

National



# POLICY BRIEF



**PROMISE POLICY BRIEF: PORTUGAL (2 OF 2)**

**Young Gender Activists**

**October 2018**

## INTRODUCTION

PROMISE explored the ways young people with a history of stigmatisation or conflict participate in society. In Portugal, our research focused on young men and women aged 17 to 32 who disagreed with the social norms regarding gender roles and gender inequality, and who are engaged in formal or informal activities that aim to promote gender equality.

Gender activism started to gain social relevance in Portugal with the second and third feminist waves that occurred in the last century, and over the decades, young people have become more aware of the social and global challenges faced by women in the country. Despite the fact that initiatives around gender equality are rising and gradually having more impact, and that youth involvement in social and cultural initiatives for gender equality has grown, at the present moment, significant gender inequalities in income, job opportunities and family responsibilities remain. In terms of legislation, Portugal has made significant progresses in terms of gender equality policies; however its implementation needs to be further encouraged.

This policy brief is concerned with intergenerational gaps that reinforce dominant discourses of gender inequality and devalue youth, with gaps in the implementation of gender equality policies, and with the experiences of conflict and stigma that young people face due to their gender activism.

The policy recommendations are directed towards young people, families and older generations, school and education staff, social workers, civil society's organisations, public authorities, and regional and national policy makers.

The aim of the recommendations is to contribute to the effective and widespread implementation of equality policies, to suggest effective ways to disseminate and strengthen the role of youth gender activism, and to strengthen intergenerational relations in order to enhance the role of youth in society.

## KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1 - Contribute to the effective and widespread implementation of gender equality policies

According to the young gender activists, the dominant social discourses in terms of gender roles still lead to unequal opportunities between genders, and maintain a low tolerance of difference. According to them, there is a false sense of change and acceptance in the Portuguese society, which is not ready to make fundamental changes.

The young gender activists suggested that some positive changes have already occurred at this level, though slowly and insufficiently, and believed that many rights have been achieved by decades of activism. The focus of the activists is to ensure that the rights that have been achieved through gender equality policies are respected.

National and regional stakeholders should be encouraged to adopt a **more inclusive discourse, namely by acknowledging inequalities and taking into consideration men and women's specific needs**. Measures should be taken to inspire **public and private institutions to follow equality policies** and to guarantee that equality is taken into account in other policy areas, especially in youth policies (e.g. public recognition for good practices, State certification for their social practices, and judicial and social support to those who are target of unequal treatment, in the workplace or at school for example).

### 2 – Disseminate and strengthen the role of youth gender activism

Young activists recognized many positive impacts of their activism, on themselves and on other people, but they considered that activism is not always perceived positively by others. In fact, when describing the main conflicts they experience, these young people mentioned resistance to activism, for instance, when their relatives did not understand their less conservative ideals nor their engagement in activism, or when teachers resisted rather than supported their initiatives to promote gender equality. Moreover, several participants referred to the media and social networks as a means to both disseminate stereotypes about gender and gender activism, and to deconstruct expectations based on gender and labels about gender activism.

The young gender activists presented some ideas on to how to disseminate and promote the involvement of other youths in gender activism, namely by: encouraging the use of a simple language when talking to others about gender equality and activism; passing on the message of gender activism more effectively and clarifying some misconceptions (e.g., feminism); providing more information about the activities that are organised (e.g., place, how to get involved); training teachers and other school staff to be aware and well informed about gender inequality; and promoting debates about gender equality and tolerance towards difference.

**Civil society organisations focused on gender equality** could contribute to the enlargement of knowledge about their work and should favour the articulation between each other, thus extending their initiatives to a wider audience. Youth initiatives and youth organisations aimed at gender equality should be further supported by public and private funding, and youth services. Specifically, citizenship education projects directed to gender equality and related issues should be further and more frequently developed in schools, stimulating the curiosity and knowledge about the theme, empowering the educational agents, families and students to participate more actively in the society. These educational projects could involve children from an early age, and young activists could be invited to take part, by facilitating workshops and enhancing the value of youth social involvement in society, namely through gender activism. Additionally, the **media could have a more active role** in deconstructing gender roles and expectations based on gender, as well as disseminating information widely, and promoting a more positive image of gender activism organisations.

### 3 – Strengthen intergenerational relations and enhance the role of youth in society

According to the young gender activists, youth in general is seen negatively by older generations. Thus, the discrimination experienced by these young people, based on gender or on their engagement in activism, intersects with discrimination because they are young. Even within activist associations, young people sometimes feel misunderstood and unsupported by older gender activists. For instance, older activists, who tend to be seen as key actors for young people's involvement in activism, are also seen as competitors for more visibility and for preserving the work they have done. Consequently, this makes it difficult for young people to have their space within activism trying to continue the work of older activists.

Some young gender activists reported not feeling supported by older generations in their gender activism, and they believed that this lack of support is linked to the fact that they are young, and young people usually are not taken seriously.

Half of the participants felt that older generations could have an important role in motivating young people to this type of activism, namely through sharing their stories with younger generations.

More initiatives should be promoted in contexts like schools or gender activism organisations allowing **younger and older generations to meet, share and cooperate**. This would allow the sharing of experiences and difficulties to enhance mutual understandings between generations, and promote shared approaches to problem resolution. Moreover, these moments should be encouraged to happen within the family context, in order to contribute to a greater acceptance of different perspectives and to a growing mutual knowledge, thus decreasing young people's feelings of non-acceptance.

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

This policy brief is based on 20 interviews with young gender activists (5 males), aged between 17 and 32 years old. The participants presented different types of engagement in activism: some (11) were or had been in formal gender activism organisations; others (7) were sympathisers/occasional participants in gender initiatives (e.g., feminist festivals, workshops, manifestations, gender meetings); and finally, two were "independent activists" (e.g., editors of gender zines, owners of feminist brand clothing). Additionally, we made observations at six events related to gender activism, such as manifestations and workshops, which resulted in field diaries and in the recruitment of some participants.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

**PROJECT NAME** Promoting Youth Involvement and Social Engagement (PROMISE)

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#### DURATION

May 2016 – April 2019 (36 months).

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#### BUDGET

EU contribution: 2 500 000 €.

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#### WEBSITE

<http://www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/en/newsfeed/>

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#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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#### FURTHER READING

Matos, R., Martins, F., Carneiro, A., Ribeiro, L., Campos, M., & Negrão, M. (2016). *National Context Report – Portugal*. Porto: CEDH – Research Centre for Human Development, Universidade Católica Portuguesa. Published online <http://www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/PROMISE-N...>

Matos, R., Carneiro, A., Martins, F., Campos, L., Ribeiro, L., & Negrão M. (2018). *Young gender activists* (case study report). Porto: CEDH – Research Centre for Human Development, Universidade Católica Portuguesa. Published online <http://www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Young-Gen...>

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