctors. I don't trust anti-vaxers. Covid-19 is an unexplored disease, and we should be happy to have discovered the vaccine! What struck me was the attitude of wealthy capitalists from the West towards African countries, how they will not give vaccines to the poor. That and the closure of each country within its borders. That isn't good.

The state of emergency and curfew reminded me of my childhood. I was seven years old when World War II began. I also remember the bombing of Belgrade just before the end of the war. This whole Covid-19 situation reminded me of my mom, who had four kids and how she struggled to save and nourish us all. My dad died just before the war in 1939, so she raised all four of her children alone! Memories and reading books helped me overcome loneliness. After all, I only cared for my children, daughter and son-in-law, and grandchildren, not myself. I am one lucky lady. I was where I wanted to be; I saw everything and did what I could. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** Everyone was amazed at how calmly I accepted it all. But I am one lucky resilient lady! I've seen everything in my life; I don't regret anything. I only take care of my children, but at least I have children to take care of them.

**Keywords:** Active aging, Care, Resilience, Childhood Memories, Physical activity

**RS02**

**Title:** I don't feel old. I'm a grandmother to my grandchildren only!

**Narrative:** "My name is Brankica; I am 72 years old and a widow. For over 38 years, I worked in the registry office for weddings, in my opinion, the most beautiful civil service. I am a member of the Association of Pensioners' Unions and the president of this Union in the city where I live. I have a daughter and two grandchildren. I don't like it when they call me grandma! I am a grandmother only to my grandchildren; otherwise, I don't feel old!

When a state of emergency was declared on March 15, 2020, due to Covid-19, I was lucky enough to find myself in my daughter's house. That house is on the outskirts of the city, it has a large yard, and the feeling of imprisonment, which many others had, was not so pronounced with me. Yet I had a strong sense of helplessness all the time, and it bothered me to depend on others; that I am not allowed to do the regular work that I used to do alone: to go to the store, to hang out and move freely. Yet I was in a better situation than many others, my friends and peers. I could go out into the yard, sunbathe, catch the much-needed vitamin D.

I come from a medical family, I trust doctors, but I still can't shake the impression of how strange this pandemic is. First, I had the impression that there was a biological war against the elderly. Then, in 2019, I listened to the World Bank President talk about how there are too many retirees in the world! She said that there are so many that the world economy can't stand it. So did this epidemic come to save the world economy from us

pensioners ?!

On the other hand, not everyone was as lucky as me. My good friend, for example, lives in a 21-square-meter apartment without a terrace. How was it for her when we were locked up for three or four days! We retirees, over 65 we were constantly locked up. At one point, I had the impression that I had forgotten to walk. Many members of our association have died or fallen into disrepair and become ill from immobility. I'm not a person who can sit in the same place for a long time; I like to hang out go out for coffee with friends. This pandemic was very difficult for me for that reason. Family gatherings and socializing stopped. Some fear crept into all of us, not so much that we would die, but that we would be a burden to someone else if we got sick. It is tough to endure mentally, no matter how healthy a person is; when you are locked in a house for so long, it affects you it makes you a problem both mentally and physically. I felt horrible, and I was constantly careful. It's a kind of anxiety, a nervousness that you're not aware of, and it just creates that kind of tension.

Yet it seems to me that our health care system has responded well. We immediately had the opportunity to get vaccinated. We did better than many of our peers in Europe only because most older people in Serbia live in an extended family or alone and not in nursing homes. It is still not wholly accepted in our country to go to a nursing home when you retire. The organization of pensioners in which I am active works on educating our membership on various topics. During the pandemic, we could not meet, so we switched to social networks, so we were most active. We deal with the social position of older people retirees. Most of them watch television and read newspapers, few use social networks or computers, so almost all our activities have stopped.

Every older person is aware that they have reached the age when we have various limitations. For example, we have at least three diseases after 60 years! But this humiliation that we experienced, the degradation in which the home becomes a prison, was bizarre, to say the least."

**Specifically telling quotes:** Before the pandemic in 2019, I listened to the World Bank President talk about how there are too many retirees in the world! She said that there are so many that the world economy can't stand it. So did this epidemic come to save the world economy from us pensioners ?!

**Keywords:** Powerlessness, Fear, loss of a friend, activism, pensioner rights

**RS03**

**Title:** Being a good person is not enough.

**Narrative:** "My name is Mila, and I am 52 years old. I am unemployed. I have a 22-year-old son, and I am divorced. I live as a tenant. I'm not working right now because I got injured during the Covid-19 lockdown. I hurt my finger on the meat grinder. It was a severe injury, and since I couldn't go anywhere to be examined and taken care of, now I have a lot of problems because of that, and my finger is unusable.

It was tough for me during Covid-19 because I was alone. Before the pandemic, my son went to Slovakia to work and remained trapped there, unable to return. In the meantime, he fell ill with corona there. I was dying to worry about him here. I wondered how he was there and if anyone could take care of him.

He called me to go to Slovakia together, clean apartments there, and do anything on the construction site. But I couldn't, I couldn't go anywhere. That's because I'm sick, not only that injured finger, but I'm also in a bad mood. I can't sleep.

It means a lot to me that I received support from the Helpline for women victims of violence, that I have someone I can talk to look back on my life.

And my life was neither beautiful nor easy. My husband is a good man, he is not an evil man, but he was very bad towards me. That's because he's sick, mentally. He was in the war in Bosnia. Then he fled here to Serbia, where we met and got married. When he returned from the war, he was not well. He was not healthy. He started drinking. I was terrified because there were weapons in the house.

I decided to divorce six years ago, but my fear of him continues. I don't know if anything changed for me during the state of emergency and the pandemic. The fear of people remained the same. Loneliness is the same. The only difference was caring for my son, who was far away. When he came back, it was no better for me, nor him. He is a very private person because of his father. He suffered from that abuse as well. But he didn't want to go to a psychologist like me.

I was not allowed to go anywhere during the pandemic. I don't need anyone like this. I have nothing here. People are worth nothing if they have nothing material. If you're a good man, nobody needs you. And maybe I'm wrong to be in a bad mood when I'm in contact with people. I don't think I didn't suit them because I lived in Montenegro for a long time and then in Serbia. I was not like those people from Bosnia. I worked and lived in a multiethnic environment, and it was normal for me to live together with all these different people. The place where we lived, my ex-husband, son and I, is a small, underdeveloped environment. In such an environment, you are marked for life when mentally ill. Everyone was wondering why I married him when he was crazy. He had a diagnosis even then. My life used to be nice; I had an excellent job, everyone respected me for being a good worker and a good person. The pandemic affected me greatly. I couldn't sleep at all or go out anywhere. I kept thinking about what would happen if I got sick. Who will take care of me, how will I be treated. Who will take care of my son? That's why I couldn't sleep.

I now know that I was mentally abused. It was a life where I was constantly insulted by his mom and sister. He was good, except when he drank. He once put a gun to my forehead in that state.

The pandemic only made my condition worse. I'm mentally ill from the pandemic."

**Specifically telling quotes:** Anything I did in my life was not good enough. When you are just a good person and you have nothing material, you are nothing.

**Keywords:** Psychological violence, PSPT, poverty, fear, sleeping disorder

## RS04

**Title:** Although I've been smiling all my life, no one ever knew how sad I was.

**Narrative:** "I'm Tina. I am 48 years old and have three children. I'm unemployed. I have had a high school education. I am currently working in a fast-food restaurant as a cook. By the way, I did everything in my life, cleaning houses, cooking. I live in a house without electricity and heating, so when an acquaintance showed up and invited me to move in with him and look after his children (there are also three of them), I agreed. That was before the pandemic was declared. So I moved in with him, cleaned the apartment, cooked, took care of his children. By the way, his wife left him. I only later understood why. His wife was a policewoman. He's a taxi driver. He told me that he would pay me 1000 dinars a day for what I did, but he did not pay anything in the end. So I got into a sexual relationship with him. He was 17, 18 years older than me. I thought it was so okay how he was behaving. But now I know that he manipulated me and became a victim of psychological violence. He wouldn't let me out of the apartment; he wouldn't let me smoke. He didn't let me buy food during the lockdown, but he brought what he thought he needed. He told me everything. For example, he told me how he worked as a painter in Germany, and I then realized that he worked in a brothel as a pimp. That's what some of his friends told me. He always took me to a male company; he told me to wear this or that, you need to look beautiful ...

Once when I was cleaning the apartment, his daughter showed me something hidden on the shelf and asked me if I knew what it was. I didn't know, and she told me it was a camera. I don't know if he filmed us in bed and what he did with those recordings afterwards. I thought if my kids saw it somewhere, sometime!

Afterwards, I found out all about the man I was with. I learned that various women came here and before me, that he stalked those who were alone and poor like me.

And so I found myself, in the middle of an epidemic, trapped in an apartment with him, with a man who seemed to be filming our intimate relationships. I don't know what he did with those recordings afterwards. As soon as the state of emergency was lifted, I returned to my house without electricity and water; I had everything left in his apartment. He kept coming to my house, parking in front of the house and looking out my window. I reported him; I said he was harassing me and threatening me. He was given a restraining order. But after that, he would just come and park in front of the house and watch. I called the police, and they say we can't do anything as long as he sits in the car and watches. If he gets out of the car and heads for you, we can arrest him.

Now that I look back on that time, I wonder how I didn't notice what was happening before. Where did he get so much money from taxis? There must have been something else, something I didn't know anything about.

I didn't know where to go, how to save myself. Of my three children, two are working and doing well. My youngest son has been living with his dad for six years. He left when he was twelve, and I haven't seen him since. His father got full custody of him, and I pay alimony for a child I haven't seen in six years. I hear he's not nice to Dad, Dad's beating him up, and there's nothing I can do about it. I went to the social work centre complained, but it was not worth anything.

It's hard for me to find a job because I'm sick. I have epilepsy and thyroid disorder. Unfortunately, I could not go to the doctor during the pandemic, so my epileptic seizures intensified. I had six epileptic seizures in only three months. That's why I didn't get vaccinated; I don't know how it will affect my health. I had a covid, and then I was awful then. I was alone, I had nowhere to go and no one to turn to. My parents have given up on me and are not talking to me. My brother gambled on their house, and I don't know where they live anymore.

I don't need anyone anymore; I need a job to live and pay alimony for my child. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** And so I found myself, in the middle of an epidemic, trapped in an apartment with him, with a man who seemed to be filming our intimate relationships. I don't know what he did with those recordings afterwards. As soon as the state of emergency was lifted, I returned to my house without electricity and water; I had everything left in his apartment.

**Keywords:** psychological violence, sexual violence, poverty, lack of institutional support

**RS05**

**Title:** We helpers like to push people into change, even when that change is impossible for them, instead of just listening and providing support when they ask for it.

**Narrative:** "I am Andjelka; I have been working as a social worker all my working life. I am 60 years old, and I do not have a family of my own. My two dogs and my mother are my family. My mother is still alive but very demented. That is why it is easy for me to entirely dedicate myself to my work.

For many years, before I became a therapist for women victims of violence, I worked with children without parental care. In parallel with my work at the Center for Support of Victims of Sexual Violence, I work at the day centre to support the homeless.

I have been working at the Center for Victims of Sexual Violence for five or six years. During the pandemic, especially during the lockdown, my impression is that the arrivals of women have thinned out. The victim would usually come to the hospital (where our point for victims of sexual violence is located), and there would be a medical examination and psychological and legal assistance. I noticed that even the women who came to the centre during the pandemic did not call us for help and support. We give them the phone number, but she doesn't call. So then we changed the way we work, we took their phone number and called them. The moment she comes to us, she is traumatized; she wants to go from there to wash and take off everything she has experienced. But the trauma continues.

We are here to support them during the process of taking evidence of the sexual violence and rape they have experienced. The police should inform us immediately, we should come while the victim is still in the police, but they rarely do that. I do not know why.

I had a tough case during the state of emergency. A girl from a foster family, already in

the social protection system, was victim of sexual violence. And then where will you go with her? The state has no mechanisms to help her and no place to put her when that system supposed to help her has failed. That's awful.

The pandemic has increased violence, it is my profound conviction, but it has reduced the ability for women to report it without fear. It is because violence in our country has normalized in the last few decades. It is OK with us to be violent, to be a criminal. The media encourages violence gives it wings!

I like working at the Center for Victims of Sexual Violence because I have more learning and development opportunities. Most professionals working in state social protection do not have such options. Their competencies are extremely low; there is a high percentage of burnout. Since working at the Center, I have gone to conferences, learned about procedures, and constantly improved and built professionally. That means a lot. Working with the homeless is very different from my work with women victims of sexual violence and the work I did before for children without parental care. Both women and children, when they enter the social security system, you think you can help them. Often you can and manage to empower them enough to get out of that system the best and fastest they can. With the homeless, there is no such feeling that change is possible. Most of them do not like to stay in the day centre. They use the services of the Center for Social Work only to get off the street for a night or two. It was best seen during the pandemic and the state of emergency. Some of the homeless know that they will be arrested if they are on the street; some do not understand, nor do they want to comply with such demands. It is tough to keep them in one place and one space. Many of them, my protégés, went to prison ten times for violating the curfew.

I am vaccinated, of course, I couldn't have done this job if I hadn't. But unfortunately, most homeless people are not vaccinated or wear any protective equipment. So I am simply surprised that there are no more covid infected among them and us - social workers. It's just a little miracle!"

**Specifically telling quotes:** We who work with vulnerable groups have to work hard not to get into stereotypical thinking about them, something like, I know how it came about and how it will end, especially when it comes to women victims of violence.

**Keywords:** bystander, victims of sexual violence, homeless people, professional competences

**RS06**

**Title:** Anyone who survives will have something to talk about.

**Narrative:** "My name is Ines, and I am 46 years old. I am married. In fact, Roma rarely has a traditional marriage; it would be more accurate to say that I live in an extramarital union in which I have three children, two sons and a daughter (22, 19 and 16 years old). I have had a high school education, but I have been working for several years as a pedagogical assistant for Roma students in primary school. It is a job that is being implemented within

the project of the Ministry of Education, and its goal is the easier integration of Roma children into the school system. Although I am officially employed through the Ministry of Education, the school neither looks at me nor respects me as a colleague because I do not have a university degree. It doesn't matter to me, because I know how important the job I do is.

For me, the time of the pandemic was like a war. Anyone who survives will have something to talk about. Everyone around us was stockpiling food, even though we lived in the countryside. My husband works in a mine, and both my son and daughter are employed. So we acted as if everything was standard on the one hand, and on the other hand, I was apprehensive that my children would not be on the street during curfew, that my relatives and friends and neighbours had everything they needed.

The hardest thing for me was because of the children in school. We immediately switched to online classes, but most Roma children do not have a tablet or a telephone with the Internet. From social networks and services, they mostly use Facebook, and all communication was conducted via Viber, for example. Most Roma children do not even know how to search the Internet for various educational content or use educational platforms. I was desperate! And that little bit of success we had to include them in education and keep them in school will now disappear like a gust of wind!

While the state of emergency and curfew lasted, I could not visit families and children in Roma's unhygienic settlements. As a result, I could not determine if they had the opportunity to follow the lessons.

When we could move again, I brought their homework to their homes. I photocopy homework and take it to each child. Then I come again after a few days to pick up those homework assignments. But it wasn't like school. Most of the parents of these children are functionally illiterate. They survive by collecting rubbish on the street, and during curfew, they couldn't do that either. I don't know what these people survived on! I'm sure the kids were hungry!

And they did not have any support regarding the teaching and materials they needed to learn.

Most parents in Roma settlements are against vaccination. I was vaccinated, but I couldn't persuade them. So instead, they listened to what was being said on television, how vaccines were computer chips, how they would be able to follow what they were doing and similar nonsense.

And yet it is clear to me why this is the attitude of Roma towards vaccination. I know, since I also worked as a health mediator, I mediated between the Roma community and doctors. For example, a mother comes with a baby who needs to be vaccinated, and a nurse or a doctor tells her to wash herself first; you and the child stink. She goes and never returns to vaccinate the child.

He still has some success. For example, when I started working in 2010 in that settlement, maybe six of them completed primary school. Now all the children have eight grades of primary school!

People in Roma settlements live without water; they only have electricity if they steal it directly from the pole, so accidents and fires often happen. Nobody loves us, Roma, so Covid-19 will not attack us either! Roma has been living with a pandemic, this or that, their whole lives. In the Roma settlement, the pandemic is raging all the time. I am very

proud that even before the pandemic, I taught all the children I am responsible for to use Google as a searching tool for what interests them. It has made it much easier for them to follow the lessons; they don't have parents to ask when they don't know something, so they ask Google! Here I see how important my role as a pedagogical assistant is. For example, in 2018, 22 students repeated the class, and this year only three!”

**Specifically telling quotes:** People in Roma settlements live without water; they only have electricity if they steal it directly from the pole, so accidents and fires often happen. Nobody loves us, Roma, so Covid-19 will not attack us either! Roma has been living with a pandemic, this or that, their whole lives. In the Roma settlement, the pandemic is raging all the time.

**Keywords:** Roma children, education, online schooling, poverty, discrimination

## RS07

**Title:** The measures against Covid-19 seemed to me to be punishing instead of protecting us

**Narrative:** “My name is Maca; I am divorced; I have two daughters and four grandchildren. I currently live with my grandson, who is studying medicine. I finished high school, did various jobs, cleaned apartments and business premises. I did that until 2016, when I was diagnosed with cancer and when I had to stop working. By the way, I have diabetes and asthma; my health condition is terrible. Despite that, I did not get any early retirement; I am still registered with the unemployment office as partially able to work, which I cannot find. Unfortunately, this means that I live only on social assistance amounts to 8,400 dinars per month (approximately 70 euros).

When a state of emergency was declared due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I lived alone in a house on the city's outskirts. Fear immediately appeared in me! What will happen, how should I behave, why is all this happening. So naturally, my children were immediately on my mind! How would we see each other because they live in another city?

What I missed the most was freedom of movement. We were denied a lot because of the pandemic, primarily access to health services. You could only hear Covid, Covid, Covid everywhere. And what is happening to us who have many other diseases? Where can we be treated ?! I believe that I was denied treatment. Our government made a big mistake that ordinary people like me did not have access to health care and specialist examinations; it was vital because of my cancer. For example, since 2019, I have not been in control of my primary disease - colon cancer.

I have been rejected twice for a disability pension, and there are many things I can't do because of all my illnesses. They told me to apply to the soup kitchen that I have something to eat. But I have diabetes and colon cancer, so I have to take care of what I eat! How do I apply to eat that food ?! There is a rule that you have to take a break from

social assistance for three months during the year so that they can recheck your status. That means that I have nothing to buy food from for three months, to buy medicine. Last year from August 2021 to January 2022, I did not receive social assistance! While processing my data, I guess it took them so long. When they paid me everything retroactively in January 2022, I went to the pharmacy to buy medicines - I had to pay for the medication partially, and some cost 1000 dinars. The pharmacist saw that I was on the record for all those drugs and that I had not come to take them for months ... She says, so where are you ?! And I tell her: I didn't have the money to go for a prescription. Then she gave me all the medication, and she didn't want to take the money. The woman couldn't believe that I hadn't had the money to take my regular therapy for months! I think her eyes were full of tears.

You also need to understand ... Do you know how much it hurts when nothing you have on you is yours - when people bring leftover lunch, buy you bread ... When you depend on someone else's alms. So now to start taking off my clothes, none of this stuff on me is mine!

Don't get me wrong; I can do without everything. But try to understand what it feels like when you can't eat a raspberry or a pear. Fruit is not expensive, it can be found cheaper, but I just don't have it, I can't buy it. I don't want anything. We were rich, my family. My father worked, we had everything. I also worked; it wasn't hard for me, but I got sick, and everything changed.

I don't know if you know that feeling when someone brings you something. God forbid you ever know. I haven't been vaccinated. It bothers me to force vaccinations; it creates differences and gaps. It needed to be explained differently, as before, when we were little and got various vaccines. I am bothered by this conditioning - there is little difference between what Hitler did and this coercion. They need to put a yellow ribbon on me!

And yet many people get sick, not only from Covid but also from other diseases. I don't know where it came from, whether they sprayed something from the air on us, whether it was because of that 5G network. I avoid politics, news and television only when something is essential. I don't want to get upset about something that doesn't matter to me. However, it seems that all this about the pandemic has been prepared for years."

**Specifically telling quotes:** You get used to everything; you learn to live with it. I do what I have to do. I have to go to the bakery to buy bread; I have to go to the post office to pay the bills. And what was before, birthdays and baptisms are avoided. For me, the pandemic changed everything! Fear of people and suspicion arose. You stand in line, and you don't know if this one in front of you or this one behind you will infect you. I move little, don't go anywhere, for example, and had Covid-19. Where could I get infected ?! So everyone crawled into their mouse hole.

**Keywords:** Poverty, disease, fear of people, anti-vaccination attitudes, Roma

**RS08**

**Title:** Covid-19 has traumatized the entire trans community

**Narrative:** “When the epidemic broke out and curfew was introduced, my first feeling was a feeling of claustrophobia, fear of the unknown, confusion and anxiety.

It has catastrophically affected the trans community, otherwise marginalized and exposed to violence. There is already great poverty in our community due to the discrimination and violence we are exposed to. Covid-19 only intensified it all. There was an immediate shortage of female hormones. I don't know why women's hormones particularly, and not some other. Due to Covid-19, none from the trans community could access trans-specific services.

Many lost their jobs. These were not some fantastic jobs; in the trans community, there are primarily people engaged in prostitution. Covid-19 is a tremendous collective trauma for our community!

We have a hotline in the organization, and we do advocacy programs. These advocacy programs have entirely stopped; we have focused only on providing essential assistance online or by phone. We had to stop self-help groups. The state of Serbia had no response to the needs of the trans community. None! We had a case of a trafficked woman. We had consultations with the state anti-trafficking team. They didn't know what to do with her! And they didn't want to allow her to be in a safe women's house; women's organizations were against it because she's a trans woman! However, two anti-trafficking women's organizations, Athens and Astra, helped us. They paid for the apartment and food for that person provided everything for her. Our budgets are minimal; we could not do without them. They proved to be feminist allies in this case. And this is not often the case when feminist organizations accept us. So we have a lot of problems on that side as well.

