



*This is a quote from the homepage of chooseyouth.org. "Choose youth" is a campaign in the UK against the cancelation of youth services that is very likely to happen as a result of budget cuts in public spending. This will, according to the campaign supporters, lead to "destroying years of professional expertise committed to partnership and volunteer working". It seems as though the financial crisis that struck Europe a few years back has taken its toll on youth work and the negative effects of this are already quite visible around the vieux continent.*

It looks like youth issues have been put at the top of government lists only when it comes to reductions in public spending. The youth sector has been among those the most at risk of losing institutional and financial support recently. As a result, in Portugal the youth institute has already stopped all support to youth organisations. This institute will join the sports department and many governmental youth workers will be reintegrated into new functions. Moreover, the local governments have seen their budget reduced, which forced them also in turn to decrease or even to freeze all the support traditionally given to youth organisations and informal groups of young people. On top of that the government-supported volunteering activities for young people have been cancelled. "In general youth is no longer a priority. It's considered unprofitable", says Dulce Marques, co-ordinator of OKUPA-Espaco Juventude. "Youth organisations

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## » Youth work in countries of crisis

### Choose youth

The situation on the other side of the continent doesn't appear to differ significantly. The youth services in the UK are already an example of consequences of the financial crisis. Some local authorities have cut publicly provided youth services altogether. As a result of this they are replaced by voluntary groups in some cases, while in others there is simply nothing. "It has certainly stimulated a debate about whether youth services should be targeted or universal and whether they should be left to the market. One development we welcome is the government's policy emphasis on the role of youth voice in the process. They are calling on young people to influence quality and delivery of services, by holding decision makers to account. Of course this depends on how effective and resourced youth participation is locally", says James Cathcart, a former youth worker, social worker and justice worker, now CEO of the youth participation network the of the British Youth Council. "A large coalition of providers, trade unions and youth voice groups has come together under the 'Choose youth' banner to campaign against cuts – especially where they are rushed or unfair and there is some local evidence of decisions being reconsidered. However at a time of rising youth unemployment, rising debt for students and a double dip recession the mood is one of resignation as well as defiance."

SPOTLIGHTS ON  
THE CONSEQUENCES



### Young people facing consequences

The atmosphere in the Balkan region is not much different to that in the UK. The lack of organised, institutional and educational support to young people has apparently been affecting their active participation in society as 40% of young people in the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" feel apathy, 56% are not active while 25% consider themselves to be socially excluded. Furthermore, the lack of youth work support has been affecting the relationships among young people in general, according to Ivana Davidovska and Stefan Manevski from Intercultural Dialogue. "The last interethnic and violent tensions and incidents among young people are one of the examples of it. The only support to young people and their personal and social development in the 'former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' are several youth organisations working with young people. There is lack of support systems for young people at local level, meaning here there are no youth centres, youth clubs, or other type of youth services", they say. "In general there are no specific funds supporting youth work development in the 'former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', granted by the government on local and national levels. Ever since the crisis hit Europe, different budget cuts were introduced, especially in the youth sector, and even this little support is gone now. The main cuts have been introduced in the Agency for Youth and Sport, in the budget for implementation on the National Youth Strategy, so the implementation of this strategy has basically been stopped."

It might be early to say where all of this will lead youth work and young people but the prognostic based on the current trends is not very promising.

According to James Cathcart: "It's still too early to assess impact, and indeed many of the means of measuring services are also not being resourced. The government is consulting on guidance about the statutory levels of youth services that are required and how best to provide them. Whatever is decided many young people will only experience the cuts in their locality and will not be aware of the bigger picture or trends, but analysts are warning about the connection between an erosion of services and support for youth in general and some unmet targeted needs in particular and general levels of discontent by a section of the population that was least responsible for the recession and need to make cuts in the first place."



### Where do we go from here?

Youth work carried out in Portugal, the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and the UK or elsewhere is always aimed at providing a space for the personal development of young people and focuses on active youth participation in society. It is also supposed to aim to improve the status of young people and to increase the level of their representation and active participation or build their capacity to undertake such actions. But how do we achieve this when the conditions for carrying out youth work are as limited as they appear to be in the countries of crisis?

"On one hand I consider that youth work and young people are in limbo. Everybody is ... waiting. The feeling is: 'There is nothing we can do', 'The solutions aren't in our hands!', 'We have some demonstrations in the streets but with no impact...' In another way, I think that this crisis also can help young people to give more value to everything that they have or had! It can motivate young people to change their behaviour, to become more creative, to change their paradigm/modus vivendi. Soon, part of the youth will be able to understand that if they want to participate in a youth exchange or to organise a summer camp, they should be more active, they should participate, they should work together and be creative!" says Dulce.