

**Project reporting form:**

The LockedDown

# Austria

UMIT – Private University of Health Sciences, Medical Informatics and Technology

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## Report on Analysis of Surveys

**Participants from:**

Universities, Private Universities,  
Universities of Applied Sciences,  
University colleges of teacher  
education, all over Austria

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**Data Collection Period: Jun-Nov  
2020**

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**Language(s): German**

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**Total Number of Surveys: 1891**

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**Surveys analyzed: 1891**

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**Ethics Approval:**

LSE used

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# 1.0 Executive Summary

Participants were invited via contacting the universities, private universities, universities of applied sciences and university colleges of teacher education plus informing relevant networks about the online questionnaire. Data was collected from June to November 2020. The support of the Austrian tertiary educational institutions was high, leading to a total of 1.891 responses (after excluding 40 respondents stating not being affiliated with a university). Of these, 716 were staff members, 1175 students.

Most respondents were below 30 (63.1%), 24% between 30-49, 12.9% 50 and older. Regarding gender, the sample is very balanced: 48.97% stated to be female, 49,89% male, with 0.96% preferring not to say and 0.16% other. As expected, most students were in the age group below 30, details are shown in Table 1. In total, 76.3% reported undergraduate level. Within staff, the majority held an academic role (440), most of these were male, whilst the majority of those with non-academic roles were female (180), see Table 2.

Role/Age	under 30	30-49	≥50	Total
Staff	19.8%	48.0%	32.1%	716
Student	89.5%	9.3%	1.2%	1175
<b>Total N</b>	1194	453	244	1891

Table 1: Role and Age group

Staff Role/Gender	f	m	other	prefer not to say	Total
academic	39.8%	57.7%	0.2%	2.3%	440
non-academic	69.2%	30.0%	0.4%	0.4%	260
<b>Total N</b>	355	332	2	11	700

Table 2: Staff Role and Gender

The majority was not **working** before the pandemic (58.2%), but if, then mostly part time (85.1%). Only 6.1% lost their job because of the lockdown/pandemic, 9.5% were concerned about their job security. None own a business. Family **income levels** were stated to be high by 16.4%, middle by 67.8%, and low by 9%, with 6.8% preferring not to say. Most had no financial problem due to the lockdown or pandemic (89.5%). 67% live in a large city, 21.4% in a suburb or the countryside, 11.6% in a small city. As for **accommodation**, 67.9% live in a flat and 24.4% in a house, 7.7% have a rented room. Though the majority stayed in their residency (79.1%), 14.9% reported moving in with their parents, and 2.9% elsewhere. An additional 3% reported the impossibility of moving to where they wanted to be during the lockdown. Most stayed with their families or partner during the lockdown, only 12.8% report a troubled relationship with those they lived with, 1.1% domestic abuse.

The **social impacts** of the pandemic were not too detrimental for most: 21.6% report everything was fine, 52.3% state there was an impact, but they were able to cope, while 26.3% indicate a negative impact. Regarding the impact on their partnership, about a third had none, for 36.3% there was no change, in 2.4% it fell apart, for 12.7% of the cases the partnership suffered while for 15.7% it improved. Only a minority was caring for a sick person during the pandemic/lockdown (5.4%), 13.3% were responsible for childcare and of these, 67.5% reported this impacted their education or work.

In total, 65.9% state not having had **problems accessing products or services**. The more detailed question(s) on where problems were encountered reveals that this occurred for personal/professional/domestic services (68.5%), medicines/health services (18.8%), food/other necessary goods (27.4%), and other services (20.6%).

Regarding **exercise**, results show a broad variety of physical activity. While around 20% report getting enough exercise (22.9%), exercising but not as they want to (21.8%), exercising more (20.2%), not exercising, and not having done so before (19.9%), 11.1% state they cannot exercise and experiencing a reduction of quality of life (QoL) due to that, while for an additional 4% the same condition results in no decrease of QoL. Only 1.9% report being a professional athlete. Of these, 52.9% fear anxious that the pandemic affects their career.

