

# COVID 19 IMPACTS ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIFE COURSES: FIRST RESULTS

GLI EFFETTI DEL COVID-19  
SUI CORSI DI VITA DEI GIOVANI:  
I PRIMI RISULTATI



A CURA DI  
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## INDEX

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Abstract / pag 1

1. Becoming adult in Italy / pag 2

2. First evidence of COVID-19 effects on young people  
course life / pag 4

3. Some elements of the ongoing survey / pag 7

4. Methodological note / pag 7

5. The five step of transition to adulthood: first result / pag 8

6. Impact of Covid on life courses / pag 14

7. The impact of Covid on future perspectives / pag 16

References / pag 20

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## ABSTRACT

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The pandemic, with its restrictions and economic consequences, has deeply impacted people's lives across the globe. In the case of young Italians, although they now become adults even without completing all the stages of the transition to adulthood, the partial suspension of the normal flow of life due to COVID-19 has led to a sort of forced moratorium on this path. From an initial analysis of the official data, the effects of the pandemic include the increase in the inactivity rate and the number of NEETs; a partial change of residence; the postponement or cancellation of marriages; and a further reduction in births. In this research, conducted through an online survey, we investigate these aspects and their physiological effects on the identity process.

*La pandemia, con le sue restrizioni e conseguenze economiche, ha inciso sui corsi di vita delle persone. Nel caso dei giovani italiani, sebbene essi diventino ormai adulti anche senza compiere tutte le tappe di transizione all'adulthood, la parziale sospensione del normale flusso di vita dovuta al COVID-19 ha indotto una sorta di moratoria forzata di tale percorso. Da una prima analisi dei dati ufficiali, gli effetti della pandemia sono: l'aumento del tasso di inattività e del numero dei NEET; un parziale cambio delle dimore; il rinvio o l'annullamento dei matrimoni; una riduzione ulteriore delle nascite. Nella presente ricerca, condotta attraverso un'indagine online, indaghiamo questi aspetti e i loro effetti fisiologici sul processo di identità.*

**Key words:** Transition to adulthood, Forced Moratorium, Official Statistics

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## 1. BECOMING ADULT IN ITALY

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The transition to adulthood has been described mostly through a series of life milestones, including the completion of studies, labour market entry, leaving the parental home, forming a first union, and finally, entry into parenthood [8, 5, 11, 16, 9, 12]. In the past, the transition process ended when an individual had experienced all of these events [6, 1]. Until the early 1980s in Europe, these life events were standardized and followed a linear trend, and each phase was preparatory to a later stage. In this period, although the modes and times of transition varied considerably according to gender and social class, youth was thus configured as a temporally defined and socially recognizable phase [6].

However, in recent decades, the transition to adult life across various European societies has been profoundly altered. This can be attributed to the economic, institutional, demographic, and cultural transformations such as increased global competition, deregulation of the job market, structural unemployment [4] and the longer periods spent in full-time education or training. Thus, the modern transitions have inevitably become more fluid, complex, risky, uncertain and prolonged.

There are two processes that define the transformations of the times and the transition to adult life, including the formation of one's own family: the postponement transition and the partnership revolution. The first process corresponds to an extension of transition times; the second, instead, corresponds to the revolution of partnerships and the change in the ways of forming a unions, less and less in the form of marriage [15, 3].

Considering the Italian case, these processes were intensified by the economic crisis starting in 2008. In the years of the Great Recession (2008-2013), many people felt excluded from the social and economic context and were convinced that they did not have the power to change their future for the better.

The health emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic has considerably worsened the transition process, inducing a kind of “forced moratorium”. For instance, the economic crisis could lead some to move back to the parents’ homes for a short or long period of time; the ban on ceremonies and wedding parties could lead some to postpone or cancel their marriages; and the heightened pressure on the health care system and the related uncertainties may have led some to change their childbearing decisions.

To investigate the effects of the pandemic on the transitions to adulthood and the trajectories of life of young Italian people, in the next paragraph, we present some evidence of these changes. To do so, we incorporate data from official statistics and socio-demographic research, organizing them by stages of life. In the last paragraph, we introduce our ongoing research.

