



Policy Brief

Addressing inequalities and participatory policy making in Amadora





Introduction

This policy brief results from the work carried out under the UPLIFT project, a European project with the objective of understanding the patterns and trends of inequality with regard to young people in an urban context, as well as to understand how young people experience and deal with inequality. In Portugal, the research focused on the municipality of Amadora. More specifically, this policy brief aims to analyse the possible contributions of the research to the work carried out by the various entities, public and private, at the local level.

Amadora's young population tends not to be well informed about the services and policy measures that are at their disposal. Similarly, young people tend to give greater importance to their family and friendship networks and to the support provided by local and community organisations than to the services provided by the State. It becomes important then, for young people to participate in the discussion about how information related to the areas that concern them most directly – education, employment, housing and others – should be better articulated and disseminated and how existing services can be strengthened.

It is recognised that local services tend to operate in challenging conditions and are under pressure in terms of human, financial and time resources. The experience of the UPLIFT project suggests that it is possible to effectively involve young people in the local policy-making agenda without the need for substantial financial resources. And doing so can have an important impact on the lives and perspectives of young people, local communities and economies.

At the end of this policy brief, some case studies on participatory policy-making experiences carried out in other European contexts are briefly presented.

The UPLIFT project

How do young people experience and adapt to inequality? The UPLIFT project aims to understand related patterns and trends, with a focus on housing, education and employment in 16 urban areas across Europe. The project's partners, with young people and their communities, are also co-designing a tool that involves young people in the creation, implementation and monitoring of policies seeking to reduce inequalities (piloted in four out of the 16 urban locations (Amsterdam, Barakaldo, Sfântu Gheorghe and Tallinn). Through the reflexive policy making agenda, UPLIFT's objective is a new, sustainable, participatory policy process, where young people are actively contributing to policies that directly influence their life chances.

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Key findings in Amadora

A crucial aspect of the social vulnerability of Amadora's young population is the interconnectedness between low qualifications, precarious work and housing difficulties. These dynamics create a vicious cycle of vulnerability in which inequalities tend to reproduce and from which it becomes difficult for individuals to leave.

Many young people experience considerable pressure to leave school and gain early entry into the labour market. Despite the progress made in recent decades, there are still difficult study conditions and insufficient family support in many cases. Among the most vulnerable population, the comparatively low levels of education of previous generations makes it difficult for families to value education. This is partly due to a lack of role models with higher levels of education, and because older family members with low levels of formal education are less equipped to support the educational path of young people. This can be especially evident when faced with concerns about the family's financial precarity.



I wondered why I had to study. And I thought it wasn't the school that was going to give me diapers, it wasn't the school that was going to give me milk for my son. (Woman, 26 years old).

Schooling can be seen by young people as an instrument to achieve better jobs but the prospects for personal improvement run counter to the quality of employment experienced. Many of Amadora's young people interviewed share the idea that, regardless of their educational qualifications, their access to the labour market is mainly limited to precarious, low-paid jobs and/or those with poor working conditions. They also told of the ease of finding one of these jobs, especially in the cleaning, catering, construction or security sectors, even though they had a low level of education and/or skills, which contributes, once again, to a potential devaluation of education.



I did the 12th grade through the vocational training centre about four or five years ago. I did it because I felt obligated because they weren't hiring people under 12th grade ... I've had jobs in a lot of areas but it's always been on fixed-term contract, underpaid and unsecured at all. (Woman, 30 years old).

Access to housing is increasingly difficult and social housing often appears to be the only viable solution. When in low-paid jobs, although often with permanent contracts, it is very difficult for the most vulnerable young people to acquire a home or find a housing solution in the private rental market. The few attempts at securing non-social housing of the young participants in the project had mostly failed, often as a result of a loss of employment or poor health and sickness. Social housing emerges, therefore, as the (only) possible solution for most young people driven by the fact that a significant proportion of young people already have experience of it and other public measures to support access to housing are largely unknown to them.