Many members of our community are homeless and engaged in prostitution. We didn't know how to help them. The state of Serbia has no answer to either of those two things! What should people do in small places where the oppression of queers and trans people is more significant than in Belgrade?! How will they survive existentially? It also frustrated us who worked on the phone for psychological help. And we were traumatized by that feeling of helplessness, that there was nothing you could do. There was no plan, no plan. It is a constant mechanism of exhaustion, we who support the community and the communities themselves. The Ministry of Health and the commission established for trans people are two autistic institutions. They exist, but they serve no purpose. We needed always to have the latest information about hormones and therapies for trans people. The state was not able to provide us with that information either.

It was also hard for those of us who provided psychological assistance services. We could not organize supervision; service providers had many burnout syndromes. By the way, I was in the most extensive life crisis in the last 10-15 years before Covid-19. Just before the pandemic broke out, I returned to Serbia. I tried to emigrate, and I failed. I needed a lot of money for lawyers, for various migration services that I had to pay for myself. Even before Covid-19, I had that feeling of isolation, depression and loneliness. The support I gave to others helped me. It fulfilled that I could at least do something good and valuable for the trans community.

I consider myself an activist for animal rights and environmental protection. I have been

a vegetarian for thirty years. I was glad to see that nature was recovering when the whole world stopped. I liked that about Covid-19. Slowing it all down allowed introspection. At least, I hope so. That we as a human race have stopped for a while, that we have learned something, that we can do something to prevent the planet from dying.”

**Specifically telling quotes:** I am not afraid of illness and death when it comes to me. I fear that humans will not survive on the planet with so much destruction and self-destruction. Covid-19 has enabled a kind of introspection of us as human beings, at least I hope. It cleaned up the planet a little, only not to go back to the old way now.

**Keywords:** trans community, trauma, lack of health care, violence, despair, fear

**RS09**

**Title:** The only thing left for them in poverty is dignity.

**Narrative:** “My name is Mirjana, and I am 40 years old; I live alone as a tenant, I am unemployed. I worked in a women's organization until last year, but I quit. Now I don't know what to do next. I want to return to work in my profession, but it is as if I do not yet have the strength to tackle the job search. Now I would like to do something completely different online that is not related to residence and work from anywhere. Last year was stressful for me because of work and because of Covid-19.

When the state of emergency was declared, I felt great fear, like in 1999, when NATO bombed. The same feeling of helplessness as then. I watched the news all the time for seven days, and I thought I was going crazy. And then I just turned off the TV and started working. Most of my colleagues retired with their families or were at risk, so they had to be extra careful. I didn't have to, so I started visiting women, buying them food and hygiene, carrying them in front of the door, and walking their pets. I chased all day. I get up in the morning, work, run all day and then come back half an hour before curfew. Nothing was complicated for me; I didn't think about myself, which was the best. I didn't have time to worry.

There were also funny situations when I managed three full carts of various goods in the store. When I finally come to the cash register, the cashier tells me that I can't buy so many things as an individual. Then explaining that it's not all for me, that in fact, none of it is for me, then dividing the bill into a hundred parts so I could buy ten litres of milk and 16 packs of toilet paper at all!

I enjoyed caring for others, and the ones I visited weren't O.K. at all. I went to women with disabilities, people over 65, and Roma women. Not all women were members of our lesbian association, but we knew they needed help.

When the curfew was finally revoked, I suddenly fell into depression because that adrenaline no longer held me. Instead, I became anxious, as if I had a minor nervous breakdown.

But then, in the meantime, we made an Emergency Fund and managed to find a few donors to give us the funds. There was enough money to make 100 packages for the

most endangered population throughout Serbia. The package included flour, sugar, oil, personal hygiene items and space hygiene. We mapped the most endangered, mainly through other sister feminist associations throughout Serbia. I sat in the car and went everywhere. It was very passionate to see where all the women and men in Serbia live. Some did not have the basics, a roof over their heads, electricity, water. Suddenly the pandemic stripped that horrible poverty in which people live. We didn't get anything from the state, nor did these people. It didn't matter to them whether we were lesbians or aliens. People on the margins do not have time to hate others.

Even while we were closed for curfew, I began to think that I needed to devote more time to myself and what I wanted to do. And then I decided to do the things I love. I started to walk more in nature and organize walking tours for other women to go camping. Our contacts with other people have decreased by 80 per cent, which is why I needed to build a new community, a community that will love spending time in nature. And so I started organizing camps or walks, and the women liked it. The only condition is to be women; they did not have any experience staying in nature and camping. It was enough to have goodwill. Everyone tells me that I need to do a business out of it. And the only thing that matters to me is keeping my mental health, taking a break, and spending as much time outside as possible."

**Specifically telling quotes:** We had 100 help packages to share, and we had a hard time reaching the end-users. People have a kind of pride, they will not ask for help. The only thing left for them in poverty is dignity.

**Keywords:** lesbian, support for others, care work, poverty, fear

**RS10**

**Title:** I haven't seen the family in almost 2.5 years, and my nephew barely knows me because he was a baby when we last saw each other.

**Narrative:** "I'm Max, and I'm 40 years old. I am a lawyer by profession, self-employed and with a regular income. I was not afraid of losing my job, and I could even say that I was overwhelmed with work somehow so that I would not think about Covid-19. But, unfortunately, it wasn't like that with some of my friends. Some lost their jobs, and one of my friends, a health worker, was in the hospital's Covid-19 system and had not seen the family for weeks.

I tried to live as much as usual. It was terrible for me during curfew when we were not allowed to leave the house for four days. As everything was put on standby, it was a feeling of restraint and almost a state of war. My first reactions were like during the NATO bombing of Serbia. I began to fear more for my loved ones, especially my parents. They live in another city; my sister lives in Spain; it was hard for me because I knew neither of us was there to help them. So I organized from Belgrade to bring them food and everything they needed to their house in another city. A reversal happened to me when the father of a close friend died of Covid-19. Then my perspective began to change; it

affected my psyche and mental health. An almost irrational fear crept into me that my parents would get infected and die. I kept thinking about it. I became more careful in my behaviour; I didn't go anywhere even when I could move; I immediately applied for vaccination and ensured that my parents were vaccinated as soon as possible. I started thinking about paying for additional (private) health insurance. In general, my life focus and plans have focused on health and how inaccessible primary health care has become to us.

There have been some changes in my private life. My partner and I broke up during a state of emergency. It wasn't just because we didn't see each other, she was from another city. It hit me quite emotionally. And then I felt the need to have to move more, to go to nature. And I started driving - I bought a car in the middle of a pandemic! Socializing has become different. Now it was essential to go somewhere in nature for a few days, walk, and stay in the fresh air. When the curfew was cancelled, a few friends and I went on a day trip to nature every weekend! Unlike many of my friends, I lost weight during the pandemic. I started cooking for myself, watching what I ate. I don't have a freezer, so I have to procure and use food systematised not to spoil. I ate less. Recipes were shared non-stop; my whole company was involved in cooking. I kneaded the bread for the first time!"

**Specifically telling quotes:** When my good friend's dad died, my view of the pandemic and the disease changed completely. My health has become very important to me and I have begun to notice how difficult our access to primary health care is. To all of us, even to those who have money. What about those who don't have it!

**Keywords:** care for others, fear, lack of social contacts, loneliness



## Sweden

SE01

**Title:** Oscar puts his jeans on and goes to campus

**Narrative:** I'm a 22-year-old man living in a larger city in Sweden. I'm studying at the primary school teacher programme because I like working with children and youths. I like being there, supporting them and seeing how they develop. Recently, my partner and I moved in together. I like going to the gym, to paint and I'm engaged in an NGO supporting girls and young trans people online.

I've studied during the whole pandemic. There were restrictions already at the beginning of the pandemic, but we were still allowed on campus. 'Corona-guards started patrolling campus', checking if we kept a distance. The guards who kept the order were students working extra, because the ordinary staff couldn't do this work. Notes were posted at the tables: 'Maximum 3 persons'.

I really didn't want to shift to distance learning, but I understand that we had to do it. Studying online during the pandemic has actually been positive to some extent. It has been more flexible and has given me more opportunities. I've used the situation and have been able to study at a distance from other places and cities, and that wouldn't have been possible without the pandemic.

But there have been periods where I've felt alone in my studies. I've missed the student community, and there is a feeling of loneliness in not seeing fellow students: 'Oh, now it feels like I am the only one sitting here reading and studying'. Also, I've missed student gatherings and seeing friends at the pub. Those things were totally taken away, which was sad. The university could have arranged some kind of scheduled zoom hangout for students, where we could discuss the course literature together, so that we didn't have had to feel that loneliness. But on the other hand me and my classmates were already tired of zoom.

Although I've been studying during the whole pandemic, I've been lucky since I met my partner just before the pandemic started. At that time, we didn't live together but we could still see each other regularly. I think that I'd have felt worse without my partner, because some friends have been very worried and have avoided to hang out - even outdoors. The relationship between my partner and me has been challenged by the pandemic since we didn't dare to see each other if some of us had symptoms. Overall, I'm glad that I've had my partner when studying during the pandemic.

Up till recently, I hadn't seen my classmates physically. It's been very special studying together and doing group tasks via zoom only, but now (November 2021) we can study together on campus again. 'Ok, this is a really strange comparison, but it felt like - now the war is over' at the first seminar or lecture when we met. 'It was nice in some way, it felt a bit ceremonial coming back', because when I was studying from home, I didn't bother very much what I looked like and how I was dressed: 'Now I put my jeans on and go to campus!'

**Specifically telling quotes:** 'Corona-guards started patrolling campus'; 'Ok, this is a really strange comparison, but it felt like - now the war is over'; 'It was nice in some way, it felt a bit ceremonial coming back'; 'Now I put my jeans on and go to campus!'

**Keywords:** student, loneliness, flexibility, distance learning, online studies, campus, dressing

SE02

**Title:** Rasmus got his gender affirmation surgery at last - and could get a grip on himself again

**Narrative:** I'm a 22-year-old trans man living by myself in a midsized Swedish city. I'm studying to become a social worker and had studied for about one term and a half when the pandemic started. Now, there's only one semester to go before I graduate. I'm very interested in music, and I like to see my friends. Unfortunately, most of them live in my hometown and I can't see them as much as I would like to do. I'm working extra and I'm engaged in an NGO for trans people.

One good thing with the pandemic is that I had to find new daily routines, as I've never cared very much about exercising, diet, study habits, and sleeping. I surprised myself in a positive way as I soon found a new structure in my daily life when the pandemic struck. The pandemic gave me a reason for making a change, and I was motivated by feeling somewhat alone in my too small apartment. I understood that I had no routines to relate to and after a while I realised that is nice to have routines, but of course I still lose the grip every now and then. Compared to the beginning of the pandemic, I'm not as strict any longer: 'It was almost rigid, now I will wake up and do this, and before I do that, I'll have to do my training ... study for this number of hours, but not later than this certain time.'

I've struggled a lot to get back to my routines and my mental health during the pandemic. This is because I was promised gender affirmative surgery in March 2020. My transition was stopped more or less at the surgical table: 'I went there [to the hospital] and at the surgical table, sort of, the surgery was cancelled.' Initially, I was so glad for the surgery, but when it was postponed, I thought that I would have to wait for a very long time for a new appointment. 'This was extremely tough for me.' Then followed several months of uncertainty because I didn't know what to expect. Before the surgery was cancelled, I could really look forward to the date for the planned surgery, but now followed 'the worst time during the pandemic'. First, I couldn't handle this very well. When the initial shock had come to an end, I got depressed. The routines I had built up disappeared completely: 'To be honest, I started drinking a lot and entered a destructive period ... just to get some relief in my everyday life.' What made it worse is that I spent way too much time by myself at home. Nobody knew what I did, my friends weren't in town, I had no one to hang out with, I didn't want to stay with my parents in my hometown because that doesn't work for me, and I'd no social rules to relate to except for my studies. Although I respect that the healthcare system had to prioritise the pandemic, I'd

wished for more clarity about my situation: 'What will happen now? What's the plan?'. But finally, I got my surgery in July 2020 and that was a relief. I visited my friends in my hometown during the summer, and I started studying again in the autumn. At that point it felt like I could 'get a grip on myself again'!

During the pandemic, I've also become more active in an NGO for trans people. We organise activities for kids and their families, and I've recently started to be involved in more meetings via Zoom. I'm not sure that I've become more active in this NGO because of the pandemic, but it might be so. I would have liked to be involved in the music scene more, but that has been so complicated during the pandemic. It felt easier to get engaged in this trans NGO instead, since we can have meetings and activities online: 'It has become a new community for me ... more people to talk to regularly'. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** 'I went there [to the hospital] and at the surgical table, sort of, the surgery was cancelled'; 'It [a trans NGO] has become a new community for me ... more people to talk to regularly'

**Keywords:** student, trans\*, daily routines, gender affirmation surgery, health, healthcare system

### SE03

**Title:** The retired teacher Erik finds meaning in family life, church, ornithology, and outdoor activities

**Narrative:** I am an 80-year-old widowed and retired man, who used to work as an upper secondary school teacher in natural sciences. I live by myself in a mid-sized Swedish city: in the same house that my late wife and I moved to 50 years ago. I have three grown-up children and several grandchildren. We see each other often and I am very happy to have them. During the pandemic, I have not stopped seeing my family at all. Instead, we started seeing each other outdoors to a larger extent than we had done before - especially before the vaccine came. Seeing each other outdoors, even in the winter, went just fine, and neither me nor my children have had Covid yet. We even arranged a 50th anniversary party which was held solely outdoors. Me and my family 'have tried to live as usual with the intention of being outdoors as much as possible'.

During the pandemic, I have kept my physical and mental health. I am vaccinated, 'like every other good citizen [laughter]', and I have not felt isolated. I think this is because I have several interests that I have been able to exercise even under pandemic restrictions, namely: the church, ornithology, and seeing my previous teachers' colleagues.

First, it feels good to part of the church. For sure, we have had to do many changes during the pandemic. We were required to have fewer attendees in church services and to start with both online and outdoor services. We also had to change the Communion ceremony, to cancel the church choir rehearsals, and to cancel the weekly café visits with fellow pensioners. But still, I often joined the physical services in church since I volunteer

as church host. Being part of the church, to me, feels 'satisfying and good in every way', although I do not like some of the novelties, such as Zoom church services. Online services are a 'double-edged sword' since you can be tempted to stay at home instead or going to the church. Even I have felt like: 'Oh, today it's nice to turn on the computer and watch [the church service], especially afterwards on Facebook. This didn't exist at all before the pandemic.'

Second, my interest in ornithology has not been affected by the pandemic whatsoever. The ornithology community I belong to have made no restrictions at all, except for cancelled indoor meeting. But for me, this has made no difference because I only take part in outdoor activities.

Third, I have continued seeing my former natural science teachers' colleagues every week. Before the pandemic, we had lunch together at various restaurants in town, but we had to change the way we come together during the pandemic. It struck us that we could gather in grilling areas to grill hot dogs instead, and 'that has been fantastic - I could never imagine that there were so many grilling areas in [City]!'. One interesting thing is that one of my former colleagues knows an infection control physician, who has been part of our gatherings. It has been a privilege to hear about his experience about infection control and the pandemic.

Finally, what has been especially helpful for me during the pandemic is that I have had a lot of support from my children. They shopped for me before the vaccine came, which I appreciate a lot. However, once I had to admit to my children, 'with a blushed face', that 'I had been to [Retail Company, laughter]'. Also, I have socialised with many different groups of people. The communities I am engaged in - the church, the ornithologists, and the groups of former teachers' colleagues - are very different from each other. I rarely see them in private: 'It's not like I would invite ten ornithologists to have a beer in my home'. But I think it is 'fascinating ... to see different groups of people that have similar interests' like me.

**Specifically telling quotes:** 'We have tried to live as usual with the intention of being outdoors as much as possible'; 'I have been vaccinated, like every other good citizen'; 'Oh, today it's nice to turn on the computer and watch [the church service], especially afterwards on Facebook'; 'That has been fantastic - I could never imagine that there were so many grilling areas in [City]!'

**Keywords:** grown-up children, church, ornithology, outdoor activities

**SE04**

**Title:** The unvaccinated pensioner Eva wonders if she is the plague

**Narrative:** I am a 72-year-old woman living with my husband in a small village in the countryside. Me and my husband have been married for 51 years. We have three grown-

up children and eight grandchildren. We are committed members of a free church. I have a good, active life with many friends. My husband I have a great respect for the pandemic and follow the regulations, but we are not scared. Although life has been different during the pandemic, I do not feel isolated. This is probably due to the nature around us. We live close to a lake and can move around rather freely in the surroundings. For example, we have had coffee with our friends in the garden on several occasions, we have had a birthday party on the ice, and during one period my children and their families lived in their boats in the harbour near us. In that sense, we are lucky. Also, since I am retired, I do not have to go to work. When I talk to my former colleagues, I realise that being older might have made life easier during the pandemic. Generally, we have stayed healthy and have been able to live our life as we would like to live it.

There is one thing that has been challenging for me during the pandemic. Me and my husband decided not to get vaccinated, and this choice has had severe consequences for us. 'People shouldn't be marginalised because they don't take the vaccine', but I feel I have been treated very badly. The reactions towards my decision to not get vaccinated have, by far, been the worst aspect of the pandemic.

Peoples' reactions have differed. Some have been reserved. For example, our children expressed concerns over our decision, but I feel that they have respected our choice and that we get along well. Others have distanced themselves from us, partly or completely. I remember one situation when I took a walk with two ladies from the church. They asked me if I was vaccinated, and when I told them that I am not 'they took two, three steps back'. This backing off felt like they were stating 'you are dangerous'. 'Since then, we have had almost no contact.' Before the pandemic, we used to see other regularly. But suddenly, this just stopped.

I have experienced not only that people have been reserved or distanced, but that they actually are scared of us. That is really hard to take. For example, we invited another couple to our home, and since they knew that we are not vaccinated, they underlined that we must be healthy when seeing them. To me, this is obvious. I would never invite someone to my house if I were ill. I have been thinking a lot about why people react like that: 'Do they care about us, or do they think that we have something that we will spread to them? Are we the plague? Sometimes I feel like if we were the plague!' In these situations, I am glad that my husband and I have each other.

I would have wished for greater tolerance for my decision to not 'take the injection'. The social pressure for vaccination has been massive: from authorities, media, and acquaintances. 'It's almost like a psychosis all over the country.' I think the discussion has been weird. Everyone must make their own choice. To me, vaccination is a matter of privacy and integrity. My husband and I 'have chosen another path and are willing to take the risks'.

Also, I would have wished for a more open discussion on vaccination in church. Vaccination has been handled like a 'non-issue'. On the one hand, I appreciate that the pro-vaccination campaigns have been missing in church. But on the other hand, since vaccination has not been discussed at all, it has been possible for members of the church to behave disrespectfully. I feel that there is a double agenda in the church: one formal where vaccination is not discussed, and another informal where church members have questioned me as a person rather than my decision. 'I had wished for an open dialogue

... but instead there is confrontation!

**Specifically telling quotes:** 'People shouldn't be marginalised because they don't take the vaccine'; 'Do they care about us, or do they think that we have something that we will spread to them? Are we the plague? Sometimes I feel like if we were the plague!'; 'It's almost like a psychosis all over the country'; 'We have chosen another path and are willing to take the risks'

**Keywords:** church, outdoor activities, vaccination refusal, the plague, couple, social pressure

SE05

**Title:** The pensioner Karin moved her social life outdoors

**Narrative:** I am a 71-year-old woman living with my 81-year-old husband in a small village in the countryside, close to the forest and the lake. We both have grown-up children from previous marriages and many grandchildren. My children live close to me. My husband has a medical condition and is not as mobile any longer, but I feel healthy and am psychically very active. We are both members of a free church and have a rich social life – at least before the pandemic and in between the pandemic waves. I have stayed healthy during the whole pandemic; I have not even had a cold.

Before you came to my house, I looked through my diary for the last two years. I wanted to be prepared before talking to you and to reflect upon what I have done during the pandemic. Of course, I already knew that I had been outdoors a lot, but when reading the diary this became even more obvious to me. It is like I moved my social life outdoors. I remember that I had many questions in the beginning of the pandemic. 'Shouldn't you be allowed to meet? ... Should we just sit at home and do nothing?' I have many people that I care about as well as many interests: my children, my grandchildren, my home group, my sewing group, dancing classes, the second-hand store in church, and church services. It feels like many of these relations and interests were taken away from me when the pandemic struck.

Luckily, I have been able to meet loved ones and to continue with many of my interests outdoors. In 2020, my husband celebrated his 80th birthday at the wooden deck outside our house with our home group from church, and my children took me to the hill nearby when I turned 70. Later the same year, at the Lucia celebrations in December, my grandchildren sang for us standing at our driveway in the cold, and afterwards we had waffles in the garage keeping all the doors open. It was cold, but we could at least see each other. Also, we have had birthday parties for the grandchildren next to a wind shelter down by the lake. In all, 'this pandemic has probably been mostly about outdoor life' for me. I think that has been the best way to maintain family life and other relations and activities. Being outdoors is something that I have always liked, so that part of the pandemic was not too complicated. But of course, I wished I could have said 'Welcome in!' to people more often before we were vaccinated, but I felt that I couldn't.

Being outdoors have helped me keeping up my mental health. At times, when I have felt low, my daily walks have been vital. I have always walked and hiked a lot, but during the pandemic I have taken even longer walks in the forest and along the water: between five and eight kilometres every day. I have walked irrespectively of season, I have walked by myself, with my sister-in-law and with my 'take-a-walk gang'. These walks were, and still are, important for my recreation and for channelling the frustration about staying at home too much, just my husband and me.

My husband and I have been very restrictive seeing people indoors, but we have made some exceptions. For example, we have seen three close relatives every now and then in each other's homes. And at Christmas 2020, my husband's daughter and her family were here. My husband and I sat in one end of the living-room, using medical visors, as far away from the others as we could. From now onwards, as society re-opens again after Omicron, I wish to avoid such awkward situations. Instead, I wish to do more of those things that I have missed the most during the pandemic: dancing, going to the church, inviting family and friends to our house, and, most of all, continuing to hug my grandchildren!

**Specifically telling quotes:** 'Shouldn't you be allowed to meet? ... Should we just sit at home and do nothing?'; 'This pandemic has probably been mostly about outdoor life'

**Keywords:** church, grown-up children, grandchildren, outdoor activities, walking, mental health

**SE06**

**Title:** The PhD student Mary might have to leave Sweden due to new permanent residency law

**Narrative:** I am a 29-year-old PhD student from a non-EU country and for the past three and a half years I have been living and working in a mid-sized town in Sweden. My contract was supposed to expire in August, but it has recently been extended by three months. This was really good news, but it does not solve my problems, it just postpones them.