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## **2. FIRST EVIDENCE OF COVID-19 EFFECTS ON YOUNG PEOPLE COURSE LIFE**

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The most up-to-date official Italian statistics on socio-demographic data show that the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the trend of the country's population decline that began in 2015. In particular, limitations and economic consequences due to the pandemic have caused impediments, slowdowns, suspensions or remodulations of the five events of life that mark the path to adulthood. According to the data coming from the official statistics, some of the life milestones to become adult were slightly affected while others were more heavily influenced by the pandemic.

In terms of the school and university system, thanks to the introduction of large-scale distance education practices, there are evidences that the graduation rate has remained high, indicating positive educational outcomes. Indeed, the percentage of young people (aged 15-29) with tertiary education rose from 13.1% in 2019 to 14% in 2020. Moreover, the percentage of young people in Despite the public fear that the pandemic will be detrimental to learning outcomes, there is no evidence this. In addition, appears that the pandemic has not affected the Italian rate of early leavers from education and training. For instance, in the second trimester of 2020, the rate of early leavers was 13.5%, which is equal to the 2019 rate, and far from the 2020 European goal of 10%.

On the contrary, looking at the rate of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the age class of 18 to 29, there is a slight growth from 26% in 2019 to 27.7% in 2020, after six years of continuous reduction. This is largely due to an increase in the inactivity rate of young people in the Central and Northern regions [10], which rose from 42.6% to

45.3% in Northern Italy and from 49.8% to 52.2% in Central Italy. On the contrary, in the South of Italy, in which the NEET rate was already higher, it remained almost stable, varying from 38.6% to 38.8%.

Considering the labour market and the employment rates, younger generations appear to be the most disadvantaged segment of the population. Indeed, after the decline in employment began in the early 2000s and youth unemployment peaked in 2013, the generalized recovery observed in the period of 2013 to 2019 was abruptly slowed down by the pandemic. In the second quarter of 2020, the employment rate fell to 38.6% (3.2 points less than the value of the second quarter of 2019) and then rose again to 40% in the third quarter of 2020 (2.2 points less than in the same period of the previous year). In addition, in the initial phases of the lockdown, the share of discouraged young people searching for jobs grew, increasing the percentage of the inactive as already mentioned [10].

Further, to the best of our knowledge, there is no available updated data that could help in understanding to what extent young people delay the decision of leaving their family's home or to what extent they have been forced by the economic crisis to their family's home. Housing choices, especially for younger workers, have also been influenced by the so-called "South working", i.e., when an individual from Southern Italy who works for a northern company and is able to telework from home in the South [18].

Moreover, in reference to family and union formation, in the first year of the pandemic, there were almost 50% fewer marriages observed than in 2019.

5 The report on "Marriages, civil unions, separations

and divorces”, which was published by ISTAT in February 2021, and shows a sharp decline in marriages and civil unions, in addition to a slight decrease in divorces [13]. The analysis also included the first half of 2020, which coincided with the onset of the pandemic, specifying that the data are still provisional; in that semester, marriages, civil unions, as well as separations and divorces literally collapsed. These trends are certainly also linked to the consolidating progressive spread of free unions (or cohabitation), both as a step before marriage and as an alternative to marriage; however, the effect of the pandemic is certainly also visible on these relationships [13], as weddings and parties were banned for many months. Finally, looking at official statistics, the impact of the pandemic on childbearing decisions is clearly evident; the number of empty cradles in 2020 sharply increased, worsening the already declining Italian birth rate [2]. In 2020, only 404,104 births were registered, a new negative record that shows a decrease of 4% (16,000 fewer births) compared to 2019 [14]. Although the downward trend in births also preceded the onset of the pandemic, in December 2020, the first month in which children conceived during the pandemic were born, the decline proved to be drastically significant (about 21.6%).



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### **3. SOME ELEMENTS OF THE ONGOING SURVEY**

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As evident from the existing data, 2020 witnessed a slowdown or a halt in at least three of the five steps in the process of becoming an adult, resulting in a forced moratorium of the courses of young people's lives.