I live with my mother for the sake of necessity. I would like to live independently - it is my biggest dream. But I don't have any plans for that. You can't have a house of your own on the minimum wage. Either you live in a room with someone, or it's impossible! And it's already hard to afford a room! (Woman, 24 years old)





Recommendations


Some of the policy priorities identified by the research under the UPLIFT project include:

- **Give priority to early intervention** among children and young people in more vulnerable situations and their families in educational, work and/or housing terms, reflecting on how this perspective can be integrated or strengthened into existing programmes, services and measures. This approach would also have the likely additional advantage of being less financially demanding..
- **Promote and strengthen joint work between stakeholders from different areas and together with young people and their families.** The different spheres of life are interconnected with each other and it is necessary to act in an integrated way. Looking for ways to reach all young people, including those in the most challenging situations, is crucial. For example, for school success and progression not to run into the pressure for early entry into the labour market, it is also necessary to act in the sphere of work. Experiences of forums such as those promoted by the programme *Rede Social* have proven successful in this respect and could be expanded or adapted to accommodate an increased focus on young people.
- **Establish integrated support services for education, training and transition to the labour market.** The services that provide support during and after school attendance should maximise the involvement of young people and their family networks. A more integrated approach would make for more meaningful engagement with knowledge about the education and training system and the pathways through it, as well as the skills development being offered, whether scientific and technical, personal and social etc. In this way, young people will be better equipped for a higher quality transition between education and employment.
- **Promote educational and training programmes that combine the acquisition of academic skills with technical, personal and social skills.** It is from this combination that, in most cases, the best tools result not only for obtaining but also for maintaining a quality job. Supporting school orientation, according to a young person's skills and preferences, and focusing on future integration into the labour market is essential.
- **More agile employment and connected support services, closer to the young population.** Services that work in a systemic and integrated way and close to young people will be better able to meet their real needs.
- **Increase the level of demand regarding supported job creation** More than simply job creation, public employment support programmes should support decent job creation, with better working conditions and better pay, for instance through support for better-paid permanent hiring. Greater prospects for access to decent employment, mediated by appropriate school qualifications, will reinforce the importance of education.



- **Promote housing support services that** support young people in identifying housing solutions best suited to different stages of life and work with them to better enjoy and maximise existing support. At the same time, full advantage must be taken of the latest housing policy measures at the national and local level; there must be greater provision of social housing, aimed specifically at young people and for limited periods of time, so that more young people gain access to the housing market and do not come to see social housing as permanent or the only viable housing solution.
- **Supplant the housing challenge.** The most vulnerable populations and young people in particular are identified as priorities in the latest housing support programmes. It is crucial to maximise this perspective, including by increasing accountability and proofing of social policies, as well as promoting the automatic attribution of benefits. This is particularly important to decrease possible non-take-up, especially in a municipality such as Amadora, faced with huge disparities in housing and a higher comparative prevalence of social housing and housing precarity. In the same way, it is crucial to overcome the existing barriers to information. This includes widely disseminating information in a simple and accessible manner to ensure that young people are aware of all the options at their disposal, something that most of those who were part of the UPLIFT project said they did not have.
- **Involve families and other role models in support for young people.** This research has shown that, in many cases, the decisions taken by the young people have often taken into account the needs or wishes of other members of the household. There is pressure for the young person to address household needs, either by adding income or by contributing to care needs. Thus, and with adequate consideration for their availability and individual characteristics, family members and important figures in a young person's life should be involved in the work and programmes. Professionals should work with families, both in individual and collective sessions, where awareness regarding young people's challenges and concerns, as well as needs and aspirations may be raised. Decisions and paths to be taken can therefore be rooted in shared understandings.
- **Participative involvement in policy-making at local level.** There is a real and urgent need for the young population of Amadora to express their needs and make their voices heard, influencing the policies that can contribute to their needs being addressed. The benefits at a local level of an agenda for broad participation in policy-making are significant:
 - » **More targeted and responsive policies.** Such an agenda means that the policy measures adopted are more likely to meet the identified needs of the local young population, reflecting their life experiences and priorities.
 - » **Greater legitimacy of policies and decision-making.** The direct development of the young population in policy-making increases transparency and has a positive impact on the perception of the inherent legitimacy, both in process and in the resulting policy measures.
 - » **Greater knowledge and use of services by the community.** A participatory agenda leads to a greater perception and understanding of local policies by young people, their families and the groups and services that support them, leading to the quality and potential of use of services.
 - » **Economic effects.** Support for young people already in more marginal educational, housing and employment situations tend to be high. It is expected that the involvement of the young population on a participatory agenda will lead to lower costs in the future, when combined with the principle of early intervention. There are long-term economic gains resulting from a more skilled workforce, higher youth employment rates and more robust transitions from education to the labour market.