**Stress levels** during the pandemic fluctuated slightly (Table 3), just as **QoL** (Table 4).

Stress level/week of lockdown-pandemic	Decreased	Increased	Stayed same	Not applicable
1-2	26.3%	43.3%	29.4%	1%
3-4	26.1%	30.0%	42.8%	1.1%
5 and later	23.6%	32.9%	42.0%	1.4%

Table 3: Stress levels

QoL/week of lockdown-pandemic	Decreased	Increased	Stayed same	Not applicable
1-2	44%	18.6%	36.6%	0.8%
3-4	38.9%	16.2%	44.0%	0.9%
5 and later	32.7%	17.3%	48.7%	1.2%

Table 4: Quality of Life

Coping abilities seem to have increased, as also the statements on **depression and anxiety** suggest (Table 5). Still, however, the numbers are very high.

Dep-anx/week of lockdown-pandemic	yes	no	Not applicable
1-2	32.2%	66.2%	1.6%
3-4	31.0%	67.0%	2.0%
5 and later	25.8%	71.5%	2.7%

Table 5: Depression and anxiety

When asked about the **benefits** of the lockdown, only 28.9% reported this to be true for them. Of these, 69.2% had more time for hobbies and family, 37% for self-education, 21.3% started something new, 27.6% saw other benefits. Open remarks include, e.g., less (time in) traffic.

As testing regimes were not yet implemented at the start of the pandemic, only very few reported COVID-19 tests. The majority had no COVID-19 symptoms (92.3%), but 25.2% another health-related issue. While not applicable for most (48.1%), 37.0% could access health care, 14.9% could not. 13% reported an underlying health condition, 2.1% to be special needs students requiring support, which for many of them was severely impacted or lost. Only 1.2% reported having **lost someone** due to COVID-19, 2.7% due to another health condition. 8.9% felt that a health emergency of a family member had not been adequately dealt with.

Most (77.3%) continued teaching/learning online, for 8.6% this was not possible and for the rest not applicable. The professional/educational experience was either not or negatively impacted for about 36% each, while positively for 28.5%. The opinion on online learning/teaching is rather positive – only 14.5% report no good experience, the rest thinks it is possible but better in person (53.2%) or great and to be continued (21.4%) [for the rest, this is not applicable]. Proceeding to work at **university** was not possible for 73.9%. However, there was organizational support to continue with working and studying (79.7%) and arrangements for exams were taken in 71.7% of the cases (and very frequently postponed or cancelled). However, 43.2% feel anxious about their education and/or exams. Project funding is a concern for 47.5%.

#### Key findings:

- The educational institutions provided helpful support for continuing to work and study.
- Individual coping abilities seem to have improved over time.
- Still, stress, depression, and anxiety levels as well as impact on quality of life show additional support might be required.
- Less than a third of the respondents reports benefits of the lockdown.
- Social impacts were among those felt most intensely.

## 2.0 Pandemic Measures in Austria

The first cases of SARS-CoV-19 in Austria were documented at the end of February 2020. By mid-March, the government decided for a lockdown to reduce social contacts via the closure of schools, restaurants, specific types of shops, etc. (Moshammer et al., 2020; Pollak et al., 2020a). This lasted until mid-April, with a curfew until May 1<sup>st</sup>. As the west of the country was most affected, Tyrol opted for complete quarantine until April 7<sup>th</sup>, though some regions remained in isolation until April 23<sup>rd</sup> (Pollak et al., 2020b).<sup>1</sup> The first nation-wide relaxation of the regulation took effect after Easter (Simon et al., 2021). These first actions resulted in a flattening of the curve (Desson et al., 2020) and a rather normal summer followed (Pollak et al., 2020c). Increasing infection rates led the federal government to demand the wearing of mouth nose protection in “indoor grocery stores (...), bank branches, post offices and nursing homes, (...) pharmacies (...) and healthcare facilities” (Schmidt & Haindl, 2021) as of July 24<sup>th</sup>. This list got extended by September 14<sup>th</sup>, in addition to limitations for public gatherings. Measures were tightened by September 21<sup>st</sup> and again on October 23<sup>rd</sup> due to rising infection numbers. A partial lockdown with curfew from 8pm-6am and severe restrictions (cancelling of events, home working if possible, hospital and nursing home staff required to get tested regularly, etc.) started on November 3<sup>rd</sup> (Schmidt & Haindl, 2021). As infection numbers rose, a second nationwide hard lockdown was decided for and lasted from November 17<sup>th</sup> until and including December 6<sup>th</sup> (Łaszewska et al., 2021; Schmidt & Haindl, 2021). Measures included e.g. strict regulations regarding reasons for leaving one’s home, the closure of all non-essential