After one year of the pandemic and heightened restrictions, we are conducting a survey with the specific aim of uncovering the effects of COVID-19 on the five steps to adulthood and of reconstructing the possible life paths. The dimensions taken into consideration are the following: sociodemographic characteristics, educational status and training, working status, residential status, marriage and parenting, changes of perspective and future projects, support networks and emotions and moods. Along with this proper socio-demographic approach, we also consider the identity status dimensions [7] in order to verify if the forced standby due to pandemic restrictions is also related to a future-oriented or present-focused identity moratorium [17].

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### **4. METHODO- LOGICAL NOTE**

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For this purpose, we conducted a survey in the months of April and May 2021 through an online questionnaire. Given our aims, the questionnaire is organized in different sections, according to the classical steps towards the adult life (Buzzi C., Cavalli A., De Lillo A., 2007) which are: the completion of study and training; finding a job; housing autonomy; having a stable relationship and cohabitation; having a child. Through this survey we reached 335 young adults (18-30) and first adults (31-40) residing in the Campania Region.

## 5. THE FIVE STEPS OF TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD: FIRST RESULTS

The sample reached is composed of 63,8% of female and 36,2 % of male (Fig.1). With respect to age, the sample is mainly composed of young people aged between 36-40 years (30%) and 31-35 years (22.3%) (Fig. 2).

The dataset consists mainly of 59, 80% young people with tertiary education and 33.22% young people with secondary education. Therefore, in our dataset young people with higher education are over-represented (Fig. 3).

