

National



POLICYBRIEF



PROMISE POLICY BRIEF: RUSSIA (3 OF 4)

Grassroots initiatives, conflicts, and solidarities of the feminist scene of St. Petersburg

October 2018

INTRODUCTION

PROMISE explored the ways in which young people with a history of stigmatisation or conflict participate in society. In Russia, our research focused on marginalised young people who are engaged in activism within the current social and political context. More specifically, this particular case study is about various feminist initiatives in St. Petersburg, Russia.

The analysis provided in this policy brief is aimed at the following: creating conditions for feminist activism in Russia, promoting feminist values in the public space, supporting the struggle against multiple forms of discrimination. The policy recommendations are directed at feminist activists and people who are working with the issues of gender, sexualities, and human rights.

The empirical data consists of 15 in-depth interviews with feminist activists and 20 days of participant observation in St. Petersburg. Most of the interviewees were women aged between 20 and 30.

KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Providing conditions to create self-organized safe-spaces for feminist practices and participation

Feminist activists need safe space for developing self-organized small-scale local initiative participation

Example: a grassroots feminist library in St. Petersburg, feminist reading groups, feminist meetups

Recommendation:

- Support self-organised grass-roots feminist initiatives and provide a multitude of spaces for them

Raising attention to women's issues in Russia

In contemporary Russia, there are still numerous social problems connected to women's issues such as sexual violence, domestic violence, women's unpaid labour and reproductive rights

The following facts frame the context: First, in Russia, more than 456 professions are banned for women to enter according to the Approval of a List of Heavy Work and Work in Harmful or Dangerous Working Conditions. This is set out in the Performance of which the Employment of Women is Prohibited (No.162 from 25.02.2000). Second, in 2016, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill signed the Appeal for Citizens for the Prohibition of Abortion.

Recommendation:

- Promote information about women's issues and the infringement of women's rights among Russian youth

Supporting feminist initiatives aimed at protecting all people oppressed on gender, class, or ethnic grounds

The space of feminist activism in St. Petersburg is a heterogeneous space of different initiatives and groups of people. Most of them are struggling against not only gender-based violence, but also against multiple forms of intersectional discrimination.

For the majority of our research participants, social problems faced by labour migrants in the Russian context are of great concern. For example, feminist activists created the newspaper for Central Asian women of St. Petersburg. They also volunteer (or have the experience of being volunteers) in the organization that helps children of labour migrants and refugees.

Recommendation:

- The feminist agenda should not only include the struggle for women's issues, but also against different forms of oppression and inequalities (e.g. supporting LGBTIQ, working-class, migrants and other groups of oppressed)

Supporting feminist projects aimed at sex workers' rights protection

The feminist agenda in Russia employs mostly neo-abolitionist rhetoric, constructing sex-workers as victims of violence. This approach stigmatises them and deprives them of a platform for public debate.

In 2017, St. Petersburg activists created a feminist public project 'Sex work: multiple discriminations and fight for the rights', aimed at organising lectures, discussions and film screenings. Not only queer-feminist activists, but also sex-workers struggling for their rights were involved in the project.

Recommendation:

- Create safe conditions for commercial sex as a form of labour, emphasising the importance of the commercial sex workers rights protection.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

This policy brief is based on 15 interviews and 20 days of observation with 10 feminist initiatives in St Petersburg, Russia

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FURTHER READING	http://www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Grassroots-initiatives-conflicts-and-solidarities-of-LGBTQ-scene-of-St.-Petersburg.pdf