

# EKO – Youth Exchange Participants' Report



## COVID-19 effects on our planet: A perspective of the Greek team of young people

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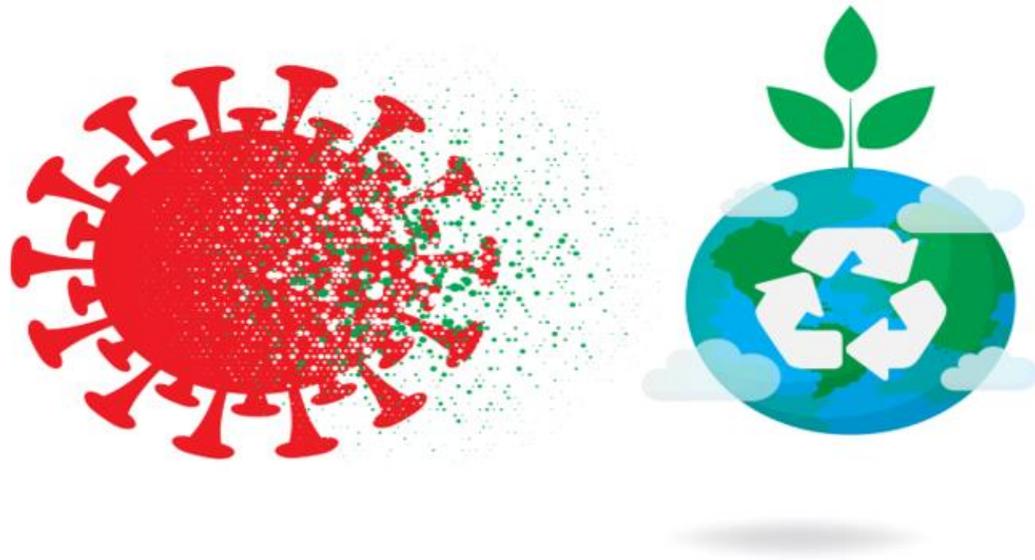
*Participant of EKO's team in the Youth Exchange "Youth Shapers: Localizing the SDG's" in the context of the KA3 project "Youth Voice: We Are Shapers, Not Listeners" 2019-1-DK01-KA347-060095*



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## **Will COVID-19 improve environmental sustainability and aid the fight against climate change?**

We all live in strange times. As if one major global threat, climate crisis, was not enough suddenly our lives changed with arrival of a tiny but deadly virus. But can this crisis at the same time generate a valuable opportunity? One significant positive side effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is with no doubt the improvement of environmental conditions around the world. NASA and the European Space Agency indicate a reduction of nitrogen dioxide emissions from January to February in China due to lockdown conditions and similar findings have been demonstrated for Northern Italy and India. Reduced transportation and commuting has also aided in the reduction of global emissions. At the same time wildlife is reclaiming natural habitats all over Europe with the latest example being wolves returning to Normandy for the first time since the 1930s. Sea-life is also reclaiming its space, due to decreased marine traffic, which also is connected to reduced emissions. These events create a sense of optimism that nature is reviving quickly after almost two centuries of industrial-scale resource exploitation and unsustainable lifestyles. They also demonstrate the realization that the destruction of our planet is not irreversible and we still have time to act. However how optimistic can we remain for the future? Once things go back to normal, a rebound of all the negative factors that drove conditions for the deterioration of the climate crisis might generate a second even more disastrous wave of negative climate impact similar to the critical rebound that occurred after the economic crisis of 2008. What is more, various climate change mitigation programs and strategies are as of now on hold due to the pandemic. Even if individuals retain a more environmental friendly lifestyle that was imposed due to lockdown conditions (even though some unsustainable habits were enhanced such as the increased use of plastic due to increased deliveries), the industry will likely rapidly try to catch up with the lost revenue and countries will pursue strategies of rapid economic growth in order to boost national economies setting the environment as a second priority.



So how can we avoid this dystopian scenario? Perhaps with a regulated return to an alternate more environmental friendly industrial normality? At the same time we had plenty of time to rethink our habits and lifestyle, improving our environmental footprint for instance by consuming what we “need” and not structuring our habits around what we constantly “want”. Environmental friendly habits need more than ever to be enhanced after the pandemic is over. What is for sure now is the time to develop a long term strategy and take advantage of this historic chance to halt the climate crisis and save our planet by positioning our collective conscience towards this direction.

So let’s beat the virus, learn our lesson and collectively thrive, in a new era of sustainable co-existence with our environment.



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