The pandemic affected my family situation and my work situation. I live on my own here in Sweden. My parents live abroad. Since the pandemic started, there is a non-EU entering ban to Sweden, so my parents have not been able to visit me. I did get to go to see them eventually, which was nice, but I find it very strange that I have been here over three years and my parents have not been able to visit. 'It creates a sense of insecurity I would say. Because you want to know that if something out of the ordinary happens, your parents can come and help you, but they can't come and that's not nice'.

In terms of work, I am quite upset that my PhD coincided with the pandemic. I always imagined my PhD years would be a time for travelling, visiting institutions, going to conferences and meeting new people. Instead, my mobility has been very limited. Also, in the past six months, I have really started to miss having colleagues. 'It is really lonely

to be a PhD student right now'. I used to quite like working from home. Now, I don't see the point going in to work as no one is there. I miss going to lunch with colleagues, 'these routines that exist that you can join whenever you like'. There is little emotional support, 'but I also feel very under-stimulated intellectually, like I am not getting any new ideas or new and interesting interactions with anyone'. In the first year of the pandemic, I thought it was cool that I could join a seminar in different country using zoom, but now, I really don't like zoom. 'I want actual in person interaction'.

The pandemic also heavily affected my data collection. It was delayed by eight months, and in the end the university gave me a three-month extension. I will not be able to finish my PhD on time and there is a second aspect that makes this much worse. Last summer they changed the law for getting permanent residence in Sweden. Before this change, four years of employment as a PhD student entitled you to permanent residence. Now, you need a work contract guaranteeing employment for at least 18 months after your PhD. This is not how academia works, no one gets an 18-month contract straight after finishing a PhD.

All my plans were based on getting residence in Sweden. It would have provided a sense of security to know that I could stay; or move somewhere else if I wanted to. I have a life here now. I have my friends here, my apartment, my work. I have a partner. I have learnt the language. 'And my ties to my home country have weakened during this time. Which is quite normal, I find'. I am looking at other options, but my worst-case scenario is that I have to leave, finish my thesis at my parents' house and come back on a tourist visa for the defence.

Neither the university, my department nor my PhD programme, have handled the situation well. Generally speaking, they are good at attracting international talent, but very bad at keeping it. My initial request for an extension was denied and I had to give a very detailed description of exactly how my data collection was postponed to eventually get three months. Also, they did not send the decision directly to me but to my supervisors. I found the whole process very demeaning. Especially when you hear of other, better funded departments, where all PhD students got an extension without even applying for one.

The whole experience has made me think about Sweden differently. 'I feel more hopeless for the future. I think Sweden is going to a very bad direction politically'. Racism and discrimination are bound to increase in the next few years, and I'm not sure I want to be here for that. I used to think of Sweden as an exception, that at least they were trying to be more inclusive but now, it is like they are not even trying, 'they are actually reversing the good things that they did'.

In the beginning, there were some petitions and manifestations and I had hopes that we could reverse the law somehow. Now, I'm less hopeful. 'For the first time in my life, I feel like I lost my agency and that's a horrible feeling'. I've experienced economic insecurity before, with short term employment and so on, 'but this feels like a direct intervention in my life... someone is telling me I cannot live here anymore'. I come from quite a privileged, middle-class background and I always thought I was free to make my own decisions. That all changed with the new law and although 'I know how it is out there for many people, I just didn't realise that I was so close to that myself'.

**Specifically telling quotes:** 'It creates a sense of insecurity I would say. Because you want to know that if something out of the ordinary happens, your parents can come and help you, but they can't come and that's not nice'; 'It is really lonely to be a PhD student right now'; 'For the first time in my life, I feel like I lost my agency and that's a horrible feeling'

**Keywords:** international student, migration law changes, social inclusion/exclusion, precarity, mobility

**SE07**

**Title:** Emma leaves her violent partner during the pandemic

**Narrative:** I am a 30-year-old woman who is living and working in a midsized Swedish town. When the pandemic started, me and my former partner lived in a small town nearby, but when I started my current job at a university in autumn 2020, we moved to a different part of the country. Because of the pandemic, working from home was the norm and I did not have to live in the town where the university is located. But moving was also a condition set by my former partner. He would not have let me take this job if I hadn't agreed to move.

At the start of the pandemic, I was working as a preschool teacher and the pandemic did not affect my working life that much as the preschool remained open. It did, however, add a lot of pressure in my home life. My former partner used the pandemic as an excuse to control and isolate me. He did not want me to work and expose myself to risks. Also, he was not working at the time, yet I did most of the housework. I was exhausted all the time but questioning the division of housework only led to arguments. Moving made the situation more dangerous, living near my friends and family had acted as a restraint in terms of violence as I always had the option of going to my mother if there was a crisis, but it also made the relationship calmer in some ways. As I was working from home and since I didn't know anyone in this city, he had complete control over me. He knew where I was at all times. Working from home also meant I had more time for housework. I started baking everyday which really pleased him. His ideal was that I would be at home all the time taking care of the home.

The pandemic made my situation more diffuse. 'On the one hand, isolation was necessary because of the pandemic, on the other hand, I was in a violent and controlling relationship.' It was difficult to separate the two. 'I imagine I would have seen it more clearly if it hadn't been for the pandemic.' But I remember a breaking point of some sort. At dinner one night, I mentioned that it was nice that the vaccines were finally on their way and that we could start doing more things again. This small remark infuriated him, and he became violent. He was against the vaccination, and he questioned why it was so important to me. He asked what my plans were and who I wanted to meet. At that moment, I think I realised how much the pandemic has benefitted controlling partners. We were together for over two years in total and the controlling behaviour started early in the relationship. Subconsciously, I think I knew quite early that I would have to leave

this relationship. These thoughts were definitely with me before we moved. But the pandemic made leaving more difficult and I had to wait for society to open up a bit more. Then in summer 2021, I had planned to go and visit a friend of mine for a week. On some level, I think I knew that I was leaving him. Before this trip I did everything to please him in order to make sure he would trust me to go. I made it to my friend's house but one night he showed up for a surprise visit and he became very violent. I realised then that this was the time to end things.

He later brought my stuff up mixed with rubbish bags but at least I did not have to see him again. I was lucky to have a good support network around me. My parents have been very helpful throughout, and a few close friends. I also got great help from several NGOs and my employer has been very supportive. My former partner had a very low level of trust in social institutions. Something I have come to realise now is how much I love society. Seeing how much support is actually out there has been eye opening. At the same time, I am aware that I am quite privileged. I speak Swedish, I am well-educated, and I know where to look for help. Not everybody is that fortunate.

After I had left my partner, a new phase of the pandemic started for me. I had this new apartment that felt like a safe space, and it was quite peaceful to spend a lot of time here, working and painting. The Covid-19 restrictions actually suited me then as I was too tired from everything to have much of a social life. At first, I was terrified every time I heard a car drive by the house. It is getting a little bit easier, but I still have nightmares and flashbacks. And I'm still too scared to go to the police: 'I think all hell would break loose then'.

**Specifically telling quotes:** The pandemic made my situation more diffuse. On the one hand, isolation was necessary because of the pandemic, on the other hand, I was in a violent and controlling relationship'; 'I imagine I would have seen it more clearly if it hadn't been for the pandemic'

**Keywords:** gender based violence, social isolation, remote work, family support, NGO support

**SE08**

**Title:** Jean describes the inhumane pressure of finishing a PhD thesis under threat of deportation

**Narrative:** I am a 34-year-old PhD student from a non-EU country currently living in a midsized town in Sweden. If all goes to plan, I will defend my thesis this autumn. If it goes according to one of the plans, I should say as 'all of my plans now are mental plans that depend entirely on the mercy of the Migration Agency'. My funding runs out in July, and I could cover the months until my defence using my savings, if only I know that I could stay after I graduate.

As a consequence of the new migration law introduced in 2021, international PhD students are no longer entitled to permanent residence after they complete their

studies. I found out about this change when 'I was just scrolling through the Migration Agency website. I like to stay updated with the latest crazy stuff that they have on the website, and I couldn't believe my eyes when I when read about the changes'.

I left my home country looking for new challenges and before I came to Sweden, I lived in another Nordic country for nearly four years, working and studying. 'I left that Nordic country for Sweden partly because I got this PhD position but also because after four years, I could get permanent residence. I was looking for a home. The other Nordic country was not a happy place for me, I did not like living there. So I thought, OK, I'll move here to do my PhD, I am passionate about the topic, and I have worked very hard for this. And after four years, I don't have to worry about visas anymore. I will have finally found a home. Being a homosexual from [home country] who was looking for fresh and free air to breathe, I thought Sweden would be that place. But that is not the case'.

The effect of the pandemic on me was not so bad in the sense that it did not affect my work too much. Well, it did in the sense that I had planned to collect data in my home country, and I had to change my plans and do an online data collection instead. This meant redesigning my study and reapplying to the ethical review board in my home country. So I lost maybe six months doing that. However, while I was waiting for a decision, I got access to Finish data that I wrote an article on. So in the end, I didn't waste too much time. However, the pandemic did mean 'I was just sitting at home working. Work never left my head at all so I was always regurgitating things'. 'As soon as things started easing up, I went back to work because it was too much'. So academically speaking, I was able to use my time wisely and be smart about the situation, 'with the help of my supervisor, who was brilliant', but socially it affected me a lot. I was having lunches on my own at home as my boyfriend works in a hospital. And then when I went back to work, I was still having lunches on my own. Whereas pre-Covid, I would have had lunch with my colleagues every day.

'But I have to tell you that I wouldn't have been able to continue working since the summer had I not started taking pills. I'm on SSRI right now and I cannot stop taking them before I finish the PhD because I will probably lose my head'. Nobody can work in this situation, to go to work every day and be more productive than most members of the department in order to finish a PhD on time. All under the threat of deportation. 'It is not humane.'

My department has not been supportive. From the very start it has been a 'non-friendly' environment for international PhD students. Although it was never stated as a requirement for this position that I had to learn the language, all meetings and all correspondence is in Swedish. I filed a discrimination complaint about this and 'the Swedes got together in one of the staff meetings and discussed the issue from their perspective'. They took the decision that the meetings should continue to be held in Swedish, excluding us completely.

The response of the university to the change in the migration law was underwhelming to say the least. Other universities took part in the public debate and expressed concern, but not this one. They seemed largely unconcerned. This is not a proper international university. Some individual researchers have an international outlook, but the administration is lagging way behind 'and unfortunately the power is with the administration, not with the academic people'.

Before we finish, I want to say that not everything has been bad. 'The PhD atmosphere has been brilliant. There is a group of around ten PhD students that I am very tight with. They are very socially aware, critically aware, and respectful to each other. And there are some professors in our department that I think are commendable and inspiring.' Finally, I have to say to I am glad I was in Sweden during the pandemic. 'The Swedish response, some people have a lot of reservations about it, but I really appreciated it'. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** 'All of my plans now are mental plans that depend entirely on the mercy of the Migration Agency'; 'I left another Nordic country for Sweden partly because I got this PhD position but also because after four years, I could get permanent residence. I was looking for a home. The other Nordic country was not a happy place for me, I did not like living there. So I thought, OK, I'll move here to do my PhD, I am passionate about the topic, and I have worked very hard for this. And after four years, I don't have to worry about visas anymore. I will have finally found a home. Being a homosexual from [home country] who was looking for fresh and free air to breathe, I thought Sweden would be that place. But that is not the case'

**Keywords:** international student, migration law changes, social inclusion/exclusion, discrimination, mental health

SE09

**Title:** Maia, a Syrian refugee, learns Swedish during the pandemic

**Narrative:** I am a 26-year-old woman from Syria, and I came to Sweden less than two years ago. My parents and younger siblings came to Sweden six years ago but because I was over eighteen when they left, I had to stay by myself in Syria. I went to university there and I have a degree in architecture. I am hoping to go to university here and get a master's degree in architecture as that is what I want to work with eventually.

I managed to get a visa to another Schengen-area country which meant I could enter Sweden without problems, but it also meant I had to wait six months before I could apply for asylum. If I had done it earlier, they would have sent me back to this country instead. The wait was horrible, and I really did not like being in Sweden at the time. The worst part was not being allowed to work or study. I was just sitting at home all the time, bored and sad. The fact that I arrived just as the pandemic started didn't help, of course, as everything was closed. There were no language cafés or any of those places where you can meet Swedish people. To learn the language, you need to meet people and speak to them. It is not enough to only read and listen.

At first, I lived with my family. I did enjoy spending time with them again. We had a lot of fun. And they also helped me with the language. My mother had saved her study material from when she studied Swedish so I started looking at this and I quickly got the hang of it. I found it quite similar to English. We tried to speak only Swedish at home. If I had any difficulties when I studied on my own, they could explain it to me. So they helped a lot.

Then I started attending classes with an adult education association that teaches Swedish to asylum seekers. The classes were all online because of the pandemic. It would have been better if they had been in a classroom, I think it is always better to learn a language when you actually meet people, but it was still good. I met a teacher there that helped me improve my language so much. He taught me everything about grammar and he helped me prepare for the SFI (Swedish for immigrants) test.

Most new immigrants spend a few years at SFI after they receive a residence permit, learning basic Swedish. I skipped this step completely. Because of the help I got from the association and this teacher, I didn't need to go to SFI at all. I am currently studying Swedish at secondary school level, as well as basic level English.

Another big change during this time was that I met my husband. After we got married, we moved to a different town in Sweden. I am living with him now. Apart from studying, I am also working extra as a substitute in preschools and schools. Some of my classes are still online, not because of the pandemic but because of a shortage of teachers, and it actually suits me now. It is much easier for me to combine work with online classes. If I had to go to school, it would be much more difficult. Life is good now that I get to work and study. I like living in Sweden now.

### **Specifically telling quotes:**

**Keywords:** asylum seeker, refugee, adult education, language, social isolation, family support

**SE10**

**Title:** Sara, an Iranian refugee, struggles with money, distance learning, and missing her mother

**Narrative:** I am a 38-year-old Iranian woman who came to Sweden as an asylum seeker two years ago. I live with my husband and my teenage son. We had a good life in Iran. I worked as an architect for the past ten years and we had a nice house, a nice car, everything. I have my family and friends there. But because I voiced my opinions about religion, it was no longer safe for me to stay there. I had to leave very suddenly; I did not even get to say goodbye to my mother.

Shortly after we arrived in Sweden, the Migration Agency offered us accommodation in a small town where we lived for over a year. It felt like a very long year. When we got our residence permits, we moved to a larger town. Things are a little bit better now, but the last couple of years have been very difficult for me.

For me, Covid has been a catastrophe. Every day, the media was reporting how many are sick and how many have died. 100 people, 150 people. This made me very scared. My son had to take the train to school every day and I was scared he would get sick. In Iran, many people died from Covid, and I was very scared that my mother would die. I stayed home all the time and I prayed that there would be a vaccine soon. Before I could get the vaccine, however, I got Covid. My first interview at the Migration Agency was

cancelled because of Covid. It was rescheduled and when I went there, I caught the virus. I was very sick for three weeks. I struggled with my breathing, and I had to go by ambulance to the hospital. This was last year, and I still have problems breathing when it is cold and windy outside.

The town we lived in as asylum seekers was very small and there was very little we could do there. Nowhere to meet people. Of course, Covid made this more difficult as well. Even going to the shop, if you asked a question, you were told to back off and keep a two-metre distance. When we first got there, I was happy to hear an adult education association offered free Swedish classes for asylum seekers. But I only got to attend these classes for one week. After that, all classes were cancelled due to Covid. They said I could study using WhatsApp but that did not work for me at all. It is just not the same as sitting next to a teacher and having them explain things to you. I think I understood maybe 20% of the online classes. Not being able to learn the language caused me a lot of stress. I am sure I would have progressed much further if it had not been for Covid and online teaching.

Access to the internet was another huge obstacle. Every month we bought 200 minutes of phone credit and 3 GB of data each. That costs 300 SEK which is a big part of the 5000 SEK (approx. €500) we get each month. My son sometimes had to do online classes as well and one time he ran out of data in the middle of a lesson. I called the Migration Agency asking for help. They put me on hold and after 15 minutes, my phone credit ran out.

The money you get as an asylum seeker does not even cover basic necessities. Covid made food more expensive and living in a small town with few options did not help. Bread was so expensive, so I bought flour and made my own and I tried to limit myself to two small meals a day. But it was so difficult that my son had to go without things that he needed. His shoes were old and broken and he told me that he wanted new shoes as the other kids were looking at him on the train. I had to tell him to wait. For his birthday, I wanted to get him a cake and I went to the supermarket. They had a tiny cake for 130 SEK. It was far too expensive, but I ended up getting it. When I got home, my son hugged me and said he didn't need cake, that he knew we have no money.

It is better now that we are no longer on asylum seekers' benefits, and it helps that we live in a larger town with cheaper options available, but money is still tight. I am happy that we are back in the classroom now and I feel like I am learning more Swedish. But it is very difficult to focus with all these thoughts running through my head. I think about my mother, about Iran, about money and about finding a job. I need to find a job quickly so I can bring my mother here. I will never be able to go back to Iran and she is old and sick. 'I am so scared that I will never get to hug my mother again.'

**Specifically telling quotes:** 'I am so scared that I will never get to hug my mother again'

**Keywords:** asylum seeker, refugee, language, social isolation, fear, poverty, family reunification

SE11

**Title:** Hisham, who himself came as a refugee from Syria, tells his story of helping asylum seekers learn Swedish during the pandemic

**Narrative:** I am a 31-one year old man from Syria who is living in Sweden since 2015. I was studying computer science in Syria, and I was in my second year at university when I had to leave Syria. As an asylum seeker, I lived in an accommodation centre. An adult education association came to the centre to teach us Swedish and I quickly realised this was something I wanted to do myself. I wanted to teach new arrivals Swedish; I wanted to do something that made a difference.

I worked very hard to achieve this dream and two years after arriving, I got a job teaching Swedish at an adult education association. The people that work for these associations are not teachers in a traditional sense. The classes are called 'study circles' and we are 'circle leaders'. Everybody has their own way of leading their circles. My way is to acknowledge that while we are all different, everybody should be treated with respect. I also emphasise the importance of structure when you are learning a language, something I think both teachers and students sometimes fail to understand. Grammar is essential to this structure. You can learn thousands of words but without grammar you will not know the correct order to put the words in and you will never be able to speak properly. And I think my method has been quite successful. Some of my former students have gone on to study at university. This makes me very proud.

When the pandemic hit, our participants were too scared to come to class. The mass media really helped to feed this fear by constantly talking about corona. People were even dreaming about corona. So we had a meeting at the association, and we decided to switch to online education. We tested all available tools for doing this and Skype was the easiest. I made short videos for the participants on how to use it and we started online classes straight away. This quick response meant that the participants did not lose any time, they could continue their classes despite the pandemic. Another benefit of online education was that I could record the lessons so the participants could go back to them afterwards. Moving everything online also meant we could reach more participants. We had people joining our classes from many different parts of Sweden. We mainly get new participants through word of mouth. Our existing participants tell their friends about us. Overall, things worked quite well for the first year of the pandemic. There were some technical difficulties at the start as not everybody had the digital skills required. But once they got the hang of it, it worked OK. A bigger problem for some was that they did not have access to reliable internet. Broadband can cost up to 500 SEK (ca €50) a month. The Migration Agency gives asylum seekers up to 145 SEK for internet to attend classes but that only covers about 5 GB. That is barely enough to attend two online video classes. After about a year I could feel the motivation, including my own, was dropping. At first, I found the change very positive as I saved a lot of time during the pandemic. I study full time on top of working 80% and cutting out the travelling between classes made it so much easier for me. But after about 1 year, I got very tired of it. I struggled sleeping, I had very little energy and I really missed the social interaction. I live on my own which didn't really help. Teaching online is just not the same. You don't get the same feel for the language and the interaction does not work as well. 'If I tell a joke in a classroom, people

normally get it. Online, the joke often fell flat.'

Things are very different now from when I started. We used to have a waiting list for our classes, that is not the case anymore. Many of those that came around 2015 got permanent residence and many of them went on to work or further studies. But some did not do so well, especially those who have got their asylum applications rejected several times. Far fewer asylum seekers arrive these days which means that many of our participants are people that have been here since 2015. These are people in a very difficult situation, both financially and in terms of their mental health. They have little hope for the future, and they struggled with motivation even before the pandemic. Every time we talk about Swedish society in class, it always ends in a discussion about the Migration Agency: 'Why are they treating us this way?' 'Why do they do the things they do?' And I have to try to answer them. Sometimes I come home and feel really bad because of this. But we try our best to support them and motivate them, even though we cannot help them with the Migration Agency. 'To me, the participants are not student or pupils, they are friends. I try to create this relationship.'

**Specifically telling quotes:** 'If I tell a joke in a classroom, people normally get it. Online, the joke often fell flat'; 'Why are they [the Migration Agency] treating us this way?' 'Why do they do the things they do?'; 'To me, the participants are not student or pupils, they are friends. I try to create this relationship'

**Keywords:** asylum seekers, refugees, online education, adult education, social support, digital literacy, precarity

## Slovenia

### SI01

**Title:** Epidemic was a trigger to self improve for a 35-year old IT professional

**Narrative:** "I am 35 years old, I am an IT professional. I moved to Slovenia from a former Yugoslavian country in 2019 to pursue a better life. However, due to the epidemic and measures I did not have the opportunity to experience the better quality of life, us being locked down, at home. It was not up to my expectations.

Initially the measures seemed pretty restrictive, but looking back it was a responsible thing to do. But it was really hard to live in these measures, especially lock down, it was hard to be isolated, not being able to leave the apartment except to get food, to be alone. At the time I was living alone. For the first time in a long time I felt alone, I felt anxiety, depression. Lack of human touch. Although I am not certain if it would have been better to be confined with a lot of people, family members, because I am aware of cases when the whole family was in a small apartment and it did not go well. But initially the isolation had bad impact on my mental health. It felt dreadfully for a month or two. I did not know what was going to happen, I was in a state of despair because of the whole situation, also because I was in a foreign country. I was working a remote job and it was very uncertain whether the company would continue to exist.