FIG. 1 - GENDER COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE

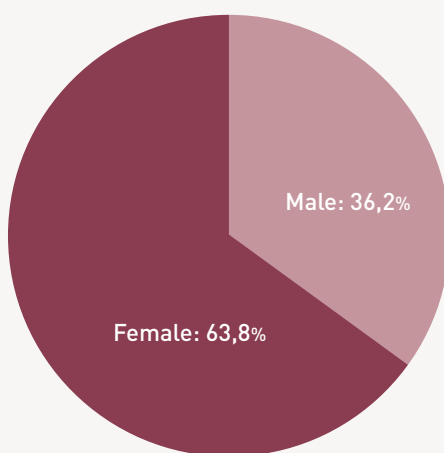


FIG. 2 - AGE COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE

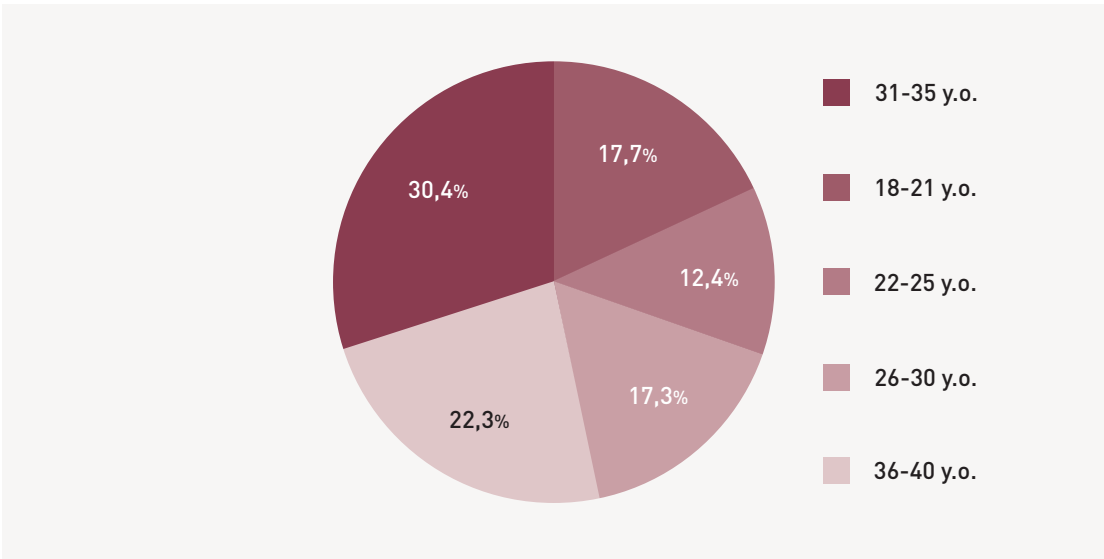
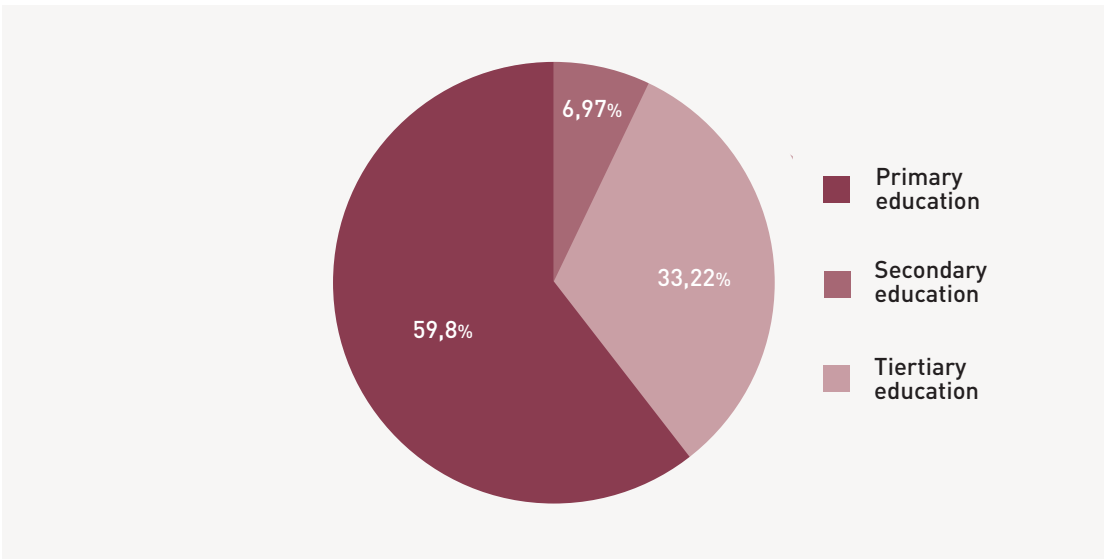


FIG. 3 - EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF RESPONDENTS



The participants currently enrolled in a study/ training course represent 40.86% of the sample like is shown by Figure 4.

Among the employed, the 41% has a permanent job, the 24% has a fixed term job and the 18% is autonomous. The rest is a “no standard job” (Fig. 5).

