

# STUDY VISIT



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The report was co-written by the participants of the study visit to Portugal.

The study visit of street based youth workers in Portugal took place between 26<sup>th</sup> of September and 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2022, during which time we visited several organisations working with vulnerable young people in two of Portugal's biggest cities - Lisbon and Porto. Below you will find descriptions of the practices we learned about during our study visit.

Youth work in Portugal is mainly the domain of NGOs, in cooperation with public institutions or through calls for tenders. As our interlocutors told us, youth work in youth centres is not as developed in Portugal, as they are not as familiar with youth centres as they are in Slovenia. Youth activities are mainly targeted at children and adolescents from more vulnerable target groups. The following article will describe in more detail the practices of youth work and work with more vulnerable target groups that we have learnt during the study visit.

## **WELFARE STATE: SLOVENIA VS PORTUGAL**

Social protection covers a range of services and financial benefits for individuals and groups who lack sufficient resources to support themselves. The main aim of the welfare state is to ensure human dignity, equal opportunities for all members of a society and to prevent social exclusion. The concept of the welfare state is a two-way relationship: the state provides various (material and social) rights and individuals and groups contribute in the form of taxes and other benefits.

In Slovenia, social insurance is a legal obligation, which means that all citizens of the Republic of Slovenia, as well as all those who are entitled to various social rights depending on their specific legal status, are obliged to be insured. This insurance is mainly paid for by employment-related contributions: employers pay tax on social security contributions and employees pay social security tax on the difference in gross/net monthly salary payments. Social security contributions include pension and disability insurance, compulsory health insurance contributions, parental care contributions, employment contributions, etc.

Social security rights cover financial or other assistance provided by the state to people who are in need (e.g. unemployment, accidents at work, sickness, disability, pensions, family insurance, maternity). Social services provided by the State are implemented to prevent and/or alleviate social hardship and problems and include self-help activities and support, e.g. counselling for individuals, family support, institutional care, organised care for adults with physical or mental

disabilities, assistance to workers, institutions and other employers in solving work-related problems, etc.

There are various pre-defined conditions for obtaining different social rights and financial benefits (some related to employment, nationality or legal status, etc.) The most common form of social benefit is cash social assistance - cash for people who, because of circumstances beyond their control, are unable to provide for themselves and their family members. It is available to those with no income or whose income is below the minimum income set each year by the government. Other conditions apply: you must be actively seeking solutions to your problem, registered with the Employment Service, participating in active employment policy programmes, etc. The amount depends on several factors: level of income, number of family members, possible assets or savings, etc.

In addition to cash social assistance, there are a number of other social cash transfer mechanisms, which are usually granted in exceptional social circumstances, e.g. exceptional cash social assistance, care allowance, funeral allowance, etc. A special category is those that are family-related (parental allowance, childbirth allowance, large family allowance, child care allowance, partial payment for loss of income, etc.). It is worth noting that recipients of (some) social transfers are also entitled to payment of compulsory health insurance.

If we compare the Slovenian social protection system with the Portuguese one, we find that there are certain similarities. Like Slovenia, Portugal has a system of financial unemployment benefits based on social insurance, which depends on various conditions, such as length of employment, age, etc. Portugal has an extensive system of various social entitlements, but it is mainly linked to the labour market. There are also some universal family benefits, but to a lesser extent than in Slovenia, e.g. no childcare allowance, no benefits for single parents, etc. Housing benefits are limited to people who have suddenly, through no fault of their own, lost their income. As in Slovenia, most social rights are not permanent, e.g. social cash assistance is minimal and temporary, and the basic tax cell is the family.

## **REFUGEE CENTRE IN LISBON**

On the first day of the study visit, we had the opportunity to visit CPR - an NGO whose work is based on helping refugee populations. We visited their centre where the users are staying. CPR offers accommodation to those identified as refugees, according to their capacities. The centre in question has space for about 100 people. They accommodate not only individuals, but

also families with larger numbers, the elderly, people with disabilities, the physically handicapped, etc. The organisation offers people the possibility of staying with them for up to 6 months once they have been accepted. After that, they find them alternative forms of accommodation, which they cover financially for another 18 months.