The company that I worked for at the time provided computer services to other companies, so we depended on other companies on keeping their businesses open. Somehow the management kept most of the employees on payroll, although it was a very tough and uncertain time. We were all put in a very stressful situation. And this financial uncertainty was adding to the level of stress I experienced. When the financial safety is undermined it is a gateway to all sorts of problems. Now it is kind of surreal, but it was a tough period.

I was also very worried for my family back home, for my sibling and my parents. My parents are older, they are in a risk age group. Father of my friend died of Corona and it just increased the level of fear I experienced. There was no sign of the vaccine, I was worried if they get the virus how would I be able to help them? The borders were closed and there was absolutely no way to cross the border in case I needed to help them. And one could not rely on the hospitals back home to be able to successfully treat older persons. So there was reasonable amount of stress and fear and anxiety because of that. I had such anxiety that not only I had difficulty sleeping, but maybe even insomnia at times. And later I intentionally decided not to visit my parents, because I was afraid I would get infected in transit and bring them Corona. Because that happened a lot. So I decided not to visit them. I convinced them to isolate themselves from other people until they get vaccinated in January 2021. And as soon as they got vaccinated I went to visit them. I haven't seen them since November 2019.

So the first few months of the epidemic were really tough for me. The level of stress was really high and that is why I increased my alcohol consumption to cope with the whole situation. Because it helped in the short term. This was around March, April 2020. But very soon I realised that this cannot go on forever, that this is slippery slope, down hill. If

I continue to drink more than five beers a day I would be considered an alcoholic. If I continue to do that it would be really bad. Those several beers per day did not actually help me to feel better, they helped me to feel normal. And I said to myself OK, this is really bad, I am becoming an alcoholic. So I knew I had to stop doing that. I did not reach for help, although I should, but I think everybody was dealing with their own problems. Who do you go to if everybody is having these problems? Maybe it was not a good idea not to ask for help, because even a short conversation with an expert would have helped. I tried to manage on my own. And around May 2020 things became clearer, the restrictions got less strict and I managed to push through. I had a lot of time on my hands to reflect on myself, to contemplate what is happening with my life at the moment, because if you have all the time on your hands, you have to spend it in a constructive manner. I wanted to feel good and the only way to feel good in a situation like that is to do something with yourself. Small victories. I managed to fill most of my days with activities, although in a confined space, but nevertheless. I started working out, I haven't done that in a long time. I started learning new skills for work. And those small victories as I progressed in them made me feel better. The whole thing was a trigger for me to self improve. The epidemic eliminated all distractions and gave me a lot of time to focus on myself. And because of that I advanced in my career significantly. So the whole situation ended in having a very positive impact on me, especially career wise.

I also felt a lot better when I got vaccinated. I certainly felt more relaxed, I knew that if I caught the virus I would not have serious consequences. In the media it was day and night just news about negative and long term effects. That was terrifying for a while. The vaccine stopped that. As soon as I got antibodies from the vaccine I felt OK, bring it on! But we will see whether we were sold a lie or not.

However, the epidemic had a negative impact on my masters degree. I was enrolled at the university and I had to take some time off of my studies at the end of 2019 due to my work obligations. And when this whole epidemic thing started I just forgot I was enrolled at the uni, it was the last of my worries at the time. There were classes online, but attending online classes was very low priority to me. So I lost tempo with it, the group moved on and I focused on my career. So this was a negative impact of the epidemic.

Another negative impact of the epidemic is that I never learned how to speak Slovene. I intended to take lessons in Slovene language just before Corona. But then it stopped being in my tracks. I spent two years in Slovenia and I did not learn the language. That is something I regret."

**Specifically telling quotes:** The whole thing was a trigger for me to self improve. That was in my case. I know people who bankrupted, lost businesses, lost loved ones... My case is maybe unusual for the majority of the population.

**Keywords:** Career, well being, alcoholism, self improvement, mental health, depression, anxiety, isolation

SI02

**Title:** 22-year old student losing monthly income due to the epidemic and feeling lack of understanding towards students

**Narrative:** "I am 22 years old, I study natural sciences. During the first wave we all stayed at home, we took the first wave very seriously, we were afraid and therefore the measures did not seem too drastic. My studies were all held online. It was very stressful to be alone at home all the time. I am very outgoing, I go to the faculty, I work and this was all stopped. It was scary, new, shocking. At the time my studies were OK, while I didn't have so many study obligations. But then the next semester started. And it was though they did not know that the next epidemic wave is going to happen and everything would close again. It was not well organised. And the studies became my primarily source of stress. We have laboratory lessons and they were online and this is just not the same. Sure, it is somehow more convenient, you don't have to worry about transport, you wake up 15 minutes before the lecture starts, but it is not the same. Everything was online and recorded and sometimes we did not watch the recordings. Students helped each other and we were in touch all the time, but it was not the same as face-to-face. And we all finished with lower grades in that semester.

For me it was awful. I cannot study at home, especially not for longer period of times, not for the whole exam period. And it was also very stressful because all exams were online and I was constantly worried about my wi-fi working properly or maybe my cat would interrupt me during my exam. There were days when I lost my interest, I doubted everything, I missed people and going to the faculty, I lost a sense of how the laboratory lessons are performed in person. But nobody stood up for us, students. People constantly demanded primary schools and high schools to reopen, but nobody said anything about faculties being closed. And when the faculties finally reopened all the lectures remained online, but practical lessons were held at the faculty. They were organised in such a manner so the classes did not mix, which meant we had a lot of work to be done in a short period of time. This student year we have lectures and other obligations at the faculty and we have the RVT rule we must respect, which I suppose is necessary to avoid lock downs. But what if my phone dies and I am not able to show my pass? I cannot go to the faculty. We also have to wear face masks, although at the beginning we asked if we could not wear them in the classrooms, but our request was denied. We also do not have a cafeteria at our faculty, while they could not find the provider due to Corona situation. So we should bring our lunch with us. We can also use a cafeteria at the nearby faculty, which is very small and very crowded at lunch time. This is very stressful because often we have lectures from 8AM to 7PM and of course you get hungry, but you do not really have an option to eat something.

I also work as a tutor for kids and this represents my main source of income. I would go to the kid's house or they would come to my house. At the beginning of the whole Corona situation I was unable to continue working and my income has dropped drastically and soon I had no money. My financial independence is very important to me, and this was the first time after a long time that I had to ask my parents for money and this was really hard for me. I do not pay rent, since I live in flat in my parents' house, so I was lucky and also my parents were able to help me, but still, it was not easy for me to ask them for money. So since then I also save money so I have something in case I would

not be able to work. But soon I was able to tutor kids online, which I did not find so good, I didn't have the equipment so I had to improvise. Now I have my tutoring lessons in person again.

Sometimes I would have a feeling I live in country where the decision makers don't know what they are doing. A lot of the measures just didn't make sense, I had a feeling they were sometimes implemented just to complicate our lives. I sense a lot of misunderstanding towards students. Sure, we got 150 Euros from the Government twice I think, but this is close to nothing, especially for those students who must also work for their living, who were not able to ask their parents for money or who could not go home for lunch. As if people do not really know what kind of a lifestyle is a students' lifestyle. There is a lot of work, a lot of studying and also a job you have to have to buy food. I would appreciate some more understanding towards us.

In high school I started going to counselling at an LGBTIQ+ organisation. This counselling and going to the office and the community is very important to me, since I am a part of the community. And it was very stressful for me not being able to go to counselling in person, not being able to go to the office. Everything was online, but I did not even realise how much I missed everything because I was so stressed out due to my studies at the faculty and my financial problems. When everything was closed people also lost safe space and they were forced to be confined to their homes. But there is domestic violence, your family is maybe not LGBTIQ+ friendly. I am lucky, I live alone and I do not have problems with my family. My family is relatively understanding. But some people do not have all that and they were really stressed when all day centres and safe spaces just closed.

I also do some volunteering at the organisation and we noticed that when our office reopened after the lock down nobody would come. For example, we organise some activities which are usually very popular. But nobody would sign up for these activities soon after everything reopened. A few people would come next time, and some more the next time, now everything is more or less back to normal. We have a RVT rule and this also impacts certain activities, while people are not able to just drop in, be spontaneous, they have to make an appointment. One positive outcome of the whole situation is that there is now a new LGBTIQ+ online community which was formed due to the lock down and it is really nice. We have different channels, to help with studying, about cooking and taking care of the flat, about elections and a lot of other things. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "No one cared about students, no one knew what to do. Not everyone was able to go to the protests. We thought that the people responsible would represent our interests.

It was stressful because you lost your safe space, which is not LGBT+ specific... There was also an increase in domestic violence, so it did not really matter if you were and LGBT child. That was a big problem. Schools and NGOs and youth centres were closed and you were not able to escape. And your parents may not be LGBT friendly, may be emotionally or otherwise violent."

**Keywords:** Student, online classes, exams, well being, financial independence, student work, safe space.

SI03

**Title:** 77-years old pensioner misses pre-pandemic social life

**Narrative:** "I am 77 years old, divorced and living alone, retired for more than 15 years. At the beginning of the epidemic I was really scared. What will happen to me if I get sick? Who will take care of me? It is not nice to live like that. This is also connected to my age, because Covid is more dangerous to elderly. I live alone, so I did not feel so lonely due to lock downs, but I am afraid of getting seriously ill. At the beginning all people would bother me. It bothered me when a kid was playing basketball at the playground near by. I would go for a walk and because municipality borders were closed of course all people were at the same spot and that bothered me a lot. I somehow isolated myself and did not go out. My daughter would bring me food and everything else. I have my own car and later I would drive to the shops, but I thought these special hours for elderly to attend the stores were not good. We should not be treated like that.

I attend a lot activities in daily centres of activities for elderly. I attend mostly physical activities, yoga, pilates, I would also go on hiking trips with the group. And during the lock down the centres were all closed. Some classes were online, on zoom, but it is not the same. I have problems with my eyes and for example am not able to see certain exercises well, and then maybe your phone rings, you go to the bathroom, or you don't feel like taking a class. But it was at least something, although I missed personal contact. Now everything is open again, we have RVT rule and I attend some classes, some are still held on zoom. But it is not as before. When you come to the centre you just attend the class, if it is an exercise class you can remove your face mask. And when it is finished you just go home. Before we would go for a coffee, but not anymore. It is not relaxing, it is kind of a stress, you worry about possible infection all the time. And some of my friends do not attend classes anymore and did not attend them when they were held online, so we lost touch and I miss them. It seems we are somehow forgotten, written off, even more than necessary.

And all social life is gone. I do not meet people without worrying anymore. It is better than at the beginning, but still not the same as before. I do not see my family as much. They are not vaccinated, they just had Covid, but they go to work, kids socialise, so we limited our contacts. We would meet for holidays, go for a lunch or have a coffee together, but is not so comfortable as before, you are not carefree. I also rather do not take the bus, I rather ride my bike, but I do not do that now, because it is winter and the roads are slippery, so I walk if it is not too far. I avoid public events, concerts. I attended a few concerts with my friend in the fall, but I was not comfortable to go. Sometimes I even told my friend I do not feel well to go. But even though I was sometimes reluctant to go, it is really enjoyable. Culture is important for our lives. I would really like to go to the opera now, but I do not dare to go. And while the epidemic situation is such, I will not go.

I miss my hiking trips with my group very much, because it is better to walk when you have company than to walk alone. The trips were cancelled at the beginning and I missed

them very much, since they were really sociable events. The trips were again cancelled in the fall, one was organised recently, but I think they will stop organising them again due to the epidemic situation. I think it is not very smart for us elderly to use public transportation at the moment, and we would often use public transportation on this trip. For me this arrangement was really good, since now that I am older I get tiered just from driving itself. When I was younger I would go hiking in the winter, alone, but I don't do that anymore. And I miss hiking and especially missed it when municipal borders were closed and I was able to go only to the hills in my municipality. But you must go hiking on many different hills, otherwise you loose your fitness.

I am also very disappointed with the governmental measures and the whole public discourse about vaccination. I am vaccinated, but I miss that the experts who are sceptical are not also included. Only one side. And I really don't like this RVT rule, I have to show my ID to every security guard at every shop I want to go to. I don't think it is fair and I think we are being limited in our freedom.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I am disappointed with the government's measures, they are not logical. Especially when we were limited to our municipalities and there was no public transport. The worst thing for me is that children were not allowed to go to schools and kindergartens. That seems like a disaster to me. And that they closed nursing homes, that they did not allow personal visits, that so many elderly died. I think the government made a terrible mistake. To determine beforehand who will be sent to treatment. They were just left in their little rooms. This should never happen.

**Keywords:** Daily centres, fear of infection, social life, isolation, public transport

SI04

**Title:** 77-years old pensioner experienced worsening of health care

**Narrative:** "I am 77 years old and based on my experience the epidemic had negative impact on health care. Before epidemic you could go to the doctor's office even if you did not have an appointment. There was a designated hour for such cases. You would feel bad, ill and could just go to the doctor's. Now it is almost impossible to reach your doctor. You could call the doctor all day and would not reach her/him. Call and call and call and nobody would answer the phone. It is awful to feel bad and not being able to reach your doctor. Sometimes I would also be left waiting in an empty waiting room and the doctor would walk around and I would be left waiting. And another patient would come and the doctor would see this patient before you, saying I have a time to wait. In such a demeaning manner! I have such bad experiences. I finally changed the doctor. I went to another medical centre and just asked a nurse there if she could get me an appointment with a doctor there. And now I have a splendid doctor, but the nurse is not nice. And again you don't have proper care. She often does not do the things she should do. She would for example not let me know that the doctor wrote a prescription or a referral for me to use.

I had some emergency a while ago and it was so difficult to get an appointment, I managed somehow via email. I had a growth on my leg and it was cancer. When I noticed this growth I would with great difficulty get an appointment with my doctor and then the doctor referred me to the dermatologist. And the dermatologist said it is infected and gave me antibiotics. I returned after a week of treatment and the doctor said it was still infected and gave me a referral to have this thing removed, while it was supposedly possibly cancer. And I was said I will have to wait for two months for this thing to be removed! I was in dire straits! I desperately wanted to have a talk about that with my doctor, I went to the doctor's office and I was utterly disappointed. I waited in an empty waiting room for awhile, while I did not have courage to knock on the door because I was afraid the nurse would be annoyed. After some time a man comes out of the doctor's office and he tells me the doctor is not even in the office! I waited there for no reason, because I was afraid to knock because of the nurse!

And after that I rushed to a private clinic with concession and had this growth removed immediately. And it was cancer. I was told that it is a good thing I came immediately and that I should come back in 6 months for a follow-up check-up. But public health care is not the same as before. You are not able to reach your doctor, you send an email and you would get no reply. You don't know if they got your email or not, nothing. I wanted to get vaccinated for flu and I sent them an email, but no answer. Nothing at all. But when I applied for Covid-19 vaccination they gave me an appointment right away. But for flu no answer. They have probably too much work to do. But when I come to the office and the waiting room is empty I make conclusions. Do they have too much administrative work?

At the end you just give up and hope that nothing is wrong with you and you say to yourself you would just go to a private clinic and pay and be treated immediately. The measures due to the epidemic are also not good, you have to fill out all these questionnaires about your health state all the time and there is also the RVT rule. But I think they should make arrangements in such a manner you can get tested at the doctor's, they should let people see their doctor. But what would I do if I get sick? I cannot reach my doctor, would I go somewhere to get tested? There should be some places you can just get tested in case you are not able to get a hold of your doctor. I don't know where I would go if there was something urgent.

**Specifically telling quotes:** In the past you could rely on the doctors more. Now is less and less of this certainty that they will take care of you. They will just let you be.

**Keywords:** Health care, elderly, public health care, cancer, private health care

**SI05**

**Title:** 73-years old pensioner lives relatively isolated life due to the epidemic

**Narrative:** "I am 73 years old and retired for more than 10 years. I used to work in health care. At the beginning of the epidemic there was a lot of fear of infection, especially

because of our age and my husband's vulnerability, being a chronic patient. So we completely isolated ourselves for 3 or 4 months at that time, we moved from the city to the countryside. And to put it simply it was boring. Complete boredom. We were completely alone and lonely. But we went to the countryside because it is easier to isolate there than in the city. We have dogs, which need to be walked regularly and if you do not want to meet people it is easier to do so in the countryside. And it is also easier to spend isolation in the countryside than in the city, while you can go into the nature and you see the greenery and you can easily avoid people. We would also order our food online, so it was delivered to us. And then we would leave all our groceries outside and spray them with disinfectant and this was really time consuming. We would do that because nobody knew absolutely nothing about this virus. So it was a very stressful time. When we got fully vaccinated we relaxed to some extent, we don't order our groceries online anymore.

My husband, who is also retired, stopped doing his occasional work due to the fear of infection and our income decreased and our living standard worsened in a sense. When you have a certain steady monthly income you tend to live a certain life style. So we went from being able to spend without worrying to having to plan our expenditure, although I cannot say the quality of our life got considerably worse. We still live a good life, although our monthly income is not the same as before the epidemic. It is 30-40% lower than before. When you stop doing certain things at this age, they would also not call you back, they forget about you.

We also regularly visited concerts, while we had season tickets. We didn't renew our subscription, although it was possible. The fear of infection is still present, we are aware what it means if there are 100 people in one enclosed space, since working in health care gives you knowledge about that. And we do not even have a desire to go to a concert, it is not worth risking the infection. We are aware that although we are vaccinated we would probably get really sick. So we avoid public events. We also used to go to the gym, to guided group exercise regularly before the epidemic started. The activity stopped during lock down and when it was possible to go again we would go a few times. But there is also a lot of children, whole classes, and we are very afraid of children, because they transmit the virus. And also nobody would check the RVT rule at the doors, so we didn't feel comfortable going there because of that. And also because the gym was used by 10 or so men playing basketball or volleyball prior to us having our workout. You can only imagine how much aerosols gets into the air when grown men exercise, how high the concentration is. And you cannot ventilate the room by opening all windows in winter time. So we don't go there anymore, but we have our exercise online now. We arranged for individual lessons and it is better to some extent, while the coach dedicates all attention to you. Of course it is more expensive than group exercise, but for now we manage to pay for it. I also stopped doing certain activities, for example I avoid riding my bike, because I am afraid I would fell and hurt myself. I really don't want to go to the hospital and possibly get infected on top of everything. I was afraid of falling before the epidemic, but now this fear is even more present, even though we don't have problems getting to the doctor's, since we have connections. And this is a great privilege! Without that I know it would be difficult, it is impossible to reach your doctor nowadays.

Now we live a relatively isolated life, although we weren't very outgoing before the epidemic either. We see our family, I do not meet my friends as much as I used to, we talk on the phone more. Physical socialising became limited to family members. Only important people stayed in my life, certain acquaintances are no longer a part of my life. The relationship between me and my husband deepened during the lock down. When we were at the countryside we were like joined at the hip for 4 months. We always talked to each other a lot, and now we do so even more. But if people don't get along, I know this was a difficult time for them. I must say it is also easier for us, because we have dogs. They help us to socialise, while we take them out and they have their dog friends and they would play and meanwhile us owners chit and chat. You are just forced to go out and meet people and this helps us to maintain certain contacts with people. Those who don't have dogs cannot understand that. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** I miss concerts, I miss having coffee with my friends. Because we limited ourselves a lot. And anxiety is returning in current situation. We know that the vaccine obviously does not protect us completely. Shops are open, so this feeling of being closed is not so great. But we are still limiting ourselves because we are very aware of what an infection can do to us.

**Keywords:** Social life, countryside, isolation, fear of infection, loss of income

SI06

**Title:** 75-years old pensioner lost a significant amount of income due to fear of infection

**Narrative:** "I am 75 years old and I am retired psychiatrist, but sometimes I still work part-time and my life is very much connected with my work. And as a psychiatrist I have a lot of contacts with people, with their distress and this is very evident in the time of the epidemic. The rise in mental health issues is evident. I am retired and until now my former patients would not contact me. I was always available via my telephone and my former patients call me a lot in the time of the epidemic. Not only older patients, but also a lot of younger people, they have anxiety and experience life uncertainty, not so much psychotic problems. And students are in a special situation. They are not afraid of the infection so much, but experience pressure due to not being able to socialise, they cannot be carefree.

Before the epidemic I used to do a lot of part-time work. But when the epidemic started I significantly reduced the amount of work, while I assessed that the preventive measures to mitigate the spread of the virus were too weak, not sufficient, and this made me feel too exposed to the possible infection. And I discontinued all contacts, that were not unavoidable. At my work I have a direct, close contact with patients and at the beginning the only preventive measure, beside face masks, was body temperature measurement. And since I have close contacts with the patients I stopped working. This decision had significant financial impact on my life. I am not able to make certain bigger investments, like repair of the roof, but I got used to it.

Now I started to work again, but not in the same amount as before. However, now I do not fear the infection so much, because I can implement all available measures to protect myself, my physical and health safety. For example, the vaccination status of the patient is known, I demand them to wear masks, I can ensure sufficient distance between us and sufficient ventilation of the room. Because this is really important, the distance and the time spent together in a room. You can have a conversation with a person who is 3 meters away from you, it is entirely possible. Somewhere there is also a plexiglass partition between me and the patient and this is also very good. I have certain knowledge about transmission of infection and what to do to avoid it. But I like contacts in person, at my line of work it is important to see a person, to see his or her mimics. Before Covid-19 I would always shake hands with my patients, because a hand shake has certain diagnostic characteristics. I can make a certain psychological picture of somebody who for example has a very flabby handshake. Or on the other hand of somebody who shakes hands in a very assertive manner. Now I make elbow shakes and do not use a hand shake as one of the parameters in my assessment. I use other, for example mimics, gesticulation, how somebody enters a room, how he or she sits down, what is his or her tone of voice, how he or she looks or doesn't look into your eyes. Hand shake is just one of the parameters, not the only one.

My life changed a lot, because I want to avoid infection. I do not want to get infected and then be treated, but I want to avoid infection in the first place. And all things I do are adapted to this goal. I couldn't wait to be vaccinated. Me and my wife live relatively isolated life now and we socialise only in bubbles. We would meet with a family of one child, and another time with a family of the other child. Only one family at a time. We are all vaccinated and we adhere to all measures, we would meet only if we all are without symptoms. But I was never a person who would like big gatherings and a lot of people at once. So in that sense the epidemic did not change a lot. I socialise with people again, though, but I do that more careful, I make selection based on my knowledge about that person, their vaccination status or health state, I modified my social contacts. I keep distance, I don't hug, kiss, although I rarely did before. I trust people, I know somebody is vaccinated and I trust them. But still the avoidance of infection is in the first place. Virus cannot travel alone, it does not have legs and it needs us to get around. And if we are able to prevent that, we won.

