



EURO SCOUT.Doc

CRISIS

How to respond to socio-economic challenges



“It is not worthy to stay discouraged due to deceptions or momentary setbacks; it is inevitable that from time to time they show up. They are the salt that flavours our progress; let us stand above them and turn our eyes to the great importance of what we have in our hands.”

Robert Baden-Powell, in: The Scouter (1935)

Background

CRISIS – Coping and Responding In the Socio-economic crisis In Scouting

Crisis is a word that became part of our everyday vocabulary. In the newspapers and on television, in Parliament and in supermarkets, in the means of transportation and in the streets, everyone talks about the crisis.

Indeed, today, the western world lives in a crisis situation; one that began as financial changed into economic and, as always, has deep social repercussions.

A previous document of the Euro.Scout.Doc series, titled “Scouting and the Financial and Economic Crisis” has already addressed this matter, in focusing in particular on the crisis and its subsequent repercussions on Scouting



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As Baden-Powell said, rather than to be submissive and to surrender before a crisis scenario, we should remember that a crisis is a period of challenges but also a period of opportunities. Challenges that often make us stop and ponder, as well as being more aware, more alert; these are opportunities for change, growth and testimony.



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So, this is the background of this document:

- Because it is necessary to stand up, in a determined and positive way, to the crisis that effects the economy, and even more so, countless families throughout the world;
- Because it is necessary to promote hope;
- Because it is necessary not to give up when the intention is creating a better world.

Therefore, this justifies the title of this document: “CRISIS – How to respond to socio-economic challenges”.

Inclusion

Inclusion is the great challenge!

The Executive Board of Corpo Nacional de Escutas (CNE), one of the National Scout Associations in Portugal, recently approved a document stating the institutional and pedagogical position of the association regarding social inclusion, and defining guidelines for the association to act upon.

With this document the association, particularly in acute situations of social exclusion, is called upon to give an extra effort in maintain its offer of an educational space where all children and young people have a place to be, regardless of their family's financial situation.

So, we are facing **two challenges** here:

1. To Be Aware of the Family Situation

Families are strongly affected in periods of economic crisis, either because of the loss of income (salary reduction or no increase; unemployment; lower sales; lower service requests; etc.), or because of variations in monthly responsibilities (in particular the increase of bank credit charges), and this often results in families reducing their non-essential expenses, sometimes even the last possible ones, creating many situations of great human suffering.



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It is important that Leaders of Scout Groups and Units are aware and attentive to these situations, and try to perceive why Scouts do not participate regularly or seize to attend activities altogether; the reason may frequently be linked to a situation of family impoverishment.

Signs:

- Delay of payment of fees;
- Reduced frequency of attendance and activity participation;
- Prolonged absence or sudden announcement of withdrawal;
- Changes in behaviour, such as alienation, passivity or aggression, etc.;
- Delay in purchasing items of the uniform or basic equipment and materials;

Attitudes:

- Try to understand the family situation;
- Approach the issue with the parents or the Scout (especially in older age sections);
- Make special payment arrangements;
- Create ways of support (such as a Scout uniform bank, etc.);
- Promote fundraising activities by sixes, patrols, teams, units, etc.;
- Support and adjust schedules for Scout meetings and activities to allow senior section members to take up part-time, weekend or vacation jobs;
- Promote hope.

In such situations, we cannot pretend not to see. Or if we see, we cannot pretend that it is not our business. We have to act, and when we do it, we have to bear in mind certain precautions:

- Respect and preserve the privacy of the child or young person and his or her family;
- Find inclusive solutions aiming to help, when help is needed, but avoiding the encouragement of dependency on hand-outs;
- Promote a pro-active and participative attitude of the child or young person and his or her family;
- Work under the principle that the best solutions are found in close environment of the individual – within the patrol, for example, rather than on Unit or Group level.