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<sup>1</sup> More on the role of federal governments can be found here: Greer, S., Rozenblum, S., Wismar, M., & Jarman, H. (2020). *HOW HAVE FEDERAL COUNTRIES ORGANIZED THEIR COVID-19 RESPONSE?* (COVID-19 Health System Response Monitor. CROSS-COUNTRY-ANALYSIS. , Issue. <https://analysis.covid19healthsystem.org/index.php/2020/07/16/how-have-federal-countries-organized-their-covid-19-response/>

businesses, and very tight restrictions regarding visiting patients at hospitals or care homes (Schmidt & Haindl, 2021).

## 2.1 Measures taken by higher education institutions nationally

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, it became clear that all universities should be closed by March 16<sup>th</sup> the latest, and several universities managed an earlier date (Kroisleitner, 2020; Pollak et al., 2020a). Courses requiring physical presence were either replaced or provided (later) observing strict regulations regarding hygiene, safety, and number of students (Nimmervoll, 2020).

Universities as autonomous entities were and are exempt from the national COVID-19 related regulations (Mölk, 2022b).<sup>2</sup> Two laws (COVID-19-Hochschulgesetz<sup>3</sup>, 2. COVID-19-Hochschulgesetz<sup>4</sup>, in their current versions) form the basis for this and for universities, university colleges of teacher education, and universities of applied sciences, to be entitled to further possibilities like prolonging employment contracts in research projects, prolonging time limits and grace periods for students to complete a certain number of courses/ECTS credit points, etc.<sup>5</sup> With the health of staff and students being priority, leadership in all tertiary education institutions thus ensured locally required measures (Bundesministerium für Bildung, 2021), closely following national COVID-19 regulations and guidelines.

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. iur. Armin Mölk is leading the COVID-19 Task Force at UMIT Tirol and is the institutions' representative at the national meetings described below.

<sup>3</sup> Bundesgesetz über hochschulrechtliche und studienförderungsrechtliche Sondervorschriften an Universitäten, Pädagogischen Hochschulen, Einrichtungen zur Durchführung von Fachhochschul-Studiengängen und Fachhochschulen aufgrund von COVID-19 (COVID-19-Hochschulgesetz – C-HG); BGBl. I 23/2020 idF. I 177/2021, (2020). <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20011109>; idF. = German abbreviation for „in the version“

<sup>4</sup> Bundesgesetz, mit dem ein Bundesgesetz über hochschulrechtliche Sondervorschriften an Universitäten, Pädagogischen Hochschulen und Fachhochschulen aufgrund von COVID-19 (2. COVID-19-Hochschulgesetz – 2. C-HG) erlassen wird; BGBl. I 76/2021 idF. I 232/2021, (2021). <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20011522>; idF. = German abbreviation for „in the version“

<sup>5</sup> Private universities were not and are not subjected under this special regulations but also used national guidelines as framework (Mölk, A. (2022a, January 12th). *COVID-19 regulations and the tertiary education sector in Austria I* [Interview].

With each institution having the possibility to issues their own rules, the sector opted to implement measures very similar to the “public COVID-19 regulations”, partly stricter. During the pandemic, a working group at the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Research was installed, where by invitation of the ministry representatives of each tertiary education institution (each of them has their own “COVID-19 Task Force”), the ministry, and research institutions, as well as the national student representative body, can meet once per week in an online setting to discuss proceedings and to agree on minimum standards to implement for the organizations’ members (staff, students). The ministry issued guidelines and provided concepts to aid in this process. This way, the sector was given the possibility to ensure continuation of teaching and research and take internal requirements into account (Mölk, 2022a).