During the presentation of their work, the representative of the organisation repeatedly stressed the importance of individualisation and, within this, focusing on the specifics of the issue. She also stressed that the essence of their work is to enable individuals to live a decent and satisfying life, not to be placed in the workforce when it comes to the issue of employability after the first empowerment. Hence the financial support for a further 18 months and the professional support at any time in the future. We were also struck by the fact that Portugal has a universal health network for everyone, and that you do not need to have an organised documentation to stay in Portugal for health care of any kind, and that all children can enrol in compulsory schooling, which lasts until the age of 18.

In addition to accommodation assistance, the centre also employs teachers who provide skills workshops and teach the foreigners the language, which is often a barrier for foreigners when entering a new country. All activities are voluntary. They also organise various excursions - to the seaside, to museums, to Lisbon's festive centre, etc. The centre also employs a psychologist who is available for individual counselling, as well as discussion groups aimed at giving individuals the opportunity to speak out and to slowly, secretly detabulise mental health concerns.

## **YOUTH CENTRE IN LISBON**

We visited the Lisbon Youth Centre. The centre is a fairly large space within a residential area. The central space of the Youth Centre is a huge courtyard. As mentioned, it is used for sporting activities and for socialising on benches. It also has a small pond with a turtle. The turtle is cared for by the users of the Youth Centre, who themselves have initiated the pet. Caring for a living creature thus teaches responsibility and care to the participants of the Youth Centre. In addition to the courtyard, the Youth Centre consists of three other rooms. The first room is mainly dedicated to playing video games and learning. The second is a gym where young people train in martial arts. The third is for creating and using computer equipment. A bit like the youth centres in our country. It is supposed to be visited daily by between 20-40 children/young people who go there after school. The atmosphere of the centre itself is pleasant, but what

impressed me the most was the creative space. As far as practices and working methods are concerned, we can draw parallels with our own.

## **COVA DA MOURA NEIGHBOURHOOD**

On our second day in Lisbon, we headed out early in the morning to the outskirts of the city, to a neighbourhood called Cova da Moura. The inhabitants are largely immigrants from the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, mostly from Cape Verde (official name: Republic of Cape Verde). The common characteristic of the majority population of this neighbourhood is marginalisation, many reasons for which stem from both historical and current socio-political situations. Many of the inhabitants were even born in Portugal, but have been given a nationality by their parents that does not correspond to their true identity. Of course, it is difficult to speak with sufficient precision about their 'true' identity here, as it is extremely complex and multi-layered. On the one hand, many want to integrate more into the general population of the country, but on the other hand, it is important for them to preserve the culture of their ancestors. Crime and poverty rates in the neighbourhood are high. It is certainly a community which, one could say, is located between two worlds. This suspension in a 'social vacuum' highlights and accentuates a number of social problems that the classical social apparatus is unable or unwilling to address, because such a situation requires a huge amount of flexibility that public social welfare institutions simply do not have. And so we come to the essence of our visit - street work. Street work is a very unusual and often misunderstood extension of NGOs to achieve what the aforementioned institutions cannot. It is sometimes difficult to explain quantitatively the techniques, approaches and contribution of street work, it requires a lot of perseverance, a feeling for fellow human beings and last but not least creativity. These are all qualities that sometimes make it so difficult to justify the indispensability of this practice in the social sphere. The example of the Coava da Moura neighbourhood will hopefully successfully and more comprehensibly demonstrate the importance of street work. When we arrived in front of the neighbourhood (the 'in front' is important - there are no taxis in the neighbourhood) we were met by Paolo. Paolo is a street worker in the neighbourhood, but he does not come from "outside", nor is he a social worker or in any other formal role, he is a resident of the neighbourhood who acts as an additional link in the group of street based youth workers who are active in the neighbourhood. He described the neighbourhood to us as the African village from which he comes. He has lived in the Covava da Moura neighbourhood since he was a little boy. Our walk around the neighbourhood lasted a couple of hours, we visited a grocery store, a tailor's shop, an employment centre, an official and unofficial kindergarten, ate a delicious lunch

at their award-winning restaurant O Coqueiro, walked past the central bar, admired the colourful often politically coloured graffiti, and at the end of the visit we listened to music by local rappers in the studio of the youth centre. In the "Recording Studio", young people are encouraged to create music and make videos. This kind of collaboration means a lot to the young people there, and they have already made a couple of successful videos and songs. It all sounds quite informal and almost like a tourist tour of the city, but the day was packed with lessons on successful street work.