**Specifically telling quotes:** I do not invest so easily. Before epidemic it was not a problem to repair something and even to change a roof or any other thing. Now I would have to plan and also save money to be able to do something like that. More planning and less quick action.

**Keywords:** Isolation, drop in income, preventive measures, fear of infection, bubbles

**SI07**

**Title:** 21-years old Scout leader notices the importance of social contacts among children

**Narrative:** "I am 21 years old and I am a scout leader. In my group there are children from elementary school. And at the beginning, in the first month of epidemic, during the lock down we did not have any meetings. The leaders were not given any specific guidelines, so we didn't organise any meetings. At the beginning we thought that this will last for one month and now it is two years. Too long. So after a month we got instructions from the organisation to organise meetings online. But this is not even remotely the same. What can you do with children on a scout meeting online? Should they watch a cartoon?"

Before epidemic we had meetings three times a month. But we had only one meeting a month when meetings were held on zoom. We didn't want the kids to be too much in front of the screen. They had school online, music lessons online, everything online and we thought it doesn't make sense to also make more scout meetings online. But also us, leaders, we also lost motivation, we didn't get any guidelines, we all had our own problems with school, with lock down and the level of stress was quite high. And you had to do something with children, you had to make some activities, games, something for them online. I spent more time to organise something online than to organise activities face-to-face. We were aware it is not enough to just meet on zoom and look at each others' faces... But at the end I think we managed, we organised escape rooms, we would make rattles, toys, just to encourage them to do something with their hands. We set points at different locations in the nature that they visited them alone or with their parents, we made maps just to make them go out. Because we all were indoors too much, just staring at our computers, nobody would go outside. So us scouts committed ourselves to encourage these children to go out. And we also let the children to stay on zoom after the official meeting ended, so they could interact.

The whole period of online scout meetings was stressful. Everything else was also closed - schools and all activities. And the children were under a lot of stress. Their social life was totally put to stop, their friends and all activities were taken away from them. Because school for example is not just about learning, there are also brakes, time off and you can play with your classmates, you also go to the playground and play there. Maybe if you had a neighbour to play with it was easier, but some kids come from secluded homes, maybe farmhouses and they were all alone, lonely. A lot of stress, anxiety, and we do not talk about it enough, it is a taboo. I remember one time we gave our kids who come to scout meetings an assignment - they had to draw how they feel during epidemic. The majority of them drew how they miss their friends, school, sports. But one kid drew how she hangs herself. And we were very shocked. We did not know what to do, how should we react. We talked with the child, we included parents. Children were really hurt during this epidemic and especially when everything was closed. Also high school children, because this is the time you really cherish your friends, even more than your parents.

So for almost the entire school year 2020/21 we held all our meetings online. Our first face-to-face meeting was just before Summer 2021 and since then we held all our meeting in person, approximately three times per month. When we met for the first time we were all so happy, we would hug each other, we were over the moon! A lot of emotions, a lot of good mood. It is totally different to meet in person. We all needed so much to reconnect with people, with our friends. Most of our meetings are held outside,

we of course do a lot of outdoor activities. But when it is cold we would meet indoors. Of course everything is done according to health recommendations, we encourage children to be responsible. Indoors we wear face masks and we also encourage kids to wear them correctly. And we should not have any food at these indoor meetings, but it is impossible to have a four-hours meeting with no food for kids. So we buy individually packaged snacks or fruit that you can pill. It takes a lot of energy to constantly think about this thing. And we try to keep distance. But it is impossible to keep distance in outdoor activities. They are children, after all, and children will be children and they play together.

**Specifically telling quotes:** Elementary school students were also affected by epidemic. More than we can imagine. And high school students who go through so many problems already. And their friend were taken away. The company, in which they evolve and grow, which means everything to them at the time, sometimes even more than their family. I remember my teenage days; how important friends were to me. And there were real hardships. We do not talk about that enough. This is quite a taboo topic, I think in other countries more attention is given to mental health and how to help yourself, how to improve your mental health.

**Keywords:** Scouts, children, mental health, online activities, lock down.

**SI08**

**Title:** 21-years old student feels students have been overlooked during the pandemic

**Narrative:** "I am 21 years old, and I study health sciences. At the beginning of the epidemic we all thought it will be over in 2 weeks. All our lectures and exams were held online; the lectures remained online even now. Some exams take place at the faculty, some are held online, laboratory practice is also at the faculty, where we have a RVT rule, which I don't mind. But even though I am vaccinated I still test myself, because I think it is a responsible thing to do. I don't like online learning, because I am dyslectic and I have hard time concentrating and listening to the lectures online for numerous hours. I can only follow them for half an hour, then I have to stop and I only come back to the computer if I am able to regain my concentration. I have problems with concentration, I also confuse numbers and I tend to skip lines in the text. I manage my learning problems with printing everything on paper, with using different colours to highlight parts of text or certain words. It is very important for me to be in a classroom, to sit in the front row and to be able to ask questions if I don't understand something. With online lectures I am not able to ask questions right away. It is also not the same if I am in my kitchen in my pyjamas.

I also don't like online exams, although students help each other a lot during exam period. I find it very hard to concentrate. We must have two cameras, one on the computer which shows our face, one on our phone, pointed into our screen and keyboard, so they can control us and prevent us from cheating. And all our microphones are on during exams and you can imagine the noise from each student - typing, drinking,

coughing,... At one time I was not able to concentrate at all and I almost cried during the exam. I flunked this particular exam. I could also study more, I admit that, but I think I would pass if it was held in the classroom. And online exams are also very stressful while I always worry about my WiFi connection or my computer freezing. Because lectures and exams are mostly online my grade average dropped from 8,5 to below 8. At first I was really frustrated because of this, while I worked really hard to have an average of 8,5, because in this case I am entitled to higher scholarship. Now that my average dropped I get 20 Euros less, which is not a lot, but it is still something. I want to be financially independent so even 20 Euros a month less influences my life.

I live in a student dormitory and during the lock down all students living in dormitories were notified on Thursday to leave the dormitories until Sunday. This order came from the Ministry and students were in a real stress, while not all students are able to just leave and go back home. There were some exceptions, who were able to stay at dormitories, but what about somebody who has a full time job and provides for themselves and also for their family at home? Sure, the Government gave us 200 Euros or something like that, but that is not even a fracture of what you need to survive. And what about somebody who comes from a family with domestic violence and was forced to go back into that environment? Some students were forced to go home where everybody was Covid-19 positive, but they had no choice. Or they didn't have internet connection and they were not able to attend online lectures. Nobody cared about those students, it was just said we have to leave the dormitories. I don't understand the point of closing dormitories and evict students, while we live in dormitories. Sure, there are parties and people hanging out, but first of all this is our home. And parties happen also at private accommodations and students living there were not instructed to leave and go back home. And some measures, like wearing a face mask in the common bathroom or in the shared kitchen were really odd.

Students of health sciences, like myself, were also not an exception and it was a real problem for us, while we have a mandatory practice in health institutions and 100% presence is required. Our faculty did not want to postpone our practice, but in case I would have to leave the dormitory and move back home that would mean I would have to drive two hours every day to the practice and then 2 hours to get home, on my own expense. This was not an option for me and I was in a real stress and I said I would just stay in the dormitory incognito. But it would be really bad if I would get caught, while this would mean that I would be kicked out of the dormitory for good. So this whole weekend was a real nightmare, we made numerous phone calls, wrote million of emails and then Sunday evening we were informed that students of health sciences can stay in dormitories as another exception. I was really disappointed by the attitude of our faculty. When we expressed our problems about practice during closed dormitories they said we should find a solution. When we said some students don't have two cameras for the exams, they said we should manage somehow.

During the lock down public transportation has been stopped and I was not able to take a bus from my dormitory to the health institution where I had my practice. I took a taxi with my classmate two times and it was 5 Euros each just for one way. This would mean I would spend 50 Euros a week just for the ride. With this amount of money I can buy food for 14 days. So we walked. It was winter and snow and we both got sick. But our

practice was also not what it should be, while most of the time we would substitute employees and we didn't really learn new skills like we should. Practice is a learning process, but we were told that it is epidemic crisis and that we should help. Sure, I understand if there are 4 nurses short at the department then nobody is really able to deal with students. But what about our practice, our learning? We were also sent to Covid-19 departments, which was stressful, while if we got infected our practice would be postponed and we would have to do it during summer months.

I think students were somehow forgotten during this epidemic. Elementary schools reopened, high schools reopened and we waited and waited to be able to go to our faculties and nothing. We were told to wait for instructions and guidelines and then you would wait and you didn't know if you should go to the dormitory in case the faculty reopens the next morning. And then you drive to the dormitory on Sunday just in case and you get an email in the evening, informing you that the faculty will stay closed Monday morning. And with whoever I spoke during that period, I would hear only frustrations and stress. I think we all share this experience."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It is less stressful for me now, since there are not so many restrictions any more. But there has been quite a bit of pressure on the students and no one has listened to us. They would address elementary schools and high schools. What about us students?"

"'Ah, we don't know exactly, we'll see what happens.' And no one knew and neither did we. 'What about us? Can you give us any instructions?' 'Yeah, we don't know yet.' We would listen to 'We don't know yet' all the time. And what should I do with that?"

**Keywords:** Student, dormitory, lock down, public transport, online school, disability, dyslexia

SI09

**Title:** How the epidemic impacted education of a 19 year old high schooler

**Narrative:** "I am 19 years old and I am a student. At the beginning of the epidemic I was in the 2nd half of my 3rd year in high school. At that time we all thought well, this will end soon, two weeks and everything will be over. When the lock down started and the schools closed we thought we will be back in our classrooms in no time. And this was a golden age of the quarantine for me. Professors also thought we will be back at school soon, so they gave us weekly assignments and when I was done with them I had a lot of free time. This was totally new to me, while otherwise I would be very tired all the time because of the school and I would not have a lot of time to do things for my pleasure. But during quarantine I was able to really focus on my hobbies, my passions and I really enjoyed it. It was great. So the rest of my 3rd year in high school was like that.

Before the beginning of the next year, my last year in high school we all thought the epidemic would go away, would end. Of course that did not happen and soon after the beginning of the school year another lock down happened and we stayed at home. This

time it was different, while the professors totally changed the regime of our online schooling. We had normal classes, only they were all held online. Every day I would stare at the screen for 7 hours or so and it was just awful. Very unpleasant. And after these 7 hours I was totally exhausted. And professors also didn't get direct feedback from us, so some topics were explained for too long, although being relatively simple. I was able to concentrate for just 2 hours or so, and then I totally lost my interest. When I go to school in person I acquire a lot of knowledge by just being in a classroom and listening to professors, but with online schooling I would quickly lose my interest. Zoom was slowly killing me. All the exams were also held online, which meant there was a lot of opportunity to cheat. Well, I did not want to cheat, while I really wanted to learn and to check my actual knowledge, because at the end of that year there was Matura exam. So I did not cheat, which meant I sometimes got lower grades than my classmates, who cheated, and that was quite funny.

And then came winter months, which were even more stressful, because when I finished my zoom classes it was almost dark outside. I had one of my most severe depressions of all times, I lost all my interest in all things, I just managed to finish my school work for the day and I went to bed. Beside that I do not live in close proximity of my school and none of my friends live close to me, so there was also a feeling of isolation. My friends, who live close to each other, they could at least hang out, socialise outdoors, meet, but I was not even able to do that and it was really stressful. I usually tend to get melancholic during winter months, but that winter was even worse, lock down and zoom and also a lot of work to be done for school. At the beginning I would hang out with my friends online, but after a while they started to hang out in person, which I was not able to do, while I live outside the city. Although my parents would drive me to the city to meet them, I couldn't ask them to do that all the time. And I was practically all alone. My social life totally died.

I think it was not necessary for schools to stay closed for such a long time. At the time the infections were high in age groups of 40 and 50 years old or so. So I think it was not necessary for kids to stay at home. Because we have consequences. Nevertheless I consider myself lucky, while I live in nature, we have a large house and I get along with my parents very well, so the quarantine was not really so bad than for other people. For example for some, who live cramped in a city in a small apartment.

In spring 2021 schools reopened and 4th year students were one of the first ones to return to classrooms for the reason we had Matura exam at the end of the school year. I think we still had a pretty nice end of high school and our grades at Matura were OK too. The exam was not a problem for me, while I chose subjects that I am good at. But you could see adjustments that were made in a sense of difficulty of certain topics on exams. I did good on Matura and was able to go to the desired faculty. But a lot of my classmates didn't continue their education, they said they will wait for epidemic to stop and things getting back to normal; some also wanted to take some time off.

Now I study at the faculty and I really like it. The majority of our lectures are held at the faculty, with some exceptions, if the professor is in quarantine or something like that. And it is also good that the recordings of last year's lectures, which were held online, are available and I can watch them if I miss a lecture or if I don't understand the topic. All of our exams are also in person, at the faculty and I hope this will not change. The faculty

has a RVT rule and I find it good, because the faculty environment is then relatively safe. Although I was never really afraid of the infection itself. Well, maybe at the beginning, but now we all got used to the fact the virus exists. It is hard for me to imagine that after 2 or 3 years everything will be the same as before.”

**Specifically telling quotes:** It was awful, really. These zoom lessons were slowly killing me. Just because I couldn't sit at the computer all day and listen.

**Keywords:** High school, social life, depression, online schooling, exams, faculty

SI10

**Title:** Student working in kindergarten feels like living in a SciFi movie

**Narrative:** “I am 22 years old, I work in a kindergarten as a student of preschool education. My studies are almost all held online, which I prefer, but it still somehow depends on the professor and on the topic of the lecture. I prefer my studies being online, while I work and after work I just go home and listen to my lectures online, which is easier for me than going to the faculty and stay there until 7 PM or so and then drive home and arrive there at 8PM or even later. But of course it is different than being physically present in the classroom. If the topic of the lecture interests you, then you can manage to listen online just fine. But if the topic is not so interesting it is easier to lose concentration, your thoughts just wander off, you get sleepy. Some lectures, however, are held at the faculty and we have a RVT rule. I have my pass printed out on paper and one time the security guard at the faculty could not scan my pass, so I was not able to attend the lecture.

At the beginning of the epidemic I worked part-time in shops and then everything closed and I was at home, waiting for the shops to reopen. Although I do not have children, mouth to feed, it was a few hundred Euros less per month and it is not nice. It was also not pleasant to wait at home, but you would like to work. Now I work full time in a kindergarten and in my group there are very small children. And current situation is such that we have a lot of sick leaves among employees, one after another. I am constantly waiting to catch the virus, but since I am vaccinated and also already had Covid-19 and I somehow know what to expect I am more at ease. But it is still quite stressful, since we are very exposed to the infection. We do not wear masks in the groups, while the communication with such small children is more difficult if we wear masks. The masks for teachers are obligatory on hallways and other common areas. But still things are quite different compared to the time before the epidemic. For example, every time a child sneezes or coughs or has a runny nose I am afraid. Now everything is Covid-19. And before I was vaccinated one kid had symptoms and I was terrified, I would not go home to see my parents or my grandparent, but now it is easier. My family they all are vaccinated and/or recovered and the pressure is not so intense anymore. But before I was vaccinated and somebody at work, a child or a coworker was infected I would avoid contacts with my family and I would also not meet my friends. I think it was a responsible

thing to do, while I work in such an environment where I am really exposed to the infection. Even now, after being vaccinated and also recovered, I still don't go to see my grandparent, I would feel very bad if I would bring infection with me. The whole situation is really surreal. One time a child in my group had a relatively high fever and the next day the parents still brought the kid to the kindergarten. If you ask me, the child should stay at home. We should all be more responsible. OK, I am young and the infection is not very threatening to me, but I could have somebody at home who is more vulnerable and I could infect them. Still, when I was sick from Covid-19, I was quite sick. I could see the difference between the flu and Covid-19.

When this whole thing started it was November 2019 and the virus was far, far away in China. But then it was in Europe and then first cases also in our country. And I was really afraid and I said I will quit my job, which I did not do. At that time I think everybody would get food supplies and other supplies, we would all go to the stores and made stocks. We would wash and disinfect all things we bought and I washed and disinfected my hands so much the skin on my hands was totally dry and harsh. I still have very dry skin, but it is better. And I noticed I changed my perception of people. Now I am aware how many germs people have. I was never like that. I have a certain aversion to people, even outdoors, if I go for a walk, I tend to avoid people. I was never very outgoing so I did not miss social contact so much, but now with this RVT rule I don't meet my friends at the cafe or we do not go shopping anymore, but we would go for a walk, since my best friend does not want to get vaccinated. So we can only take a walk together. You cannot go anywhere else, you can't eat in a restaurant, nothing. I think this RVT rule is not appropriate, I can be vaccinated and still spread the virus. It is like a science fiction movie. If I want to go to the store I have to show my ID, my pass, everything. Or when my family was infected I would go visit them and I would stand under the balcony and they would be on the balcony and we would have a conversation. And even though I am vaccinated and recovered I still don't visit my grandparent, I don't know when I will go. And my younger sibling who is at the beginning of the elementary school is already so used to the face masks that it is just horrible. Some children in kindergarten have been born in the epidemic. I feel really sorry for children. It is not a good time to be a kid.

During the first lock down, at the beginning of the epidemic my anxiety got worse. I suffer from anxiety and anxiety attacks for a few years now and when I was at home all the time during lock down I noticed it got worse. When I had to go to the city, I would have anxiety attacks, my heart would beat really fast, I would start to sweat and I would have a feeling I will pass out. And this happened every time I had to go to the city, while I was not used to go anymore. I stayed at home all the time and although I really enjoy being at home, my anxiety got worse because of that. At the end I would get anxiety attacks from fear of getting anxiety attacks. But I forced myself to go to the city and this helped me. I also learned I have to keep myself busy, because if I don't do anything for a few days my anxiety comes back. I have school, I have work. I started exercising and this would be a positive outcome of the epidemic. I now know how to control my anxiety. Sure, I still start to feel anxious, but now I am able to pull myself out of that feeling quite quickly and successfully.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It is strange, like a movie. You cannot go to your

grandparent's normally. It sucks. Like in a movie. And new variants all the time. Delta, Omicron. Like a science fiction movie. I watch a movie from 10 years ago and I find it weird they do not put on a face mask. Or now that you need a pass to go to the store. But I think people got used to it. At the beginning everything was scary. As someone would walk past me down the sidewalk, he would cover his face. Now we are used to live with the virus. We have adapted."

**Keywords:** Student, kindergarten, anxiety, mental health, fear of infection, new reality



## Slovakia

SK01

**Title:** Isolation and being dependent deteriorates seniors' health

**Narrative:** My name is Katarina and I am 72. For me, the first year of the pandemic was the worst. All my life I worked in cultural sector, for many years in a theatre. And these are bad times for the culture. I am very worried for the theatre, the culture in general, how it will survive. Artists need to perform otherwise they do not grow, the opposite. So that is very sad. Anyway, I was always surrounded by people. I spent my evenings in a theatre. Although I was already retired when it all started, I kept going to see performances, to help a bit, to be with people. This is a small theatre and a small town. I knew everybody. And then the theatre got closed. I did not know what to do in the evenings. During the day, you can find ways to occupy yourself, but in the evening? So I started to watch TV. And the virus was everywhere, all those horrible images. And it always started with the image of the virus, that weird ball with sticks. I hated that picture. Anytime it appeared on a screen my heart started to beat faster. One day I had a terrible chest pain, I was afraid that it was a heart attack so I went to the hospital. They did not find anything wrong. Then I understood, it is the virus, all those images of it. And I stopped watching news. Since then I only listened to the radio for news. And there was this isolation. I live alone, just me and these walls around. I only went to a shop and for a walk with a friend that lives nearby. We walked a lot, not that much for walking, but to kill time, to be with somebody. I am unhappy with the way us seniors were treated. We were not supposed to go anywhere. But for people like me who live alone it is horrible. We need to do something, to go somewhere that keeps us alive. And if we are not even allowed to go shopping, to do anything, it is like we are already dead. If you are able to take care of yourself, you should do that. My boyfriend is in a senior house. He is not able to take care of him anymore. In that case OK, let the others to take care of you. It is OK, if those who are there do not go anywhere. But it must have been difficult for them to be there without seeing anybody. For many months I was not allowed to see him, we just phoned each other. Only if he needed to see a doctor. They have this strange system there that relatives take clients to the doctor. Legally, I am not a relative, we are not married or anything but his family lives far away. I am the only person who left here for him. So anytime he needs to see a doctor, they call me. So that was the occasion I could see him. To go for a doctor's appointment. We took a taxi, it was too dangerous to go by train, and his daughter reimburses the expenses so it's OK, but it is quite costly. And then, a year ago or so, they had the virus in a senior house. 8 people died there. Fortunately, his illness was not that serious he did not needed to go to a hospital. But those days, knowing that the virus is in, people are dying and he is there... I felt helpless, I couldn't do anything. But he was OK, he survived. The second year was better. I got vaccinated, so I am not afraid anymore. I hope it works the way they say. This year I frequently visit my family, my boyfriend, I travel by train and I am not afraid. I even see friends from time to time. Like yesterday, few friends came to see me to wish New Year. We had a drink, we chatted and laughed. But only those that are vaccinated. I have some

friends who are not but I do not see them. We only communicate through phone. It is everybody's choice to get vaccinated but if they are not, I do not want to visit them, to get them infected or something. Like this December, a neighbour of mine died of Covid. She was not vaccinated, she was under influence of those hoaxes. She did not go out much but anyway she got it somewhere. I do not persuade anyone, it is their choice but I just do not see them in person. I got vaccinated as soon as possible, my niece helped me to register and everything. I did not hesitate at all.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "During the day, you can find ways to occupy yourself, but in the evening? So I started to watch TV. And the virus was everywhere, all those horrible images. And it always started with the image of the virus, that weird ball with sticks. I hated that picture. Anytime it appeared on a screen my heart started to beat faster. One day I had a terrible chest pain, I was afraid that it was a heart attack so I went to the hospital. They did not find anything wrong. Then I understood, it is the virus, all those images of it. And I stopped watching news."