### 3.0 Analysis Context

In 2020, Austria had a population of 8.926.290 (Statistics Austria, 2021c). A total of 387.775 students were enrolled in 2020/21 (Statistics Austria, 2021a) at 22 public Universities, 16 private Universities (BMBWF, 2021b), 21 Universities of Applied Sciences (BMBWF, 2021a), and 14 University colleges of teacher education (BMBWF, n.d.). Several of the institutions introduced own testing strategies, surveyed their owns students and for example found that during the first lockdown, 85% [at FH Technikum Wien] wanted to have social contact again (Nimmervoll, 2020). Thus, providing first-year students with face-to-face teaching was prioritized as much as possible (Nimmervoll, 2020). In addition, some study programs conducted own studies (e.g. Schmölz et al., 2020).

Also, the Students Representative Council of the University of Vienna (SRCUV) conducted two questionnaire studies in April and September 2020 regarding distance learning and problems arising for students due to the pandemic. While the higher workload due to the switch to online teaching is criticized, the higher flexibility was also appreciated by the students (ÖH Uni Wien, 2020). In this context, Bork-Hüffer et al. (2021) testify “significant improvements” in online teaching over the course of time. At the university of Linz, a one-year course on empirical social research on digital change was used for qualitatively investigating how students of the university perceived the

switch to online learning, also focusing on inequalities (Prietl, 2021). Based on 26 interviews and some pre-tests, the study reports an initial shock when teaching was changed to an online setting, some issues of adaptation, including technical problems, but an afterwards rather good transition. However, the new mode was also reported to be more strenuous and potentially increasing inequalities.

A team at the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Vienna organized four questionnaire studies to analyze student learning conditions during the pandemic, covering all tertiary educational types. Reports are available for April (Holzer et al., 2021; Schober et al., 2020a), April/May (Schober et al., 2020b), June (Schober et al., 2020c), and June/July 2020 (Schober et al., 2021). Between 3522 (April/May) and 1635 (June) students participated, most studying at universities. Results show that though most students managed well with the new learning setting (Schober et al., 2021) the uncertainty accompanying the situation was problematic. Not knowing when and how exams could be done could lead to a drop in motivation, just as lack of professional discussion and exchange (Schober et al., 2020a), and online teaching in general (Dorfer et al., 2021). About 65% felt well, 18% did not – this correlated with how learning could be managed, but also with the perceived degree of information received by their institution of study about the developments regarding COVID-19 and how protected they felt. Also, feeling competent and autonomous plus socially embedded correlated positively with perceived wellbeing (Schober et al., 2021).

A broader study regarding psychological strain of students was conducted by Bernadette Vötter (N=1500 students), finding that major problems were increased perceived burdens, existential concerns, and various mental and physical issues. 36% were suffering from anxiety and depression as well as depressive states, the majority felt stressed and stated lower subjective wellbeing (Universität Innsbruck, 2021). Correspondingly, half of the respondents in the SRCUV study felt their concentration levels were lower than usual, their contact to colleagues had worsened, and more than 40% stated having (rather) negative expectations for the current term (ÖH Uni Wien, 2020). Findings include reports of job losses (17% in April), especially for students working only part-time or a few hours per week. This may be due to specifics of pandemic related employment policies and can lead to financial problems for the affected (ÖH Uni Wien, 2020).

A study with Austrian and German students compared psychological need satisfaction, motivation, and vitality before and during the initial lockdown-induced distance learning phase. Results showed that intrinsic motivation, one of the types of extrinsic motivations (identified regulation) and perceived psychological need satisfaction suffered during the distance learning period, while vitality and “more controlled forms of motivation” (p. 11) were higher. The study also highlighted the importance of feeling related to peers and faculty (Müller et al., 2021).

For the teaching staff, a total of 74.653 people in the academic year 2019/20 (Statistics Austria, 2021b), there is a study by the University of Graz, done in three waves in 2020 (March, N=119; April, N=18; July/August, N=345) at the University of Graz (Dorfer et al., 2021). Students (5 waves) and teaching staff were surveyed quantitatively regarding online teaching and its effects. Both groups stated a higher workload, together with higher stress and strain, but also positive effects like higher temporal flexibility. One short report is available of a university college of teacher education in Vienna regarding workplace health promotion during the pandemic. A sports offer was provided online for students and all staff members (Drexler & Rudloff, 2021).