How to involve young people in policy formation

Participatory policy making takes as its starting point the position that policy can only be responsive to the needs of individuals, households or communities if it is transparently developed, implemented and monitored in cooperation with its intended beneficiaries.

The UPLIFT project extends this to a process of “Reflexive Policy Making”, which becomes embedded on an ongoing basis. RPM aims to change the approach of policy designers and increase the capabilities of young people in order that they can generate changes together.

During the process young people are empowered to be able to enter into policy discussion with policy makers and implementers. The process is supported by facilitators who help build trust and common understanding among both young people and institutional stakeholders.

The UPLIFT project has produced a range of materials to help local groups undertake Reflexive Policy Making processes. You can find out more about the process in our additional [policy brief](#), and on each of the key stages in our [Guidebook](#), along with training materials and videos [on our website](#).



Stages in the participatory policy creation process



A mindset and commitment - Policy co-creation is a deep process which requires commitment from all stakeholders and a willingness to challenge traditional power dynamics.



Preparation - Planning with stakeholders about objectives, roles, resources and capacity.



Creating a youth board - In collaboration with a range of organisations, using supportive and inclusive methods, a diverse Youth Board is recruited.



Narrowing the focus and scope - Young people and institutional stakeholders identify the policy areas for action. The decision about the scope has implications for the way in which the co-creation process is organized and the expected outcomes.



The co-creation process - Capacity building, trust building and creative activities underpin successful co-creation. Involving a specific youth facilitator is key to an equal, safe and empowering process for all participants.



Towards a policy agenda - The stage at which the institutional and systemic realities must be navigated to identify what can be achieved in practical terms.



Policy implementation - Highly dependent on the local context, communication and engagement is essential to achieve uptake of the policy recommendations.



Reflection & evaluation - Throughout the process it is essential to engage in reflexive practice – continually learning and evaluating to inform next steps.



Participatory policy making in action

A local Youth Board collaborated with the Municipality, housing association De Key, resident organization !WOON and Delft University of Technology in order to shed light on the current housing problems of young people and formulate shared policy approaches and tools to tackle the most urgent problems.

Over two years, the Youth Board: developed a range of ideas for tackling the housing shortage, including a virtual platform for young house seekers which is being explored for development, and produced a manifesto for the municipality of Amsterdam which was presented to the Municipal councillor responsible for housing in the city.

The Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (AYEC) collaborated with the University of Tartu to improve services benefiting NEET youth and, in particular, improve their educational attainment and outcomes and access to the labour market. 40 young people in vulnerable life situations were involved in the process in order to shed light on the current education, employment and housing problems facing young people and the solutions that young people see feasible to tackle their problems.

In the co-creation with young people, a new service model has been produced: The "Cross-sectoral NEET-status youth support and cooperation model of services for local governments. Description of the future model". Young people and representatives of different city institutions jointly designed a range of possible support paths (services).



Tallinn



Amsterdam



Sfantu Gheorghe



Barakaldo

A participatory policy making process brought together young people living in the Municipality, policy makers from the Barakaldo City Council and researchers from Orkestra- Basque Institute of Competitiveness, who collaborated over nine months to improve urban housing policies for young people.

As a result, the stakeholders involved have developed a reflexive policy agenda including four proposals oriented to adapt these policies to the real needs of the youth. Moreover, the process has been oriented towards the empowerment of the young people involved, allowing them to improve their personal skills, such as their knowledge on the topic, their attitudes and behaviours towards civic participation, their general socio-political skills and interest in urban development planning.

Two groups of stakeholders - a Youth Board (group of vulnerable young people) and institutional representatives - worked on identifying the causes that hinder the access to education for vulnerable young people and how to tackle these. They worked in parallel at first, then in joint groups within the framework of a co-creation process.

During the joint sessions they identified public policy proposals and created an action plan that can be implemented at the local level and can offer solutions to some of the problems identified. Besides these proposals that had been embedded in the Reflexive Policy Agenda, the biggest gains of the activity in Sfantu Gheorghe was that vulnerable young people were empowered to have their voice heard and that the institutional representatives developed a greater understanding of the benefits of cooperation and co-creation.

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