"I am unhappy with the way us seniors were treated. We were not supposed to go anywhere. But for people like me who live alone it is horrible. We need to do something, to go somewhere that keeps us alive. And if we are not even allowed to go shopping, to do anything, it is like we are already dead. If you are able to take care of yourself, you should do that."

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**Keywords:** fear, health, care, seniors, culture, vaccination, media

**SK02**

**Title:** LGBT groups have been impacted heavily by limited access to services and increased radicalization of a society

**Narrative:** "My name is Linda and I am 36. I work as a counsellor in an LGBT organization. Work wise, these two years were terrible. Our counselling centre could be opened basically only during summers or couple months around it. It was either lockdown or there was a limitation of how many people could meet. We provide support groups and various community activities where people can gather. And we never knew whether it would be possible or not. The anti-pandemic measures were changing constantly, from week to week. So we never knew what and when we can do. We needed to think a lot about the forms of services we offer, to find appropriate ways because we knew that there is a need for our services but it is difficult to find the proper form. For our community, in person meetings are extremely important. We work in an area that is not

an open minded one. So often, we are the only safe space LGBT people have. I see how they flourish during our meetings and activities, how they can be finally who they are and how it helps them to be creative and so on. It is really often the only safe space they have. And during lockdowns those people were locked with their families with no safe space for them. Unfortunately, often the families are not safe. The number of disclosures of domestic violence raised significantly during the pandemic. We tried various online forms but not all of them worked. Individual online meetings worked quite well. Now we also do online small community meetings. I was very hesitant in the beginning. It is a completely different format, we even do not call them support groups, just community meetings. Online, I do not feel the dynamic, I do not see what it does with people, how they feel. Now I feel more comfortable about it but in the beginning I was not sure. So online works, but only for a limited portion of the community. As I have mentioned, many of those people do not have safe space at home and they cannot have online meetings. It works for those who live independently, but for teenagers or young adults living with their parents it is difficult. Or the e-mail exchange worked as well. But through e-mails it lasts much longer. You do not have enough information and you should be careful about the information you provide so people do not get overwhelmed by it. So you need to think carefully how to write it. I work with transgender people and the situation in this country is pretty complicated. There are no rules for the transition health care and there is just one doctor who offers this care and of course he is overloaded with demands. And the process is complicated and the pandemic made it even worse. People needed to wait for months to see the doctors they needed to see. You really need to think how to dose these information for people and I felt very bad that I could not offer them any positive information they need so badly. And for people less than 18 it got even more complicated. There is no health care available in the country, so they need to travel abroad but the borders were closed or there were traveling restrictions, so it was extremely complicated to get health care through out the transition process. All this situation made me very depressed and I doubted whether I do my job correctly, whether I should do it at all. Plus, we are an NGO and we are financed by projects, so there was also the fear whether the organization will survive the pandemic. And even more, the pandemic uncovered a lot of hate and aggression in a society. And I am very worried about how this society will develop in the future. Everybody is so radicalized, the society is polarized. It has never been easy for LGBT people in this country but nowadays the hate is getting out of the Internet to a real life. We already have reports on physical attacks in streets. I am afraid that we will move the same direction as Poland or Hungary and that would be a disaster. There were even similar law proposals in the Parliament. It did not passed but still more than 40 MPs voted for it! It is terrifying, together with the language they use, the polarization and the aggression, I am really really scared about the future.

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**Specifically telling quotes:** "The anti-pandemic measures were changing constantly, from week to week. So we never knew what and when we can do. We needed to think a lot about the forms of services we offer, to find appropriate ways because we knew that there is a need for our services but it is difficult to find the proper form. For our community, in person meetings are extremely important. We work in an area that is not an open minded one. So often, we are the only safe space LGBT people have."

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**Keywords:** LGBT, transgender, health care, community services, hate, violence

## SK03

**Title:** The day got blurred, no boundaries between a private life and work

**Narrative:** My name is Linda and I am 36. I work as a counsellor in an LGBT organization. When the pandemic started our services moved online. I ended up working from home, trying to figure out how to transform the services to a remote mode. It was not an easy thing to do. I tried hard but often I felt incompetent, I was doubting my capabilities, the way I work. But I did work hard. Often, the whole day got blurred, I worked the whole day, and I did not distinguish between my work and my life. Normally, I commute to work everyday, it separates the work from private life. But being in one flat the whole day, working, caring for household, being with my partner, I couldn't make boundaries. I felt that I was not doing any of those things properly. Sometimes I was just sitting and looking at the dishes not able to do force myself to wash them. I was depressed but I felt bad about being depressed. For so many people it was harder, they have lost their jobs, they couldn't provide for their families. We were fine, both of us working from home. And then my clients, it was so difficult for them, to get health care, to find a safe space... I am a transgendered woman after the transition, so I am already fine. Luckily, we have a supervision in my organization. After the first wave I spoke to our psychologist and I learnt that it is OK not to be OK. I gradually learnt how to separate work from my life. I stopped working in the evening. We found a balance with my partner, how to provide each other a space for being alone, to have some space just for yourself. I need it and now I know how to create it. So the second lockdown have been much better. Although I still missed being with people, I am very talkative, my work is about being with people, I often go to various activities but nothing happened for months. My partner is an introvert, he was happy about it, but for me it was hard, I really missed it. But there were some pluses too. As everything was closed, we managed to save some money and this summer we went for our first vacation at the sea side together. It was perfect, I read about four books. During the pandemic I was not even able to read books and there, I could really enjoy time for myself and time for each other. 2020 has been also difficult because I was worried about my mother, she is chronically ill, so for her it would be dangerous to get infected. Plus my father works abroad so he could bring it to home. And he did catch Covid. It was last year, just before Christmas. He was at work, abroad. We just knew that he was ill, but we did not know much about how he was, how serious it was. We could only communicate by phone but these were short calls as he got tired easily. I could hear his heavy breathing over the phone. Both my mum and I tried to persuade him to get to the hospital but he refused. I was really worried about him but luckily, everything went well and he got better. And then the vaccination started. I really worked hard to persuade my parents to get vaccinated. Mum was worried about her diagnosis, so I took her to her doctors who approved the vaccination. And they were also under the influence of various Internet disinformation. We had a lot of talks. At the end I told them that if they want to see me in person, they needed to get vaccinated, otherwise I would not come to visit. It helped. Later I also taught them how to be on the Internet, what are

the relevant information sources, how to fact check. My mother even banned some sources on Facebook and now it really changed here experience of being there. Myself, I limit my time on Facebook, I switched off notification, I do not follow certain people, no politicians at all. I need to use it because of my work but otherwise I would leave. It has become a horrible place full of hoaxes and hate, most of the things are extremely negative particularly for LGBT. Limiting my Facebook time also helped me to feel better.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “But being in one flat the whole day, working, caring for household, being with my partner, I couldn’t make boundaries. I felt that I was not doing any of those things properly. Sometimes I was just sitting and looking at the dishes not able to do force myself to wash them. I was depressed but I felt bad about being depressed.” “Myself, I limit my time on Facebook, I switched off notification, I do not follow certain people, no politicians at all. I need to use it because of my work but otherwise I would leave. It has become a horrible place full of hoaxes and hate, most of the things are extremely negative particularly for LGBT. Limiting my Facebook time also helped me to feel better.”

**Keywords:** work-life balance, depression, vaccination, Facebook, Internet hate

**SK04**

**Title:** Killing loneliness by work

**Narrative:** My name is Nina and I am 29. I work as a journalist focusing mostly on women, refugees and other human rights issues. I travel frequently to cover these issues. The pandemic has changed a lot for me. Many planned trips had to be cancelled. I was selected for a training program in the US but finally it was online. I won some stipends to cover some issue but I still did not manage to go there as it is difficult to plan anything. First, the borders were closed, then it was possible to travel but flights got cancelled, the measures have been constantly changing. To plan a journalist trip is different than to plan a vacation. So during the first wave I ended up closed in my flat with borders closed. I was not sure for how long and when I would be able to continue with my job. So I took a lot of other work, various projects that I was able to carry out from home. I took too much of it and I had enormous amount of work to do. In fact, I still do. Now I understand that it is not that much about fear of having no work but rather I try to kill loneliness. I live alone, I do not have a boyfriend and I am not in contact with my family. So if I cannot go anywhere, I am in the flat. Trying to keep busy with work to not to feel lonely. I even developed a touch hunger. I have really missed bodily contact so I found this blind masseur not far from my place and I go there regularly for massages to deal with it, to be touched by another person. I also miss sport activities, I was used to go to gym regularly, now it depends on the measures, sometimes it is possible sometimes not. During lockdowns I used to go to nature, I found a friend who is a real hiker, so I walk with her although it is not my type of activity. But I don’t want to complain. There are many people for whom it has been more difficult. I went to cover some issues, I was at

Polish borders, in Donbas, on a boat saving refugees in the Mediterranean. Those people have real problems, they fight for their life and dignity. I am doing fine. I have everything. I has not been scared of Covid at all. Maybe if I am a senior or ill I would, but I am not. But many people are and it makes us less empathic. I remember the first Covid summer. I could finally travel to cover some issues, I met with several refugees or migrants abroad. When I returned I was advised not to go to the office and to be in a quarantine. Everybody went abroad, not just me. People went on vacation and they did not stayed in a quarantine. They were simply afraid that I would bring Covid from refugees. As if it is any different than to be in a hotel. Refugees are isolated, so isolated that they have rarely got infected. I was cautious, I met people outdoors, I got tested a lot. Ironically, I caught the virus. But not on my trips, not from refugees but in the office from a colleague. Last Christmas I spent sick at home. It was an interesting experience but the illness was not that serious in my case. I did not need to see a doctor or anything. However, I had a bad experience with doctors during the pandemic. Once I hit my head heavily at home. It hurt after hours and I felt dizzy so I went to the emergency. The medical personnel behaved horribly. They yelled at me and they acted like I am a pretender. I tried to explain that I lived alone and I just wanted to be sure but they did not listen. I was young, able to walk and talk so they did not care about me. I believe I had a concussion that time but I do not know. So before I thought, it is OK that you live alone, if something happens, you go to the emergency, after this experience, I do not want to go there anymore.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “Now I understand that it is not that much about fear of having no work but rather I try to kill loneliness. I live alone, I do not have a boyfriend and I am not in contact with my family. So if I cannot go anywhere, I am in the flat. Trying to keep busy with work to not to feel lonely.”

“I even developed a touch hunger. I have really missed bodily contact so I found this blind masseur not far from my place and I go there regularly for massages to deal with it, to be touched by another person.”

“When I returned I was advised not to go to the office and to be in a quarantine. Everybody went abroad, not just me. People went on vacation and they did not stayed in a quarantine. They were simply afraid that I would bring Covid from refugees. As if it is any different than to be in a hotel. Refugees are isolated, so isolated that they have rarely got infected.”

**Keywords:** loneliness, work-life balance, touch hunger, refugees, access to health care

**SK05**

**Title:** The pandemic has changed my life completely

**Narrative:** My name is Monika and I am 34 years old. The pandemic has changed my life completely. I had family, four children. And suddenly three of them stayed at home on online schooling. Plus a small baby. Two of the kids were my partner’s children, one

is mine from a previous relationship and we have a baby together. My partner went to work, so everything was on me. Three online schools, sending homework to teachers, for the whole day I was dealing with schools and taking care of the baby. That's when the problems started. Kids did not want to do homework, they were inventing things, quarrelling all the time, they behaved badly to my daughter and when I defended her, I was accused of preferring her. There was a lot of tension in the house. Kids did not respect me, one of them stopped to communicate with me. Then it got better, but it took quite a time. The younger ones went to school and I stayed at home with the oldest. She stopped to communicate, she stayed all day closed in her room, she did not eat. I didn't know what to do and my partner did not want to deal with it. Sometimes he told me to leave her alone, other times he accused me that I did not take care of her. I suggested to see a psychologist, but he refused. I was afraid that something would happen to her. Me personally, I was exhausted. I was closed at home for more than a year and all the time it was the same. He did not help with anything. Everything was on me, taking care of children, the baby, the household, the house. It was all on me and I couldn't take it anymore. Once, there was this situation, we came back home, he complained about the mess in the house. I was tired so I told him that kids can do some cleaning and then we... He smashed the plate on a table. We had an argument that I wanted to solve things and he did not. I said something bad about the behaviour of the oldest. He got mad and hit me in front of the kids. My daughter started to cry, so he hit her as well. I tried to defend her so he hit me again. I fell on the floor with my baby in my arms. Then the oldest called his parents. I took my daughter and a baby and left the house. His parents came and took me to their place. Then we lived with them for a while. His mother tried to arrange things, she found a doctor for him that gave him some pills. Later we came back. But I still was very afraid of him. For two months I was not able to function properly, I couldn't sleep, I had headaches. I was still breastfeeding so I couldn't take medicine much. Then his kids went for vacation and we stayed at home. Everything was fine. One day, he got his vaccine that day, so I took kids outside so he can rest. When we came home, he was sitting with a bear. I felt that it wasn't good. I wanted to drive my daughter to my parents but he refused to give me a car. So I called my parents to come and take her. He started to shout on me, to call me names. My daughter started to cry. He did not allowed us to take anything. I was outside with two kids and a phone. That was all. I called the police. With them I could take some basic things and my parents came to pick us up. We lived with them but they were not happy about it. We did not go on very well so I was looking for some place to live. But any time I called to rent a flat, it was strange. There was this guy who asked me for "favors" if I would move in. Then I called to this shelter. It was in that period when there was not a problem to move in. I am in a sporadic contact with my partner. He does not care about the baby. He has seen her twice, he has never asked how she is, whether we need something. We are all alone. I want to move. It is fine here, they help us but I would appreciate more privacy. And also we were in the quarantine. My daughter got Covid at school. I am not vaccinated, I still breastfeed and I am afraid of the vaccines. We spent a month in a quarantine, three of us in one room. It was tough. We couldn't leave the room plus this telemedicine is quite special. Kids were OK but I got very sick, fevers and coughing. The older one helped with a baby. And they helped us here in a shelter as well. So we had the first hand experience with Covid. I

hope that everything will get better from now on.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “My partner went to work, so everything was on me. Three online schools, sending homework to teachers, for the whole day I was dealing with schools and taking care of the baby. That’s when the problems started.”

“Once, there was this situation, we came back home, he complained about the mess in the house. I was tired so I told him that kids can do some cleaning and then we... He smashed the plate on a table. We had an argument that I wanted to solve things and he did not. I said something bad about the behaviour of the oldest. He got mad and hit me in front of the kids.”

“But any time I called to rent a flat, it was strange. There was this guy who asked me for “favors” if I would move in. Then I called to this shelter. It was in that period when there was not a problem to move in.

**Keywords:** intimate partner violence, physical violence, care for children, harassment, lack of support

**SK06**

**Title:** We take this Covid differently, it does not stress us that much that other people

**Narrative:** My name is Sylvia. I am 36 years old. I have four children. I was with a partner during the first wave. I experienced violence, both psychological and physical. He also took my money. He stole from me when he didn’t find a job and didn't have money. He had no money, only I had parental allowances. But at that time a lot of money was needed. The children went on online schooling, I had to buy equipment and increase the data. In general, I have a feeling that more things are needed when they are online than when they go to school. That was very challenging. I still breastfeed the youngest, online school for older kids, it was very difficult. Sometimes I couldn’t take it anymore. I was in a terrible state. When I came here, to this shelter, I weighed 49 kilos. The children were also in a bad state. He behaved terribly towards them too. When he hit my daughter so she needed to see a doctor, I knew I had to leave. For the safety of myself and my children. But I had nowhere to go. I'm from an orphanage, I don't have a family. My brother helps me with money sometimes, but he doesn't always have some. The shelters were also closed, and with so many children as I have, it's not easy to find one. When they told me in June that I could come here, it was unbelievable. But I had to figure out how to leave, how to pack. I can't lie, everyone sees it. I said we were going on a trip to explain the packing. At the end, I succeeded, but my daughter told me that she knew we were leaving. It was difficult in the beginning, we were afraid to go out, the children were afraid to go to school, we were scared that he would find us. Then we got a restraining order, so we could go out. We've got better since we are here. Me and the kids. They help us a lot here with the authorities and psychological counselling. We also get some groceries, some cosmetics when I need it. This is a big help, because I only have parental allowance and I need to pay for everything, things to school, kids’ courses, food, diapers

for the baby. Sometimes, when I count it together what I have to pay for, I'm in the red. The allowance is just not enough. But now I at least know how much I have, what I need to pay and that I need to save on the rest. I also tell the children that they have to be modest, that they can't always eat what they want, because other things are needed. But children have to have everything needed. I do my best so they have food at school, all things for school, everything they need. Before, the money went to my account, the partner took the credit card and I even did not know how much was left. It is much better now. But then another disaster came. The father of my child, it is my ex-partner, not the one I left, got an interim measure by court so he can have my daughter. So now I wait for the court trial to get her back. But even in courts everything is delayed by the pandemic. Once the judge is in a quarantine, then we were in one and couldn't attend the hearing. We don't even had a hearing date yet and I am without my child for months. We will not be happy until she returns to us. The father also makes all sorts of problems so I can't see her. He invents things about the pandemic, he wants me to be tested for Covid all the time. Testing means additional money. I am vaccinated, I am responsible for the children, not for myself. Although I'm still breastfeeding, I got vaccinated. And the older children, they don't want to see him. So we wrote to the court that they should hear them in person that they themselves would tell them that they did not want to go there and why. After all, they are old enough to tell for themselves. We'll see how it turns out this time. So there's a lot to think about, the kids, their needs, the school, and now the court. There's a lot going on, sometimes I can't take it anymore. But I have to. We take this Covid differently. I am not saying it is not serious, we also had it. But it doesn't stress us the way that it stresses people. They do stress that shops are closed or something. I have to deal with the court, the police and everything, Covid is on top of it. It is a problem, mainly financially because sometimes I really do not have enough for what we need.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I was with a partner during the first wave. I experienced violence, both psychological and physical. He also took my money. He stole from me when he didn't find a job and didn't have money. He had no money, only I had parental allowances. But at that time a lot of money was needed. The children went on online schooling, I had to buy equipment and increase the data." "I knew I had to leave. For the safety of myself and my children. But I had nowhere to go. I'm from an orphanage, I don't have a family. My brother helps me with money sometimes, but he doesn't always have some. The shelters were also closed, and with so many children as I have, it's not easy to find one." "They help us a lot here with the authorities and psychological counselling. We also get some groceries, some cosmetics when I need it. This is a big help, because I only have parental allowance and I need to pay for everything, things to school, kids' courses, food, diapers for the baby. Sometimes, when I count it together what I have to pay for, I'm in the red. The allowance is just not enough."

**Keywords:** intimate partner violence, care for children, lack of resources, poverty, custody, postponement of court decisions

**SK07**

**Title:** For me, the pandemic was a separation time

**Narrative:** “My name is Mira and I am 35 years old. My second child was born shortly before the pandemic. We have already had problems in our relationship, we started couple counselling. We attended one session but then the lockdown came so the others were cancelled. I had two small children, I didn’t have much time to follow the news. I only about the pandemic from my husband. He described it as a disaster, I would better not go anywhere, not to see anyone, not even my parents. He bought large stock of food and if anything was missing I shopped online. However, he still went to work, he went out, to see his child from the previous marriage. I was left alone at home with children. I don’t know whether the pandemic made the relationship worse. Maybe, as I was suddenly alone and isolated, I became more aware of it. It was during the first wave, when after some incident I called the counsellor. She told me that I experience violence and gave me a number for a helpline for abused women. I called them. I became more and more aware that what I experience is violence and that I had to leave with the children. So for me, the pandemic was a separation time. I've left the partner for three times in those two years. Every time I left, the same thing followed, threats, promises, declarations of love. We have really small children, so I wanted to give it a chance. First time, I returned in the summer. Everything was perfect for a few months, but then it went back to where it had been before. The second time, I left in the fall. At that time, I had already found a lawyer and asked the court preliminary custody of my children. On her advice, I began to gather evidence of violence. They have everything here, in the centre, if needed. The second time I didn't want to go back to our house, I had a lot of bad memories connected to the place. He agreed to rent an apartment and to start again. Even that he would go somewhere to a psychologist. But the history repeated. He did not keep his promises and did not go anywhere. Everyone told me nothing would change, but I wanted to give it a chance. The third time I filed for divorce. I don't want to go to the police, just as a last resort. That would ruin his life, he would lose his job, and I don't want that. Also because of him, but mainly because of the children. I always went to my parents, we now live with them. Fortunately, we have a very good relationship and they have always helped me, although it had not been easy. He threatened them too, my mother even told me once that she didn't know if we would survive. At first, I was also afraid that the threats would come true and he would really hurt me or take my children. But now I only take it as a threat. I don't think he really will. He is not very interested in children either. He wants to see them, but only when it suits him. I rather feel like he is using them as a tool against me. I have nothing against them seeing him. But I don't want them to sleep at his place. They are still small and I'm not sure he would take care of them. And I'm afraid of his anger. The older child is already aware of what he does and does not want to be with him that much. He went to the kindergarten later than expected due to the pandemic, so he was at home and experienced it all with me. There are also problems with him in the kindergarten, he doesn't want to go there. I don't know if he doesn't like the kindergarten. But the psychologist told me that it can also be possible that he is worried about me. When he was at home, he defended me against my husband, and now he may feel that he is not there and he cannot help me. Maybe if it

wasn't for a pandemic, he wouldn't have to be at home and he wouldn't have experienced it that way. And also, before the pandemic we could go somewhere, meet people, we all had a place where we were fine, where we could breathe. Then we just stayed at home and that nice space disappeared. We spent all time at a place where mother didn't feel well and the child felt it.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I was left alone at home with children. I don't know whether the pandemic made the relationship worse. Maybe, as I was suddenly alone and isolated, I became more aware of it." "So for me, the pandemic was a separation time. I've left the partner for three times in those two years. Every time I left, the same thing followed, threats, promises, declarations of love. We have really small children, so I wanted to give it a chance." Before the pandemic we could go somewhere, meet people, we all had a place where we were fine, where we could breathe. Then we just stayed at home and that nice space disappeared. We spent all time at a place where mother didn't feel well and the child felt it."