FIG. 4 - YOUNG PEOPLE ENROLLED IN A STUDY/TRAINING COURSE

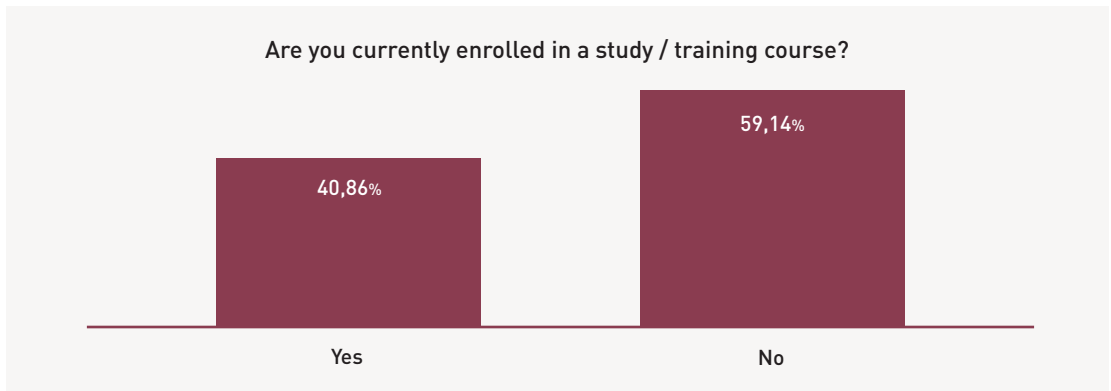


FIG. 5 - EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

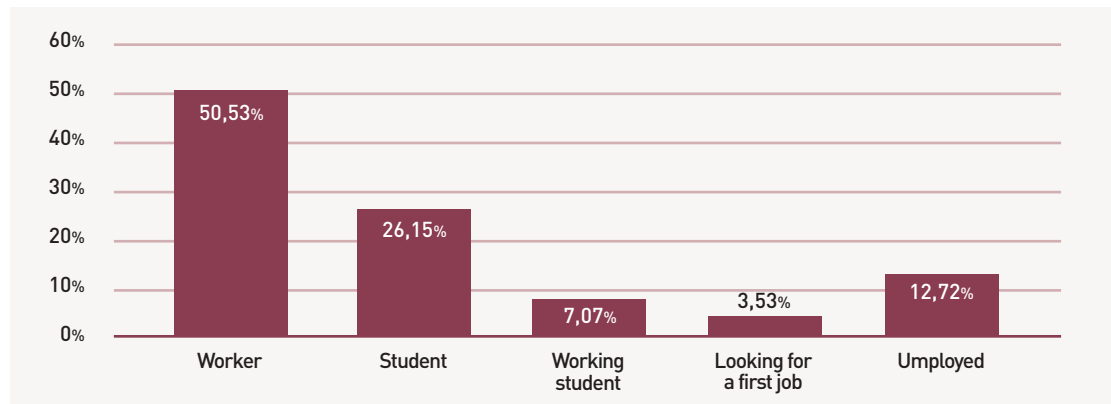
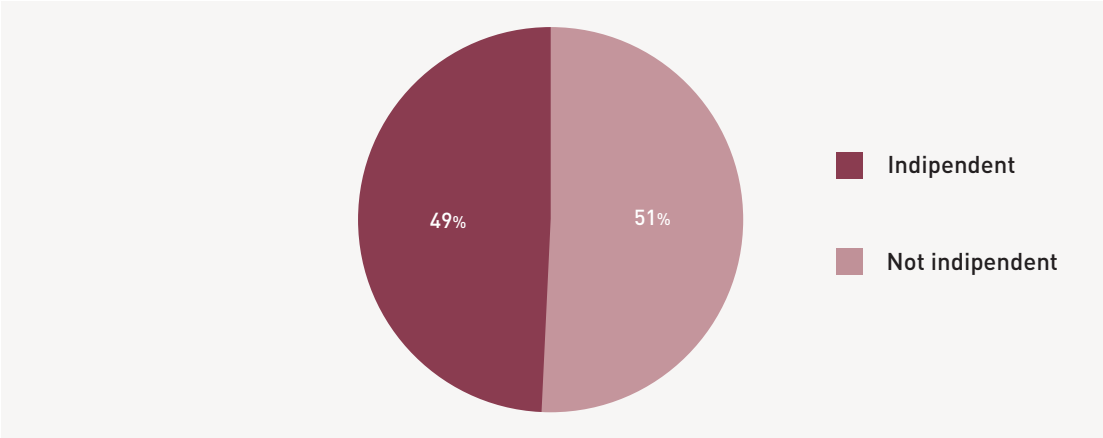
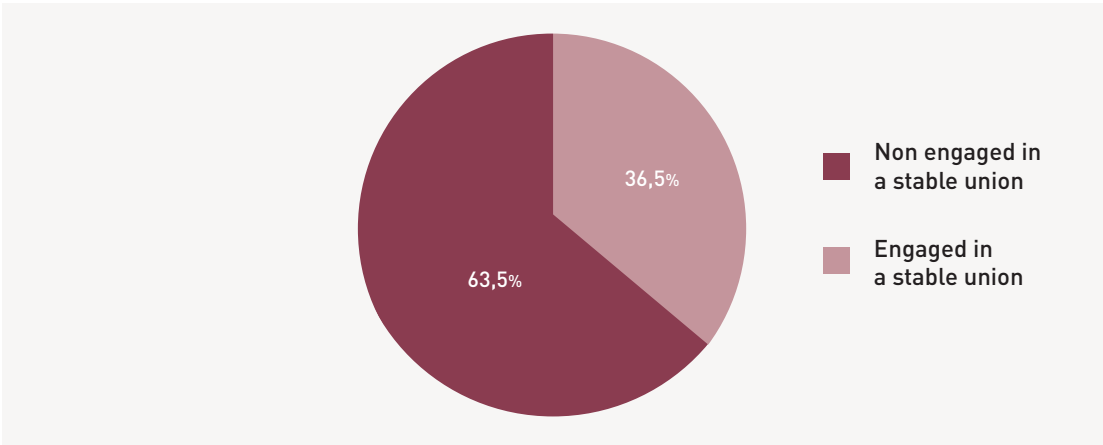