Firstly, it is necessary to recognise the level of trust between the local population and the street workers that made our "pedagogical walk" possible in the first place, without our visit being experienced as an external intrusion into the intimacy of everyday life within the neighbourhood. It did not escape any of us that all the passers-by greeted Paoloto cheerfully and chatted with him happily, and there was no mistrust in the looks they gave us strangers. And that was the second lesson of the day about street work, the need to establish cultural understanding. Why the second? Because Helder had told us the first one the day before at the kick-off meeting. So the first lesson is the one that talks about consistency and persistence over time. So much mutual trust is not built overnight, probably not even in a year, it takes years. He said very simply that the key moment, when the question "who are you?" finally comes from the other side, when you keep going to the community, that is when the building of trust starts. Going back to the first of the lessons and elaborating a bit on the importance of cultural understanding of the population we are working with and why street workers coming from the community is crucial. Whatever our level of empathy, openness, persistence and desire, certain segments of different ethnic/social/subcultural groups will forever remain incomprehensible to us (at least on an emotional level). In this way, someone from the community can help us to create a more understandable dialogue, which will enable street workers to integrate more quickly and more fully into the community. In addition to the direct benefits, the acceptance of street work and workers into the community allows for contact to be established between marginalised neighbourhood residents and more formal and structured forms of social welfare assistance. Something like this can only be established through sustained contact. It is also important to stress that the intervention is implemented at the level of the whole community, regardless of age or gender, so that inclusion is even greater and perception of current problems and needs is even better.

When we look at the overall impact of street work in this community, we can see it at every level, from the sincere greetings on the street, to the renovated primary school that will now

cater for pupils from mixed neighbourhoods, to the Employment Centre and the Youth Centre with its colourful range of activities. A visit to this very distinctive neighbourhood confirmed that street work is meaningful and effective, and requires a wide range of skills.

### **MUNICIPAL AND INTERCULTURAL MEDIATORS PROJECT (PMMI)**

On our first day in Porto, we visited the Cerco do Porto neighbourhood, where we took a bus. Already on the bus we could see the interaction between the youth street worker and the participant when we met by chance on the bus. The local organisation introduced us to the Municipal and Intercultural Mediators Project and Cercar-te. In the former, we were greeted by five friendly hosts, one of whom was part of the Roma community. We had some problems with the language, as we needed a translation from Portuguese into English, and I think some information was lost. However, in the end, we understood the point.

The PMMI project took place between 2019 and 2022 and aimed to take action in the areas of housing, health, education, internationality, culture, employment opportunities and citizenship. We were told that many Roma families live in the Cerco do Porto area, where non-profit housing has been built and where they now live. The aim of the project is to integrate Roma and migrant communities, using the methodology of international mediation, which allows for closer relations of healthy coexistence between these communities and people in general.

### **CERCAR-TE RUGBY SCHOOL**

Cercar-te also takes place in Cerco de Porto. This is a sports-based intervention involving a rugby school. The project aims to offer young people between the ages of 6 and 18 a learning and integration experience. The Rugby School was conceived in response to the need to increase the effectiveness of the prevention of juvenile delinquency and school absenteeism/failure. The neighbourhood where the school operates is managed by the Municipality of Porto and has been associated with the drug trade for the last 30 years. The area is inhabited by almost 7000 people, mostly migrants and Roma. The socio-economic background of the children and young people coming from this neighbourhood is often deprived and there is a very high rate of 'NEET' young people (not in education, employment or training) within the neighbourhood. Within the programme, sport is used as a means of preventing delinquency, as children and young people find sporting activities to be a fun rather than stigmatising experience. Participation in sport provides opportunities to learn positive qualities, skills and virtues that protect children and young people from developing

delinquent or risky behaviour. By participating in sporting activities, young people learn team spirit, morality, respect for rules and authority, self-control, conflict resolution, coping skills and cooperation with others. This learning is facilitated by the coach through reflection with the young people. When the work started, they noticed that there was a lot of tension within the neighbourhood between the Roma and the other residents, which they addressed within the rugby school in order to reduce these tensions. The focus is on healthy and peaceful relations between the residents of the neighbourhood. Within the programme, they have seen great progress in the persistence of the young people involved in the rugby school in the school system, so that they consider their programme a success. It was interesting to learn about the ways in which a seemingly 'rough' sport can be used as a tool to promote a positive self-image and good relationships.