**Keywords:** intimate partner violence, custody, divorce, care for children, care facilities

**SK08**

**Title:** Father was left out from all the medical stuff

**Narrative:** My name is Maja and I am 35. I gave birth during the second wave, before the vaccination started. It is my first child so I cannot assess how it would be different without Covid. But the truth is that both doctors and a hospital were very strict about the tests. My gynaecologist required negative test before every check-up and the same with the hospital. I knew that I need to stay negative so I do not miss anything important. The first trimester I worked mostly from home, so that was OK, then the summer came and there were almost no cases. When the situation got worst I was more careful but at that time I did not know many people who got sick, so I was not worried that much. As the due date approached I isolated myself. Being positive could really complicate giving birth with all those additional measures. Luckily, both I and my partner have not been positive up to now. Our family, they were sick but nothing serious. But us, we somehow managed to escape the virus so far. I gave birth later than expected so I spent some days in the hospital before and after the birth. The rules were really strict, no visits, basically we were not expected to leave the room. There was no Wi-Fi, no TV, nothing in the room. I mean, few days were OK, but there were women who had some problems and needed to stay there for weeks. Being pregnant, scared whether everything would be OK and totally isolated for weeks must have been extremely difficult. My partner was allowed to accompany me during the delivery, he could hold the child for a while but then he needed to leave. He saw us again only when he came to pick us from the hospital. He also couldn't attend any pregnancy check-ups, to see ultrasound pictures, nothing. And it continued afterwards. Only one parent was allowed to come to the doctor with a child, so I did all the visits myself. I needed to carry the seat and the baby few days after

Caesarean because he couldn't help me. So due to the pandemic he was left out of all these medical stuff. I did not experienced any delay or refusal of medical care. I mean, with me it was OK until I was negative and with the baby, all those check-ups are needed to be done on time because the problems can get worse later on. He had some health issues but fortunately, it's fine now. So no, everything was on time. Nevertheless, the poor baby experienced his first nose test being couple of weeks old. At that time there was a rule that even new-borns needed to be tested. Later on, they did not require the test and then later they did, the measures were changing. So it became sort of my mummy routine to go for a walk with a baby, get tested and get back home. Sometimes even a baby got tested if it was necessary. Fortunately, the testing place here tested even babies, I know that somewhere they were not, so that would be more difficult. Another thing was that grandparents could see the baby only after six weeks. We needed to be sure that none of us got infected until all necessary doctors' visits were over. My partner is often tested due to his work so I could be quite sure that he is negative. Than it was possible to get a vaccine. I consulted it with my gynaecologist, with the paediatrician and they both supported it, so no problem. Now everybody in the family is vaccinated. The social isolation is not a big problem, I mean, on maternity leave you are isolated anyway. At work I used to be always with people, so it was kind of refreshing in the beginning. In the neighbourhood there are many young mothers so we can meet outside and go for a walk. I meet with few friends and my family but the truth is that I avoid bigger gatherings and think about whom I meet. I guess it all became part of a daily routine, assessing risks of infection, testing, not participating in baby activities. I mean, my baby is too small, it doesn't matter. It must be more difficult for older kids not doing things. But there is one thing that might affect him. He is still a baby and he is having online calls! With grandparents, his father if he is away for work and so on. Normally he would not touch a phone at this age but now he uses it regularly. Even, when the phone rings he demands the phone because he thinks it is for him. We will see how this will develop in the future, this online generation from the diapers.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "But the truth is that both doctors and a hospital were very strict about the tests. My gynaecologist required negative test before every check-up and the same with the hospital. I knew that I need to stay negative so I do not miss anything important." "He also couldn't attend any pregnancy check-ups, to see ultrasound pictures, nothing. And it continued afterwards. Only one parent was allowed to come to the doctor with a child, so I did all the visits myself. I needed to carry the seat and the baby few days after Caesarean because he couldn't help me. So due to the pandemic he was left out of all these medical stuff." "He is still a baby and he is having online calls! With grandparents, his father if he is away for work and so on. Normally he would not touch a phone at this age but now he uses it regularly. Even, when the phone rings he demands the phone because he thinks it is for him. We will see how this will develop in the future, this online generation from the diapers."

**Keywords:** pregnancy, delivery, reproductive health, care, testing

**SK09**

**Title:** The responsibility for others and difficult decisions to make

**Narrative:** "My name is Maja and I am 35. I work in a film industry. The first pandemic year was quite difficult. Now the industry has adopted, big productions even have a Covid coordinator. But the first year, we were totally unprepared. There were no guidelines, no extra budget lines, nothing. With one project, we were quite lucky. The shooting was planned for summer, so during the spring lockdown we mostly did the preparation and that was possible to do it online. Actually, we did not have other option as the director got stuck in another country. The shooting was more or less OK, most of it was outdoors, and there were almost no positive cases at that time. We needed to do some shooting in autumn but not much. The other project I worked for was more complicated. We needed to postpone the shooting three times. Plus the main character was a senior. Then you really need to consider safety. I mean, what if he would get infected, what if he would die? This was the most difficult part - the responsibility. You are not responsible just for yourself but for the bunch of people. You need to think how to make everything as safe as possible. On the other hand you can never be completely safe. So we made these difficult decisions. Like, is it enough to have antigen tests if PCR are more expensive and sometimes the access to them was complicated? And you do not want to limit the directors, you cannot really tell them to have only young actors. You also need to be careful about the budget. On one hand, no extra expenses were planned for testing, on the other hand, if the virus would get spread on the set you need to postpone everything and that costs money as well. So safety goes hand in hand with a smooth operation. We needed to follow the measures all the time to make good decisions, not just national, but also local and later on special guidelines for the industry were developed. Not always the three of them were inline. So this was very difficult to make those decisions, to keep everybody and everything safe. In the beginning I was also stressed about the family economy. Both I and my partner work in a film industry so we didn't know how it would develop. Plus we were expecting a baby. Fortunately, we were lucky, both of us have been able to work. But many people working in culture were not. I mean, if you work for living culture like theatre or music that must have been devastating.

And I have another experience with Covid. My grandma died during the pandemic. We do not know whether it was Covid or not. There were many cases of it in that hospital at the time and she had troubles with breathing. Nevertheless, she has been seriously sick already so her death was not unexpected. However, it was difficult for the family. First, we couldn't visit her in a senior home where she was placed. When she got transported to the hospital it was even worse. Finally, my father managed to see her before she died. I am not sure how legal it was. It helped him a lot, to at least have an opportunity to say good bye. The funeral was with all the restrictions, limited just to a few family members. As the restaurants were closed, we met at home, just us, family. I have been to many funerals, but actually, all of us agreed that this one was special. It is a pity that there could not have been more people on the official part, but for the second part, it was really good that it was private, no stress, no big organization and a really intimate family

experience. And we were able to see each other in person finally.

**Specifically telling quotes:** “The other project I worked for was more complicated. We needed to postpone the shooting three times. Plus the main character was a senior. Then you really need to consider safety. I mean, what if he would get infected, what if he would die? This was the most difficult part - the responsibility. You are not responsible just for yourself but for the bunch of people.” “In the beginning I was also stressed about the family economy. Both I and my partner work in a film industry so we didn’t know how it would develop. Plus we were expecting a baby. Fortunately, we were lucky, both of us have been able to work. But many people working in culture were not.” “First, we couldn’t visit her in a senior home where she was placed. When she got transported to the hospital it was even worse. Finally, my father managed to see her before she died. I am not sure how legal it was. It helped him a lot, to at least have an opportunity to say good bye.”

**Keywords:** film industry, responsibility for health of others, economic insecurity, death of a closed person, family

## SK10

**Title:** I took care of my sick husband. He died.

**Narrative:** My name is Ester and I am 76. I have very negative feelings about this pandemic. The first year was quite OK, my husband felt more or less fine, we have a garden so we could go outside, so it was not that bad. But the second year was terrible. The health of my husband deteriorated seriously after the vaccination. After the second dose he ended up in coma. I called the ambulance, they said that all they could do is to take him to the hospital. We as family decided not to. So I had him at home, for five days he was in coma, I just gave him infusions. I called his doctor to come and see him but she refused, that they have not visit patients. But how could I transfer him to the doctor? My daughter got upset and finally she persuaded the doctor to come. When she came, he was already awoken and was able to react. However, the advices she gave me were not of any use. So this was quite a bad experience with doctors. Fortunately, everything else worked well. I got prescriptions for all medicine and tools we needed. The physiotherapeutic nurses who were coming were very nice. My son is a doctor, so I consulted with him often. We bought adjustable bed so it was more comfortable for him and for me as well. Without it I would not be able to take care of him. The care, it was mainly on my shoulders. I needed to wake up twice a night, I couldn’t leave him for more than hour. Only in the morning, when I was sure he was asleep I went to do something in the garden, to cheer myself up a bit. Otherwise I spent all the time with him, I was going just to the shop or pharmacy, nothing else. When I needed to go to the doctor, my daughter came for that period. I asked about the aid services but they said that they could come in precise hours, it was not good for me. I needed them when I needed to go somewhere, not when it suits them. It was not easy. It was exhausting, physically and

psychologically. Sometimes I needed to call neighbours to help me if he had fell on the floor. I alone was not able to pick him up. He had never got well again and he died this winter. So for me it was a very difficult and said period. Now I am alone and sometimes I do not know what to do. Fortunately, my grand son moved to my place, I have someone to talk to for a while. Another thing was that for quite long periods I could not see my family, me kids and grand children, my siblings. I have not been in my native region for two years. We just called. My son is a doctor and he lives in a different town, for him it was very difficult to find time to see us. My daughter, she lives nearby, nevertheless, it is a different district, so in lock-down periods even she couldn't come. But when she could she did, she helped with my husband a bit. If there was not the pandemic, everything would have been different. I am very angry on the decision makers, how they treated us as seniors and as persons who not vaccinated. When I heard that one MP said something about people over 65 that they are not productive anymore, it is so dehumanizing. And the names they has called us unvaccinated. I felt insulted. I take care of my health, of course, I have health issues, in my age it is normal, plus all the care for my husband affected my spine. I had bad experience with vaccination before, so I did not want it. But I complied with all the rules, I behave responsibly. But why only vaccinated people are responsible? And those rules, they were illogical, we could go to shops but not to a church. Why one place is OK and the other is not? For me personally, it was difficult that I could not go to church. Spiritual life is important for me and if you are in a situation that you cannot help your loved one, you just need to be there, it would help me to go to church a lot. This vaccination division divided society a lot. Some of my friends, whom I have known for years, we helped each other a lot before, now they do not want to see me. The are vaccinated and they are scared, I am not but I am not scared. But it really impacted the relationships and I feel sorry for that.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "But the second year was terrible. The health of my husband deteriorated seriously after the vaccination. After the second dose he ended up in coma. I called the ambulance, they said that all they could do is to take him to the hospital. We as family decided not to. So I had him at home." "The care, it was mainly on my shoulders. I needed to wake up twice a night, I couldn't leave him for more than hour. Only in the morning, when I was sure he was asleep I went to do something in the garden, to cheer myself up a bit." "For me personally, it was difficult that I could not go to church. Spiritual life is important for me and if you are in a situation that you cannot help your loved one, you just need to be there, it would help me to go to church a lot.

**Keywords:** Care of an elderly, death of a loved one, fatigue, faith, vaccination, division of a society

## United Kingdom

UK01

**Title:** G, young LGBT woman struggles as a Cardiac Nurse during the pandemic

**Narrative:** "I am a 28 year old woman working as a cardiac nurse in the South West of England. I am a Band 6 nurse and manage a team of 6 other nurses. I rent a house, which we moved into 8 months ago during the pandemic, and live with my wife and pet rabbits. I am also studying a Masters degree in Nursing which I started last year and undertake modules at different times throughout the year.

In the first wave of lockdown, work was incredibly quiet. All procedures were cancelled and in fact I struggled to get work due to the lack of patients in the hospital. When things started to get a bit busier, I unfortunately contracted Covid and had to take time off work. Vaccines were not available yet at that stage but I was lucky in that my symptoms weren't very severe, I was just incredibly tired. Sadly my wife also contracted Covid and, while her symptoms were also not too bad, we had to continue to isolate which affected our work lives.

In August 2020 we were due to get married with over 100 of our family and friends. We were so excited to take the next step in our lives however we had to cancel our wedding and postpone it to 2021, and now to 2022. When lockdown restrictions eased in the summer of 2020 we decided to still get married officially however we were only able to have 15 guests and a small meal, something which although was nice, just didn't feel quite right or the right way to celebrate our love. Some friends and family were also unable to attend. We had to cancel holidays and our honeymoon, and we both felt very disappointed and saddened by the situation.

By winter 2020 the hospital was under extreme pressure. There was still no proper testing in place and no beds available for new patients, causing an intense amount of stress for hospital employees and patients. I had incredibly bad experiences at work that I don't think I'll ever forget. The NHS were forced to send nurses wherever they were needed and so I often had to work much further away and in Wales, meaning the lengthy commute added to the stress of the job. The Intensive Care Units (ICU) were completely full to capacity and we were having to turn patients away from our cardiac units as well, several of which subsequently had worsened conditions or passed away as a result. I had one particularly traumatic experience in which a middle-aged woman came in who was suffering very badly from breathing difficulties from Covid. She had previously suffered from lung cancer and as such did not meet the strict criteria at the time to be admitted to the ICU, which required patients to be young, fit and with no previous health conditions due to the lack of beds. I was in charge of the patient and we put her on a machine that forces oxygen in her lungs, however the longer you spend on the machine the more risk of getting a pneumothorax where your lung collapses, and this is what happened to her. We had to place her on another machine but she passed away very quickly after that. It didn't have to happen and it was a very scarring experience as it was due more to the circumstance than her illness. I thought I was getting over it but feel very

emotional discussing it now. I wonder if I have PTSD. The hospital were very supportive and I've been helped by wellbeing support nurses and phone counselling but it is hard to move on.

Over the last year I have also been doing my Masters, however doing these courses online has been a real shame. Having been out of education for a while it is daunting to return, and online environments felt strange and awkward. I wanted to learn from the other students and I feel like the virtual environment has really hindered that experience."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I was excited to learn from other students and share our experiences but I haven't been able to do that. The whole experience is different due to it being online."

"It's been so hard. I thought I was over it but I really struggle with the things I've seen at work and how to cope."

**Keywords:** Struggle, loneliness, PTSD, distress, nursing, pressure, marriage, mental health.

**UK02**

**Title:** Young PhD student struggles with Covid interruptions

**Narrative:** "I am a 25 year old woman studying a PhD in Computational Biology in Oxfordshire. I am now in my fifth year of study as I have had to suspend my student status twice and get an extension, but I should be handing my thesis in in April. I work both in the lab and on computers. I rent a flat privately with my boyfriend, who is also a PhD student, however I spend a lot of time back at my parents home which is nearby.

In March 2020, my lab shut completely due to the Coronavirus. It only reopened for researchers who were undertaking Covid related research and then reopened to other researchers in waves. I was unable to return to the lab until August, meaning I'd lost 5 months of research time. I had to keep a log of how Covid affected my research to inform applications for time and funding extensions and was required to stay in contact with supervisors, however this was more difficult than before. During the 5 months I spent out of the lab I was able to analyse some data, however we have since found that the cells we were using were incorrect and therefore a lot of time and research money was wasted, which was very disappointing. During the pandemic I really struggled with motivation and was not working to my full capacity. It was hard to work at home and key working spaces such as the library that I used to utilise were no longer available. My college were very supportive however and we were allowed to apply for grants for equipment which were not means tested and this really helped me to set up my workspace at home.

I had weekly meetings with my supervisors however they felt like I was not communicating with them enough. This was difficult to do as I had little to report on my work. I was worried that my project wasn't going well and that I was running out of time.

I commented in a student survey that I felt concerned about my course and my supervisor was annoyed that I had not raised this issue with them first which strained our relationship. My Director of Graduate Studies was however very supportive and almost like a mother figure, and she supported me in applying for two extensions which helped to take the pressure off and relieve some of the stress.

In the first lockdown I was living in my parents house with my boyfriend and sister until restrictions eased and this was very difficult as it was an intense amount of time together in one house. When the lab reopened in August I spent a lot of time there.

I moved in with my boyfriend in May 2021. In terms of getting work done we were bad influences on each other and it was very hard to get motivated in the same space, and so I often return to my parents to get work done.

There have been many disappointing parts of Covid. I lost contact with a lot of my old university friends as I was unable to travel to visit them. My PhD has taken a lot longer than expected and I missed an opportunity to do an internship with a large pharmaceutical company that would have enabled me to network and make connections for future employment. The social side of my life greatly suffered and I lost some of the student experience. I was also President of a university club during this time and therefore was responsible for undertaking health and safety risk assessments and providing PPE for my clubmates. During a time of uncertainty I was therefore taking on even more work on top of my PhD."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "My PhD is taking so much longer than it should have and I'm sick of it at this stage, I just want to be finished."

"All of us under one roof was very intense and not good for motivating me to do work, so I wasn't very productive."

**Keywords:** PhD, further education, university, support, motivation.

**UK03**

**Title:** 70 year old man living alone with health anxiety.

**Narrative:** "I am a 70 year old man living alone as I am separated from my partner. I have two daughters and two granddaughters. I am still working as the Director of an engineering company as I have done for 25 years but am semi-retired. I have quite a few medical issues, including heart failure, atrial fibrillation (a heart condition), gout and type 2 diabetes.

Due to the pandemic, ongoing care for people with conditions has been less than adequate. I haven't seen a doctor now for over 18 months whereas previously I would see them every 3 months minimum in order to check my progress and review medication. I have had 8 cancelled appointments so far and my blood tests have been very irregular. For my diabetes, I haven't been seen for 18 months and am still struggling to get an appointment even though I'm a high risk patient. It's a pretty dire picture. I take 15 tablets a day and my drugs regime hasn't been reviewed since the pandemic began.

A few months ago I had a foot injury and haven't sought help for it yet, I feel as though the NHS is under such pressure I won't be seen unless it's urgent. I feel a mental strain due to my medical worries and living alone made me increasingly concerned as I was worried no one would find me if I had an accident or fell unwell.

During the initial lockdown I shut the business down but we came back to work as soon as possible. A great deal of the people I work with in other companies are over the age of 60 and so were high risk so we needed to be careful. Of course I am also vulnerable so had to ensure to take precautions. The quantity of our work did not really diminish so for the large part I carried on working, even though I should really have been shielding due to my conditions. Due to Brexit and Covid a lot of our prices increased and, alongside material shortages from factory closures, our industry did encounter some difficulties.

The pandemic did make me think more about my life. I want to start slowing down with work more due to my age and use my time more wisely for vacations and spending time with family. I found the lockdown especially taxing as it was very hard to stay in the house when I was alone. As an older man I did luckily have support from my family and was able to rely on my daughters for shopping and prescriptions which was a major advantage. In some ways things have improved as I talk more with my daughters, however I have missed key moments in my grandchildren's lives such as first birthdays and them walking and talking which I can never get back. During the lockdowns I created a nature garden at my house which was both a project that kept me busy and allowed me to see my grandchildren more when restrictions were relaxed. Playgrounds were still not open and therefore they visited my garden in order to play which was lovely.

I also had two pets, a dog and a cat that sadly both passed away during the pandemic. This was especially hard as they were great companions to me and the house felt very empty once they were gone. I greatly look forward to things planned with my family but due to the pandemic so many things were cancelled and I am sad to have missed that quality time."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I became more concerned with my ailments as I had more time to think about them. Mentally it's taxing because you tend to overthink your problems. The thought that you're unable to get the help you need due to the shortage of staff and resources only adds to the anxiety."

"It really plays on your mind. It doesn't worry me so much when I see people often but when you are totally alone and no one is visiting because they aren't allowed, it's scary to think what could happen."

**Keywords:** Medical care, loneliness, anxiety, shielding, ill health.

**UK04**

**Title:** Single mother struggles without familial support.

**Narrative:** "I am a divorced mother of one, living in the former marital home with my

best friend. I have been divorced for two and a half years and my daughter is five and a half years old. I work as a PA in an accountancy firm full time and my best friend, A, who lives with us, helps to look after my child. A is a constant in my life and currently we plan for her to stay living with us until my daughter goes to secondary school. A has been a godsend, she has undertaken home-schooling during lockdowns and was so well placed for this as she used to work in schools. We are co-parenting between us without any of the complications of a relationship.

In terms of the pandemic, my ride has been as smooth as it could have been. I continued to work and was able to go into the office as I was the only one there while my colleagues worked from home.

Despite my ability to continue working, I felt as though I was on a knife edge, as only one thing had to fail before I would be in financial difficulty. I rely greatly on child maintenance payments from my ex-husband however we have very little communication and therefore this remained hugely uncertain as if he became unemployed these payments would stop. My ex-husband has no real parental involvement and sees our daughter as little as he requests, which is how I would like to keep it. At the beginning of the pandemic he tried to assert himself and force me to take my daughter out of nursery, something that would have been impossible due to work. The logistics of our daughters life have always been left to me to solve which is a challenge. When my ex would have my daughter in the week he would refuse to home school her which was difficult, and he never asked about how she was doing or her wellbeing. This was especially concerning as my former mother-in-law has emphysema which means she is at very high risk if she caught Covid. No extra precautions were taken on his part. He didn't offer to help at all with our daughter and it was exhausting. I am estranged from my family and therefore have little support, so have relied entirely on my friend and her family. My ex-husband is very derogatory to my friend and devalues her role in raising our child.

I suffered from a great deal of anxiety as I believe the majority of my stability during the pandemic has been purely out of luck in terms of my employment and home life. I constantly feared that if my friend or my child got ill I would seriously struggle. My anxiety began to have physical manifestations as well which is concerning. I am lucky in that a lot of my friends are easy to talk to and work in therapeutic fields, so we maintain conversations about how best to cope with our situations. The pandemic has highlighted my need for financial stability and that I have very few safety nets as even before the pandemic, every bill was scrutinised. I couldn't watch the news as it would make me so anxious, I just waited to be told about the new restrictions by other people. I have constant feelings of pervasive anxiety that began with my divorce but have now increased.

In other ways though I welcomed the level of simplicity that came with lockdowns as my life was so complicated, I was forced to shrink my world and it was a relief that dating would not be on the agenda after the divorce. In some ways I was bizarrely well placed to deal with uncertainty as my divorce had been so unexpected that I had been forced to quickly pivot and refocus my life."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "My life was totally on a knife edge. I was two pay cheques

away from being in real trouble.”

“My ex-husband is essentially a glorified babysitter...there was an expectation that I would just pick up the pieces.”