FIG. 6 - HOUSING STATUS OF RESPONDENTS



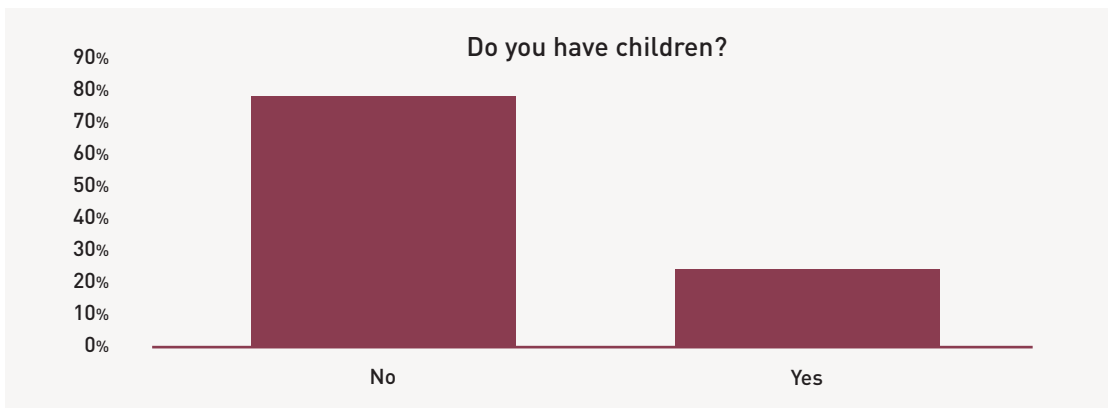
With respect to housing independence, our data shows that the 11,8 % of respondents live alone or in cohousing, and the 35,4 % lives in a new family with or without children (Fig. 6). The 75% of ones engaged in a stable union are married or in a civil union (Fig. 7).

FIG. 7 - MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS



Regarding having a child, the Figure 8 shows among those who don't have children, the 40% doesn't know if they want them, the 25% definitely doesn't want them, the 28% would like to have them within three years.

FIG. 8 - HAVING A CHILD



In general, with regard to the attainment of the main stages of life that mark the transition to adult life, the traditional completion of all five main stages doesn't occur before the age of 36 (Tab. 1).

TAB. 1 – STEPS TOWARDS ADULTHOOD AND AGES

	18-21 v.o.	22-25 v.o.	26-30 v.o.	31-35 v.o.	36-40 v.o.
	Stage reached	Stage reached	Stage reached	Stage reached	Stage reached
Completion of study and training	4	23,5	53,1	81	89,5
Find a job	18,4	34,4	64,4	93,4	98,8
Housing independence	2,1	3,3	20,9	71,7	79,1
Having a stable union	2 43,92,75%	2,9	20,4	57,1	62,8
Parenthood	0	0	4,5	20,4	48,7

## 6. IMPACTS OF COVID ON LIFE COURSES

Having in mind that reaching some stages of adult life became more difficult, our aims are: a) trying to describe the impact of COVID on the pathways to adulthood, b) verifying how the various steps of becoming an adult affect the perception of the future, c) verifying if young people, that modify their course of life due to COVID effects, change their perception of the future.

Most of the respondents perceive the pandemic as an event that has a large influence on their life plans (Fig 9). The Figure 10 shows the general effect, negative or positive, that the pandemic has had on the life stages of young people. In particular, most of them argue that the pandemic has affected the completion of education and training (Fig. 10).