## **FIOS E DESAFIOS**

In the eastern part of Porto, we were welcomed by two street workers from Fios e Desafios, an organisation that works to support children and young people in particular, but also to support families and social and community inclusion, education and training. They showed us around the neighbourhood where they work. The majority of the population living in the neighbourhood is elderly, so many of the activities that take place there involve this age group and support for this group. In the middle of the neighbourhood there is a community centre, which consists of a café and a small hall. The hall has instruments where the young people can practice with their bands and organise events (dances, concerts, social gatherings, etc.), and the room also displays the products they have created together with the young people in the workshops. They also have a prize system for young people to take part in the activities. If they participate in the activities or if they do something good, they get points. If something bad happens, they lose points. At the end of the day, they get different prizes (cinema tickets, swimming pool tickets, etc.) when they have accumulated points. What is most interesting about this is that it is not the youth workers who decide whether points are gained or lost, but the young people themselves. Together, at the end of the activity, they decide how to build on a good deed and/or how to punish a certain deed by taking points away. There was a real sense of togetherness and inspiration of intergenerational cooperation within the neighbourhood. A good story was how young people organised a piano concert for the elderly in the neighbourhood during the coronavirus and played under their balconies.

## **SOCIAL HOUSING QUARTER**

During the study visit, we also visited a social housing quarter with a predominantly Roma minority population. This is the only team that officially carries out street work in Portugal. The street youth work project in this neighbourhood started by coming in a converted van, which served as a kind of mobile youth centre, with all the tools to carry out youth work inside. In the beginning, the youth street workers took some time and effort to gain the trust of the users. They were suspicious because they drove up in a van that reminded them of those used to kidnap children. However, after many years of cooperation, the youth street workers and the residents of the neighbourhood seem to have built a good relationship.

When we arrived in the neighbourhood, we were greeted by the oldest member of the Roma community in the settlement, who introduced himself as an elder, as a sign of hospitality. In addition, every passer-by came up to us, greeted us and asked about the purpose of our visit.

Youth street workers work with everyone in the neighbourhood, but with an emphasis on the younger population. Most of their activities take place on the large lawn surrounding the high-rise buildings where their users live, and they also have offices on the ground floor of one of the high-rise buildings in the immediate vicinity. However, the project promoters said that they miss their van (mobile youth centre), which has broken down and they do not have the means to repair it. At this point, I see room for cooperation with the municipality, which could help them with funds. The project is being run by an NGO, which is rather cash-strapped.

## **PROJECT SYNERGIES**

We then visited the Synergias Project, where we learned about the practice of youth work in their youth centre. The youth centre is aimed at children and young people aged between 6 and 25, but the staff there told us that it is mostly attended by young people up to the age of 18, as older people do not want to attend it, the main reason being the wide range of ages and therefore the great differences in the way young people spend their free time.

We asked them if the organisation of youth centres in Portugal is similar to Slovenia and found out that the youth centre we visited is mainly for primary school children, as they also organise after-school care and activities for those who want them. We learned that in primary schools in Portugal, they do not, for the most part, organise after-school care (at least not in Porto), so many primary school pupils benefit from the possibility of being looked after by this youth

organisation. We were told that there are many immigrants in Porto (and in other cities in Portugal) and that they are involved in the activities of the youth centre. Many of the young people who are present at the various events later decide to help as volunteers.

It's a pretty big youth centre, at least compared to the youth centres we have in Ljubljana. They have a space with tables and chairs where they can create, socialise or work for school. In another room they have a kitchen, and also chairs and tables. They also have a big yard and a garden where they garden.

A typical day at the youth centre should look like the users do their homework first, and then the various activities start. There seems to be a strong emphasis on creativity, board games and bringing together the users and others present in the community.

The tour gave me some ideas for activities that could be done in the youth centre where I volunteer. One idea that particularly stuck in my mind was to paint and paint the top of the tables with different motifs, including the bases for different board games (e.g. chess board, don't be angry, etc.). They told me that the young people wanted to play these games, but they didn't have the money for them. From the point of view of reducing consumption and moving towards sustainable development, I think these are excellent solutions. Also, the ball game (as a kind of mix between football and a game between two fires) is something that could be used through the practice of youth (street) work. It is just the right tool for getting a larger group of young people of different ages to participate and be active.