**Keywords:** Single mother, divorce, co-parenting, home-schooling, anxiety, financial difficulty.

## UK05

**Title:** Young woman encounters difficulties with balancing mental health, further education and work

**Narrative:** “I am a 24 year old woman living in a house with my partner. I work as an assistant in an engineering company part time and have just finished my Masters degree. At the beginning of the pandemic I was working full time still and had to adjust quickly to working from home. I had a rough office set up and so didn't initially struggle with this, especially considering the uncertainty at the time of not knowing when we would return to the office. I hadn't worked in my job for very long when the lockdown started and while I felt relatively confident in the work I was doing I felt as though my boss and colleagues didn't quite trust me enough to get work done as they hadn't spent enough time working with me face to face. This started to affect my confidence in the longer term and I felt like I needed to always be at my desk and responding to things quickly to show that I was conscientious and reliable. I think this took a toll on me long term as I was work day began to bleed into my evenings and I struggled to switch off with thinking about different tasks.

I am generally an anxious and introverted person so in some ways I revelled in the opportunity to stay at home and cancel plans as it seemed like a sort of holiday from my responsibilities and obligations. However I underestimated the toll that the isolation would take on me long term. I have always suffered from low mood but this began to get worse. My parents are both elderly and I was doing shopping for them but found myself getting very upset with our doorstep visits as I was so worried about what would happen to them after I left. They both live alone separately and it was a real concern that they could become unwell.

During the first lockdown I found out that I had received a place on a Masters course starting in September 2020. I was excited but also very nervous as everything was so uncertain. The entire course was undertaken online and I never even got to visit the university campus, meaning I never met my classmates in real life. I struggled as I felt as though I couldn't make any friends and had no one to ask about the workload or lectures. It was very isolating. Meetings for support were held by the university with other postgraduate students however I felt as if my problems were small compared to other students whose whole plans and fieldwork had been derailed by Covid and therefore I didn't share how I was feeling. My partner is an essential worker so continued to go to work as normal, meaning I spent a lot of time alone. I put on a brave face for Zoom meetings but would become very upset when I was totally alone. I started to feel suicidal

but did not share these feelings with any of my friends, family or colleagues (as I continued to work part time). I also felt as though I was taking on more responsibilities around the house as the perception from my partner was that because I was working from home I had more time to do other things and didn't have it as hard as he did. Already the domestic responsibilities weren't even but I began to feel like a 1950s housewife as I was expected to make all the meals, clean the house and care for our dog all because I was in the house more.

I am now in therapy and taking medication for my mental health and feel much more positive about the future, opening up to people about my feelings. My mental health has suffered for years however the pandemic made me hit a breaking point."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I started to collapse in on myself and isolate myself even further. I didn't really understand the effect that being alone so much was having on me." "I felt very alone and like I couldn't really connect with my classmates...it felt like a missed opportunity."

**Keywords:** Mental health, further education, domestic responsibilities, anxiety, loneliness, isolation.

## UK06

**Title:** Disabled man encounters medical and financial difficulties, exacerbated by Covid-19.

**Narrative:** "I am a 51 year old man living in Warwickshire in a house with my mother and my dog. My mother and I jointly own the home alongside my brother. Just before the first lockdown I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis which has caused me to have weakness in the left side of my body and I had to stop work and retire. Prior to retirement, I was doing contracting and was previously a horse groom. I have always undertaken physical or outdoor work. As the doctors did not officially sign me off of work I was unable to claim benefits and therefore I have been using money from my pension for the last four years. I am now finally hoping to access PIP (Personal Independence Payments) which could be backdated and therefore would help me financially. I also took out a Protection for Life policy with the bank 20 years ago when I was working as a horse groom that I have now been able to take advantage of and therefore that has also helped to pay bills.

When I was diagnosed, I was told I would then see a neurologist to monitor my condition once a year, however due to Covid restrictions I was unable to see the neurologist the first year. No ongoing treatment was put in place and I feel as though my physicality and mobility has worsened due to the lack of support from medical and physiotherapy staff. In some ways it is upsetting and I feel angry at times but I also know that many other people have suffered from having treatment and operations cancelled and therefore I try to stay positive.

I received very little advice or support in regards to how to manage my condition and

also was not made aware of resources that I could have taken advantage of, meaning I have not utilised a lot of services which could have helped me over the last few years. I also have a condition called Drop Foot which they are now starting to treat but it just feels like they are ticking boxes now and a lot of the treatment for my conditions is too late. I often think 'What if?' in regards to if my condition had been treated earlier. Numerous referrals from doctors were cancelled and there were many false promises. I was told I would be able to undertake physiotherapy at my local gym which I was keen to take up so I could continue to stay active through the colder winter months, however there was a 6 month waiting list for physio treatment and those who had suffered with Covid badly became the top priority. I also suffer from poor sleep due to nerve issues for which I was prescribed a muscle relaxant, however I could not maintain taking them as I wasn't entitled to free prescriptions, and they were too expensive. In addition to this, I have left sided bowel weakness which causes added anxiety regarding the regularity of my bowel movements. In general, I don't like to be reliant on tablets and I like to keep things as natural as possible but sometimes it's necessary.

I try to be as active as possible and continue doing things I enjoy such as walking my dog, kayaking and cycling, however I am unsure how active I can be without causing myself further damage. However, I feel lucky that I am still able to do these things and know that I must stay active to maintain my mobility. I think also that I might not have maintained my level of activity without my dog but by having him I walk everyday which really helps me. Often when I am out walking, people will approach me as they recognise that I have MS and therefore I now know other people with the condition and have found out about some resources from them. I try to maintain a positive outlook however and so I sometimes try and avoid these people, so I don't have to keep having conversations about my health. I also have an allotment which I haven't been able to plant much in due to not being physically able, however I am hoping to plant flowers to encourage birds and bees over the next year so I look forward to enjoying that space.

I think I have learnt from having a few accidents how to manage my condition better and have adjusted my behaviours in order to prevent them in the future, such as being more alert and observant when I am out walking. I used to live in Majorca, and I try to keep well so I can visit once a year as it improves both my physical and mental health. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It's very upsetting as I feel as though I am getting worse with no support."

"I often wonder if the progression could have been slowed if not for Covid... I get angry and think 'What if?'"

**Keywords:** Disability, pension, unemployment, medical care, mobility, disappointment, anger.

**UK07**

**Title:** 71 year old retired woman living alone

**Narrative:** "I am a 70 year old retired, single woman living alone. Prior to my retirement I was a bookkeeper in a business with my partner. I have two daughters and two granddaughters. Loneliness was the key way in which Covid affected me, especially during the lockdowns when we were only permitted an hour to go out each day and I struggled with missing my family and friends. I was able to Facetime and have phone conversations with my daughters and some zoom sessions, but this didn't match up to face to face contact. Once people had adjusted to moving online I was able to continue some classes online such as exercises groups and a choir that I am a part of. The main reason I enjoy classes such as the choir is due to the social side of meeting people, and so this was completely lost over Zoom.

In terms of self care, I tried my best to stay active and took up walking which I very much enjoy, although had always previously thought was a bit of a sad activity to do alone. I have found that I meet a lot of people out walking and being in nature and people are much more willing to stop and chat than they were before Covid. I also watched a lot of TV and probably had a few too many glasses of wine.

Prior to the pandemic I regularly looked after my grandchildren and so it was hard not to be able to see them all the time. When they came to visit on my doorstep it was very hard for me, they were too young to understand why they couldn't come into the house or touch me and I really struggled with not being able to hug them. My daughter is a key worker and so continued to work during the pandemic while also having to look after the girls on her own so I think she found it very difficult, and it was hard not to be able to help her until restrictions eased. I feel sad too because my grandchildren have missed out on 18 months of their childhood.

Although I am in a vulnerable age group, I was not worried about catching Covid as I live a healthy lifestyle. Sometimes I thought I would be better off just to catch it and get it over with, as I believed I wouldn't suffer that badly from symptoms. My only concern about catching it was giving it to my grandchildren.

The worst part of the restrictions was attending the funeral of my brother in law. He fell ill (not due to Covid) and my sister called an ambulance for him and then never saw him again. He passed away alone in hospital. The funeral was limited to very few people and we all had to sit separately, unable to hug or comfort anyone. Not being able to support my sister, niece and nephew at that time was incredibly hard and it took a great emotional toll on my family. I also have another relative who has been in and out of hospital all of her life and she wasn't allowed any visitors which has been very hard.

Now restrictions are easing, I'm making sure that I plan in lots of things to make up for the time lost and am greatly looking forward to going on holidays again. I've not long been retired and was very much looking forward to making the most of my free time, something which has been ruined due to Covid. I missed things like going shopping and walking around Tescos so I'm glad that is back to normal now. I'm also glad that the gym is getting back to normal as all of the classes were restricted and we had to wear masks and sanitise all the equipment. Looking back it's hard to believe any of this ever really happened but I do think however that the pandemic has made me appreciate the things I already had a lot more and so there are some positives. I've got to know a lot more people in my local area as everyone is lonely and people want to have a chat, which is nice."

**Specifically telling quotes:** "I've only recently retired so I was looking forward to an active social life and holidays and meeting up with people, and of course none of that has happened."

"With the grandchildren, I didn't see them for a long time...and when my daughter did bring them round and they were in the road and I was looking at them through the window, that was even more upsetting because the children wanted to come in the house...and they were too young to understand what was going on."

"When you get older you have to make up your time, you don't have the time you had when you were younger."

"Just seeing everyone so devastated [at the funeral] and you can't give them a hug...It's not how you should be celebrating someone's life."

**Keywords:** Retirement, loneliness, familial support, grandchildren, social clubs, funeral.

**UK08**

**Title:** 35 year old social worker for children in foster care

**Narrative:** "I'm a 35 year old married woman living in the South of England. I work 3 days a week as a social worker for looked after children and 1 day a week as a play therapist. I have two young children and it was difficult working and looking after them without childcare during the height of Covid restrictions. I felt as though my children were missing out on education and experiences and the pandemic also took a toll on mental health as it is so difficult to be separated from people. I think it has had a lasting impact in relationships with people.

Social work is really an unspoken emergency service and so our work had to continue during the pandemic. Usually, my work is supported by lots of external resources and organisations including education services, health, child and adolescent mental health services, mentors and charities, and therefore we quickly had to figure out new ways of working to continue to best support our clients. Initially we were unable to visit clients out of county due to geographical travel restrictions but we were subsequently granted special permission to drive out of county and deliver laptops to children from the virtual school, allowing them to continue learning from home.

The key way in which the children I work with were affected was the disruption they experienced in contact with their birth families. These children have been placed in foster care but many continue to have regular contact with their birth family members which provides them with a degree of stability and predictability in their schedules which was interrupted when the pandemic began. This served to break down already fragile relationships. Foster carers were not obliged to facilitate contact between children and their birth families themselves and many were reluctant to do so if they or their family were vulnerable in some way due to Covid. We had no choice but to give more autonomy to foster carers than we usually would and boundaries we would usually maintain had to become fluid and blurred. For the first time, it became acceptable not

to perform statutory visits and therefore there was a risk of significant harm in the first few months of lockdown. The children I look after frequently go missing, are subject to drug exploitation or suffer from mental health issues, and therefore there was concern for their wellbeing.

In general across the service, domestic abuse greatly increased. Due to school closures, all of our ability to monitor children was removed as usually schools and teachers played a significant role in keeping an eye on those who might be at risk of abuse. As social workers, we don't have the same capacity and therefore we all had to be on high alert. For many of these children, schooling was already very difficult as they are preoccupied by their trauma. They were often unsettled in their education and so the pandemic added even more uncertainty and anxiety to an already difficult situation. There is also evidence to show that children in care have a lower threshold for risk, and therefore were often not adhering to Covid restrictions. Many of the children were putting others at risk as illegal activities such as criminal drug exploitation and drug running continued despite the pandemic.

Initially, we stopped doing visits to our clients but these restarted eventually with PPE. The child protection front line team continued to go out but the rest of us were told to use a red, amber and green traffic light system to rate the severity of our cases and then we eventually started visiting the red cases. I was not too concerned about myself catching Covid but I understood that by undertaking visits there would be an increased risk of infection to my family. Now, there are more virtual meetings with professionals and working from home has increased significantly, especially for those with families. I've definitely gained more flexibility in my work as before I used the office as a base for visits however this didn't always make sense geographically. We are also required to go to certain meetings where the children are based and therefore this had an environmental impact which can now be avoided by meeting online. I think some of my colleagues have suffered from the isolation, especially those who have joined the team during Covid. The quality of companionship and the relationship building that was enabled by physically being in proximity to one another in the office has been lost, and, for some people that reassurance and opportunity to discuss cases is necessary in such a high stress job. It would be interesting to know how many social workers have left the role during the pandemic as I think many would have sought other employment due to the stress and isolation. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Boundaries were blurred that we would not normally have wanted to blur but we had no choice but to do it that way."

"Schools are such a vital part of the child protection process in terms of gathering evidence and monitoring children, and we lost all ability to monitor these children and to fully be present...social workers don't have the same capacity to visit those families every single day so it did provide a gap and everyone had to be on very high alert."

**Keywords:** Social work, foster care, vulnerable children, criminal activity, education, familial support.

## UK09

**Title:** Self employed woman in long distance relationship juggles work, her autistic daughter and her elderly parents.

**Narrative:** "I am a 48 year old woman living in Birmingham with my 16 year old daughter who is on the autism spectrum. I have lived in the Midlands for 20 years but am originally from a rural village. I was previously in a civil partnership but this was dissolved, and I am now in a relationship with a new partner who I have been with for 6 years and we live separately, an hour apart from one another. I have been self employed for 12 years but I have recently taken on a 9-5 job in cybersecurity. In regards to Covid, things could have been much worse. Although I am self employed, my industry was not affected by the pandemic and therefore my income stream remained stable.

Other small businesses suffered badly but mine didn't due to pure luck and I was so grateful not to have an economic problem. As my partner lives in another area, I was unable to see her for 10-12 weeks in the initial lockdown which caused a lot of stress. The first lockdown began the day before I would usually go and visit my partner on a weekly basis, and we had no warning or time for preparation. We continued to speak every day via phone but that was the only way we could be together. We are quite different personality types as I am quite rule driven and wanted to strictly adhere to the restrictions and my partner is more emotional, and therefore there were some tense initial discussions about the best course of action. Quite quickly however the restrictions were imposed more strictly and there were no choices to be made and no middle ground for discussion. Until they brought in bubbles, we were living totally separate lives. My ex partner and I share care of our daughter and luckily this was allowed to continue despite the pandemic, however we had to check the rules very thoroughly to ensure we were following them carefully. My daughter was off of school for 6 months, which would have been very difficult to cope with without shared childcare. I was used to working from home but suddenly there was a teenager in the house, and I wasn't expecting or prepared for it. There were practical issues such as physically where to work in the home, however my daughter and I got into a routine where we would eat breakfast and lunch together and take breaks to walk together as our daily exercise. I was lucky as I did not have a lot of the behavioural issues that I heard other parents had, as my daughter is very rule driven and was happy to do her schoolwork. There were consequences however for my daughter's emotional state due to her autism. Autism and anxiety go hand in hand and she has fears around death, and so the pandemic exacerbated her anxiety which I had to try and manage. She finds going out more stressful than staying in, so in many ways prefers lockdown to non lockdown and we are still dealing with the fallout of that. I felt however that if I was going to be locked down with someone I was glad it was her, and we made the best of the situation.

We cooked together, did outdoor activities and went cycling. I've also taken a lot more holidays in this country and discovered great places on my doorstep which felt like a real privilege. Also, in order to protect my ex's new partner who was shielding, we changed the way we did childcare and the way I saw my partner so we could try to reduce the risk of infection. During the strict lockdown and once bubbles were introduced my partner

and I saw each other in two week blocks. Even now we see each other in longer blocks than we did before lockdown which has been good for our relationship.

In terms of my own emotional state, I am asthmatic and initially I was unclear the extent to which I would be at risk from exposure to Covid. I was keen to stay indoors until there was evidence of how it would affect me and I avoided going to the shops, opting to get my shopping delivered which would sometimes mean staying up late into the night to get a slot. In some ways this attitude has continued despite the fact I'm not especially at risk from Covid, as I don't go out as much as I used to and I enjoy cooking at home as opposed to eating out as my skills have improved. I found the first lockdown quite a calm period when I got into the groove of things. It actually gave me an excuse to stop and not have to keep up with my regular obligations which I found to be a relief. In usual life with childcare, work, my partner and parents living far away, I am far too busy to get other things done. The pandemic allowed me time to do house DIY and also to undertake courses to help my future career that have facilitated my recent career move. The pandemic on the whole wasn't that bad for me as I haven't lost anyone from Covid which is lucky. I also have the support of my friendship group as I would have once a week calls with my 3 friends and we would emotionally support each other, do quizzes and have a drink. Local friends would also help me initially when I was concerned about my asthma by getting prescriptions for me. When they launched the volunteer programme, I decided to become an NHS volunteer for the Chat and Check programme, where you ring people who are shielding and are isolated for emotional support and guidance. Some of the experiences I heard about from these people were shocking and it made me realise how people's lives had been completely transformed overnight. I also have elderly parents in their mid seventies who I was concerned about. I was less worried about my father as he lives with his wife and is a scientist so was able to understand the science. My mother however lives alone and her health is not as good so I was more worried about her. She was very anxious and would ring a lot, concerned about wiping down parcels she received and the risk of infection. There was no one there to calm her down and therefore she relied on talking to myself and my sister on the phone. She had to learn to do new things like online banking because she couldn't physically go to the bank. In general however she was well supported by her neighbours and the local church also did shopping for people. I didn't see my mother for over 6 months as she is 100 miles away and we had Christmas in 2020 over Zoom so my mother spent it alone. We made a collective decision as a family to protect each other but it was very hard. This Christmas we decided that my mum would not be on her own and she spent the Christmas with my sister. My mum was of the view that time was ticking on and she was willing to take the risk. My mother, sister and I now all have a weekly Zoom call which has continued despite the return to semi-normality which is a nice consequence of the pandemic. "

**Specifically telling quotes:** "It was quite stressful at first...we speak every day but that became our only way of being together...that was strange. A relationship is built and we hadn't anticipated that."

"I worked from home and had my own way of doing things and suddenly I had a teenager in the house."

“These things still impact you, you know, I don't go out as much as I did....there are some impacts that are quite longlasting”

**Keywords:** Long distance relationships, autism, familial support, learning.

**UK10**

**Title:** Young woman is pregnant and gives birth during the pandemic.

**Narrative:** “I am a 33-year-old woman living with my partner and two young children who are 1 and 4 years old. We live in a barn conversion on the site of my partner’s family’s farm shop and I have lived here, in the house of my in-laws and subsequently our own home, for 5 years. I work part time doing administration work for the farm shop and my partner works as the butcher alongside his parents.

During the first lockdown, the farm shop was very busy with everyone panic buying and the main supermarkets running out of produce so people came to us instead for their shopping. We also had a lot of good weather which made the whole situation a lot more bearable and to be honest we rather enjoyed it. We weren’t able to see some family members due to the lockdowns and different tiers in different areas and in some ways, this was a blessing as it removed the obligation to see the ones we aren’t very keen on.

In 2020 we were still converting the barn on the farm shop premises and so when the pandemic hit it meant that we had to initially stop building work and then when we could restart, it led to much longer waiting times for materials and a lot of delays which were out of our control. Our main workman is Romanian and the pandemic was also very hard for him because he wanted to go home to spend time with his family. With the 10-day isolating returning to Romania and the isolation requirements in the UK, it made it a lot harder for him which was sad. We eventually were able to move into our own home in January 2021 but before then we were living with my partner’s parents with a small child which was difficult. Not being able to do simple things like going for a meal was hard, and it made us realise the family we really wanted to see and the things we took for granted before lockdown. Financially, we were better off as we were both always working at the farm and shop, and we weren’t able to go out and spend any money. It was worrying however when the shop staff were off of work isolating and this put additional strain on the business which was already under significant pressure due to how busy it was.

Feelings of isolation and loneliness were a lot more difficult during the lockdown in winter as we didn’t have the garden to escape to and walks weren’t as appealing. The introduction of last-minute lockdowns and tiers before Christmas provided a massive upheaval with the farm shop and trying to get everyone’s food orders out to them, which caused us a lot of stress. When the lockdowns did end, it was still worrying to us that we could be giving Covid to our parents and grandparents as that was all that was talked about on the news. My partner was unable to see his grandmother in the care home which was upsetting and when he was allowed to visit, he had to wear lots of PPE and was unable to hug her. She is 83 years old and has dementia so the whole situation was

very confusing for her.

I was also pregnant during the lockdown periods and gave birth to my second child during Covid in March 2021. It was very tough as my partner wasn't allowed to go to the scans with me and I felt that I had to go through it all alone. Thankfully it was the second child and so I knew what to expect, but I still had the feeling that if there was something wrong, I didn't have any emotional or moral support. Due to a difficult birth with my first child, I was scheduled to have a caesarean section. Luckily when it came to the day my partner was allowed in to the operation theatre but we all had to wear masks which was strange. After my baby was born, my partner was only allowed to stay for an hour before he was made to leave. I felt very isolated without any visitors at the hospital and it didn't feel like we were able to celebrate having a new child. My other daughter couldn't come to see either me or her new sister which was very hard. When we were going home with the baby, the whole situation felt very impersonal. They took us both down to the hospital entrance where my partner was waiting to put us in the car, but we were just passed off and it made me feel like we were just baggage at an airport. Having had a caesarean, I was not able to come home and do household chores or anything too strenuous and because I wasn't allowed any visitors to help me, I had to pack up all of our belongings when I could barely move while juggling a baby that was barely 24 hours old. It was a very difficult time. When we got home, we were still in lockdown and so people couldn't come and visit or help me around the whole with the two children while I was recovering from major surgery, and my partner still had to work.

My older daughter also lost out on mixing with other children. When she started pre-school at three years old last year, she hadn't played with any other children since she was 18 months old due to Covid. She had got so used to being with adults that she didn't really know to interact with children of similar ages to her so it was a shock to the system. There were also no health visitors checks due to Covid so we didn't know if how she was progressing as she should have been, which was an additional concern. We don't know anyone with children the same age so it was not easy to see how her peers were getting on so we could compare.

**Specifically telling quotes:** "Taking our baby home from hospital felt very impersonal, they took her and me down to the hospital entrance where my partner was waiting to put us in the car, made it feel like we were baggage at an airport."

**Keywords:** Pregnancy, childbirth, child development, loneliness, family.