

Short presentation – Brussel’s Call Workshop [6 minutes]

Hello everyone!

First of all, thank you for the invitation to be here. It’s great to see so many young feminists from all over Europe and the world committed to fight sexual exploitation in all its forms. I am also a young feminist activist myself and a project officer at the Portuguese Platform for Women’s Rights, so I hope my experience can help you think of the possibilities for youth engagement against sexual exploitation and, in particular, the system of prostitution.

In Portugal, the Portuguese Platform for Women’s Rights is currently developing the project EXIT – Women’s human rights not to be prostituted. This project has three major components: a nation-wide research on the system of prostitution, an informative campaign for the general population about the Equality/Nordic Model and behavior change through mobilization and awareness-raising among young people.

We consider this last component of youth engagement to be one of the most important. There are many young people in Portugal who are feminists and abolitionists, but many of them are unaware of each other. That is why we decided to do a training for young abolitionists from all over the country in June of this year.

Over 40 young people came to a city near Lisbon for a two-day training on the system of prostitution and its impact on equality between women and men, girls and boys, and about feminist abolitionist activism and advocacy. For many participants, this was the first time they had the opportunity to meet fellow abolitionists, with similar values and mindset. A few of them told me they were surprised to see so many people, because they felt isolated and powerless.

During the entire training, we decorated the room with the exhibition #RiseUpAgainstOppression by the European Network of Migrant Women, to establish a connection between the system of prostitution and its predatory abuse of migrant women and girls.

Pierrette Pape from Isala and Grégoire Théry from CAP International were the trainers, but the training also featured many activists, workers from frontline organizations, artists and an engaged academic. The first day of the training was mostly focused on the system of prostitution, the several actors involved, and how it related more generally to a pornified culture of inequality and objectification of women. We talked about the interconnected relations between neoliberalism, commodification of women’s bodies, globalisation and the sex industry. The young participants were able to express how such concepts influence the lives and sexuality of young people and it was interesting to see how, for them, prostitution, pornography and inequality were so interconnected.

The second day was mostly focused on what we, as young activists, could do. From the experiences of advocacy and lobbying of CAP International and of the Portuguese Platform

for Women's Rights, the young participants learned about strategies to form coalitions and to influence decision-makers.

At the end of the training, each of these young people committed to do two awareness-raising sessions for other young people about the system of prostitution and its impact on equality between women and men, girls and boys. The goal is to impact about 2500 young people across Portugal, mainly high school and university students. At the end of these sessions, we distribute the Portuguese version of these condoms, which states "Mutual pleasure has no price", encouraging men and boys not to be sex buyers. This strategy, which was already used by other EWL organizations, allows us to discard accusations of moralism or anti-sex and instead focus on promoting a more equal vision of sexuality for young people.

We can tell the participants of the training are very committed to feminist abolitionist activism and that they feel empowered to defend their views. The training allowed some of us to create a collective of young people against the system of prostitution which advocates for the Nordic/Equality Model and we already did one awareness-raising performance in the center of Lisbon, which was very well-received. In this particular performance, we focused on the housing crisis in Lisbon and the system of prostitution, since it is a very hot topic right now.

It's clear that the Exit project is having a real impact. One of the ways we can see that is through the backlash against the project and partner organizations on social media by the sex work lobby. Interestingly, however, this backlash also led to the system of prostitution being discussed in Facebook groups and leftist meme pages of young people, where we found many others who share our views.

We are encouraging our young abolitionist activists to raise this topic in their respective associations, collectives, friend groups, families, etc., and to inform people about the Equality/Nordic Model which is still relatively unknown in Portugal. Along with the other two components of the Exit project- the nation-wide research and the informative campaign – we hope this project will put the system of prostitution and the human rights of women not to be prostituted firmly in the political agenda.

I advise you to replicate the abolitionist trainings for young people in your respective countries and to contact schools, youth associations and other spaces with young people to do awareness-raising sessions. We have a lot of material and information to share, if you are interested.

I am now going to show you a short video about the training for young abolitionists, subtitled in English. If you want to know more about how the training was, you can also ask Raquel or Beatriz, which were two of the participants.

Thank you!

Margarida Teixeira