The study reported here is different in scope than those described, as these typically focused on learning and teaching in a different setting. The most comprehensive account regarding the developments during the summer term 2020 and winter term 2021 was done by Pausits and colleagues (2021) and also provides recommendations. A further difference of this study regarding those done so far is that staff investigated was not limited to those with teaching responsibilities, and the general population could answer, as well. However, the latter are not included here.

## 4.0 Policy Context

Younger Austrian adults (below 35yrs) were soon reported to experience a higher degree of stress due to the pandemic (Pieh et al., 2020). University students (Schmölz et al., 2020) and staff need to be trained for online teaching and preparing distance learning (Bork-Hüffer et al., 2021; Prietl, 2021), just as universities (Ebner et al., 2020). In a very practical account (Sabie et al., 2020), students of the Technical University in Vienna describe the problems they encountered, especially regarding infrastructure, like a stable internet connection (see also (Prietl, 2021)). The bandwidth available was

crucial for video conferences – sharing a connection with others at home or having limits could lead to difficulties (Schmölz et al., 2020). In addition, the classes used various tools, which demanded a lot of learning. Issues centering around questions of exposure need to be considered, as well, since posing a question in class differs from doing so in an online forum (Sabie et al., 2020). In February 2021, a working group on ‘digital teaching, learning and assessment’ was installed by the Austrian Higher Education Conference with the aim to “develop recommendations to further enhance the quality of university teaching, learning and assessment based on (currently available) evidence and experience” (Pausits et al., 2021, p. 11) as a lot of insight has already been and will still be gained on how to best design online teaching and learning.

Students would like to have some form of distance teaching continued (ÖH Uni Wien, 2020), via blended learning and the offer of online courses, recording of classes, and having online access to material (Bork-Hüffer et al., 2021). However, all these efforts should be an addition to regular teaching (Prietl, 2021) and need to be considered with the required access to university facilities like libraries, the technical competences of students (Schmölz et al., 2020) plus the complete curriculum and total workload in mind (Sabie et al., 2020). The students wish for training on how to use the new media, [technical] resources, plus the offer of forums to connect with others (Prietl, 2021). Higher social connectedness can reduce stress and worries in a pandemic situation (Nitschke et al., 2021), suggesting that measures supporting students’ interaction amongst themselves and with lecturers should be introduced – and maybe kept during more normal times (Müller et al., 2021).

In addition, it is highlighted that higher temporal flexibility in itself creates higher demands on self-organization (Schmölz et al., 2020), plus does not increase students’ availability, but only makes their schedules more accommodating (Sabie et al., 2020). Feedback for this can be given in the regular course evaluations, and during the term. Students also request guidelines and standards for online teaching and online exams (ÖH Uni Wien, 2020), an issue also highlighted by the recommendation of providing “legal, financial and structural framework conditions” (Pausits et al., 2021, p. 11). Students experiencing financial hardships can apply for a specific fund (Hochschüler\_innenschaft, 2022). Moreover, COVID-19 related laws for (public)

tertiary education provided the legal background for easing the impact of the pandemic, for example regarding project funding, financial aids, and contracts.

In our study, financial issues were not (yet) problematic while social and emotional impacts were more severely felt. This highlights the importance of psychological counselling and providing more (online) possibilities of social contact. Outdoor teaching might be considered more in this context as it reduces stress and screen time, both of which – lower screen time and being outdoors – can have a positive impact on well-being in pandemic times (Stieger et al., 2021). Also, seeing each other while keeping distance could be possible. Adding courses to the curriculum teaching coping strategies and promoting own wellbeing might be helpful, as well, not only during a pandemic.

However, what this study showed is that support would be required for those who work/study and have childcare responsibilities. During a hard lockdown, this is very difficult to combine. Time related issues are also reported by other studies – especially students having the feeling of being overburdened with tasks, with teaching staff not considering the time these really cost. Thus, more training is suggested for planning distance learning tasks.

## 5.0 Public Outreach

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## 6.0 Other outputs (optional)

*In preparation*

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