FIG. 11 - LIFE SATISFACTION

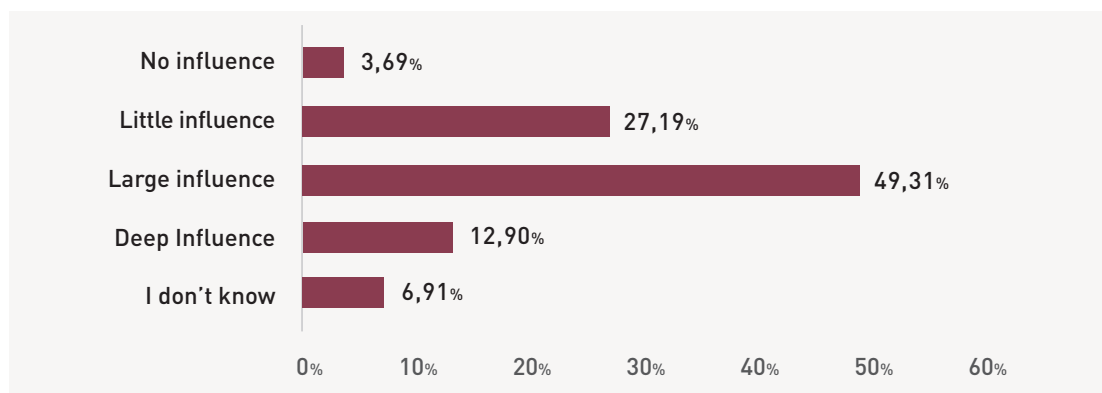
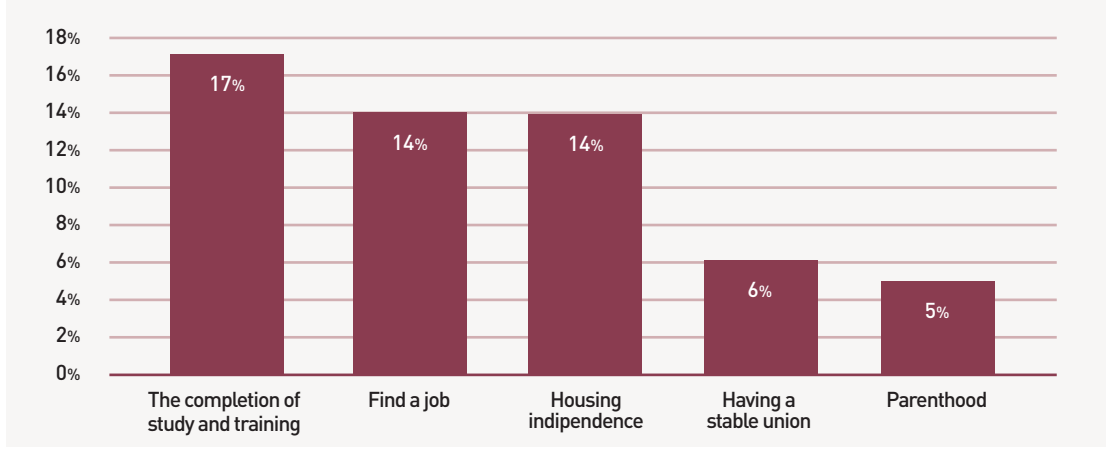




FIG. 10 - THE IMPACT OF COVID ON TRANSITION TO ADULthood

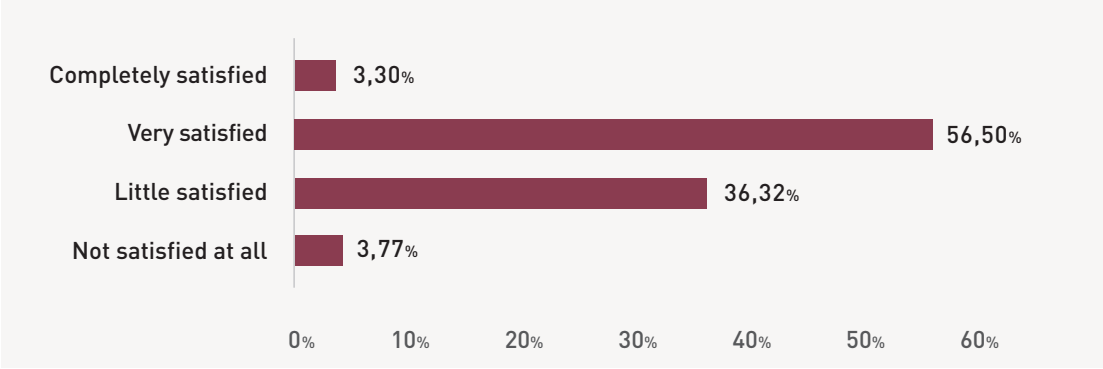


In particular, among young people declaring that the Covid affects their course life:

- The 5,44% have been slowed or postpone the study completion;
- The 5,04% have been fired or changed the job due to the COVID;
- The 3,22% came back to the parent house;
- The 6% postponed the marriage or the cohabitation;
- The 6% postponed the having child due to health risk or economic risk.

With regard to the level of satisfaction with life, more than 50% say they are very satisfied (Fig 11).

FIG. 11 - LIFE SATISFACTION



**7. THE IMPACT OF COVID ON FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

We have estimated two models to understand if having completed the steps and perceived the impact of the pandemic and life satisfaction, if they affect the perception of the future.

Regarding the perception of the future, we test the effect of the: a) the transition to adulthood steps: we use each step coded as a dummy variable or one variable counting the number of reached steps, b) life satisfaction likert scale, c) covid impact (dummy variable) on Confidence in the Future (items considered: *I feel optimistic about the future; The future scares me; I feel uncertain about my future life*) and on Self-efficacy in the future (items considered: *I think in the future I will be free to decide how to live my life; I think that in the future I will have little chance of showing my actual abilities; I am pretty sure that in the future I will feel fulfilled for what I do*).

We have estimated two models to understand if having completed the steps and perceived an impact from the pandemic, also considering the life satisfaction, has an influence on the future perspective. In addition, we control for the variables

gender, age and educational level.

The final models (**Tabb. 2 e 3**) obtained through a backward selection process show that:

- Life satisfaction is the most important variable positive affecting the future scales
- Changing life plans due to the COVID negatively affects the future scales

Moreover, having reached some steps to adulthood does not seem to play a decisive role in general. Being involved in a stable relationship (married, in a civil union or in a cohabitation) increases the confidence in the future, while the study completion negatively affects the self-efficacy in the future (unexpectedly): maybe the end of the education period brings much more anxiety and uncertainty.

With respect to socio-demographic characteristics they don't seem to play a decisive role: female are more confident in the future than male, while young people with higher education slightly feel less self-effective.

TAB. 2 – SUMMARY OF THE REGRESSION MODEL ON CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE

Independent variable: confidence in the future					
	Not stand		Stand Coeff	T	Sign
	B	S.E.	Beta		
(Costant)	1,233	0,243		5,07	<,001
Life Satisfaction	0,382	0,079	0,324	4,832	<,001
Gender: Female	0,328	0,101	0,214	3,25	0,001
Stable relation: Yes	0,191	0,105	0,125	1,823	0,07
Covid Impact	-0,244	0,108	-0,155	-2,268	0,024

TAB. 3 – SUMMARY OF THE REGRESSION MODEL ON SELF - EFFICACY IN THE FUTURE

Independent variable: confidence in the future					
	Not stand		Stand Coeff	T	Sign
	B	S.E.	Beta		
(Costant)	1,233	0,243		5,07	<,001
Life Satisfaction	0,382	0,079	0,324	4,832	<,001
Gender: Female	0,328	0,101	0,214	3,25	0,001
Stable relation: Yes	0,191	0,105	0,125	1,823	0,07
Covid Impact	-0,244	0,108	-0,155	-2,268	0,024

The data show a high degree of moratorium and a postponement of becoming an adult. In particular, the choice of having children seems to be set aside for many young people. There is also a not negligible percentage of young people who don't want children at all.

Young people from Campania seem still very traditional in their paths of transition to adulthood. The COVID does not negatively affect only the current choices but also affects the confidence in the future and the self-efficacy for the future. It adds further uncertainty to people that have already internalized the precariousness and should be able to deal with it.

Taking steps towards adulthood slightly affects the future perception: finding a job or reaching independence in housing do not make you more confident in the future.

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