2. To Offer Less Expensive Scout Activities

One of the ways to avoid that children and young people are excluded is to lower participation costs for Scout activities.

We always want to offer more exciting, longer and more and more distant activities... The appeal of nature and challenges compels us to do so.

But to be educationally rich, a Scout activity does not need to be expensive, organised far way or over a long period.

It is not a question of just being 'miserable', as we are in the middle of a period when difficulties faced by families are increasing. But we need to give special attention to see if we cannot lower the costs of activities we offer; this concern can be shared with the members themselves, and then with the organisers of the Scout activities.

Some examples of how to lower costs:

- Make distances shorter and choose the most economic means of transportation (sometimes we can even hike to the location...);
- Choose economical menus, without compromising the nutritional balance needed (why not create a menu/cooking competition?);
- Avoid 'commercial activities', especially those, where we are 'consumers' rather than active participants (and which are often similar to those offered by schools, anyway);
- Give priority to rich and intense activities rather than longer ones.

Education

Education is a great opportunity!

As we have seen, the crisis is in itself an opportunity, namely an educational opportunity.

Even better in moments of crisis we may find – and we find for sure – reasons, spaces and challenges, which seem to us to be educational and personal development opportunities.

It is in our hands to look ahead, to perceive and especially to take advantage of them; it would be wrong not to do so.

In this context, right from the start, there are **four opportunities** here:

1. To promote thrift

The promotion of a spirit of thriftiness has always been part of Scouting's ideals – a Scout is thrifty, economic and respectful of others' well being. Temperance, another way of looking at thrift and sobriety, is promoted in many religions as a core virtue.

Virtue should always be promoted through small gestures and details, in every-day choices, because it is common-sense, but also because it can be related to the scarcity experienced by so many and to the duties of solidarity and sharing.

2. To promote creativity

The implementation of a game that leads us all to look at the activity programme and how it is managed daily, with a host of challenges to be overcome in a spirit of greater thrift in associated costs, can be an excellent challenge and exercise in terms of creativity.

From transportation to food and the activities we do – including materials to be (re)used – everything can be a challenge to the creativity of children and young people, who many times – maybe too many times – are confronted with ready-made solutions.

This is a challenge that will for sure develop creativity in every child and young person, but also group spirit, within the six, the patrol or the team.

3. To promote fundraising

The participation of children and young people in financing their own activities is something that should always be part of the development of Scout activities. This will give a sense of responsibility regarding the value of the work and the money that comes with it and the spirit of self-sufficiency that inspires it.

In times of growing financial difficulties of the families, this participation is to be seen as an

unquestionable educational aim but also as an unavoidable moral link.

This approach should be worked out with a strong commitment, growing in intensity within the older sections, according to the ages and maturity of the young people.

4. To educate for (and in) service

Scouting always educates the 'self' in relation to others, promoting attention and service to our neighbour.

The times of crisis, while increasing poverty situations, underline and strengthen the need for solidarity action for the benefit for our neighbour.

The promotion of participation in solidarity action or even the organisation by ourselves, are excellent ways to raise awareness of the sense of our neighbour and of the development of a spirit of solidarity.

It is important that in these activities children and young people will not be the only workforce

(although it is important and educational that they are part of it). It is also important that they have an opportunity to experience other realities, to understand ways of helping and reflecting about the work done and their role in the construction of society and of a better world.

The Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations as world objectives aiming at equality, social justice and co-operation may be excellent pedagogical tools to be worked on by Scouting at local level.

Throughout the Scout year 2010-2011, under the patronage of the Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, CNE proposed 'service' as main framework for activities, thus strengthening the development of this pedagogical perspective.



“The poor whom we must seek may live near us or far away. They can be materially or spiritually poor. They may be hungry for bread or hungry for friendship. They may need clothing, or they may need the sense of wealth that God’s love for them represents. They may need the shelter of a house made of bricks and cement for the shelter of having a place in our hearts.”

Teresa of Calcutta

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