ANGELA PONCE

b. January 18, 1991

"Even if many people don't want to see me as a woman, I clearly belong among them."

Angela Ponce is a Spanish beauty pageant winner, a fashion model and an activist. In 2018 she made history as the first transgender woman to win the Miss Universe Spain title and to compete in the international Miss Universe contest.

Born in the conservative town of Pilas, Spain, Ponce knew she was different from a very early age. As a boy who identified as a girl, she faced discrimination and insults. Her school placed her in a group of children needing special care—some of whom were dealing with family breakups or belonged to the minority Roma community. Ponce's parents battled efforts to single her out. She credits them for sparing her a traumatic childhood.

She was the first transgender woman crowned Miss Universe Spain.

Ponce began hormone therapy in high school and completed her last gender confirmation surgery in 2014. After winning a regional beauty contest, she moved to Madrid in 2015 to pursue a modeling career. She was dismissed by leading fashion brands and often rejected for modeling jobs based on her gender identity. Undeterred, she continued to pursue her dreams.

In June 2018 she participated in the Miss Universe Spain pageant and made headlines as the first transgender woman to win the title. Later that year, she captured international attention again as the first transgender woman to represent her country in the official Miss Universe competition.

Although she did not advance to the international Miss Universe finals, she won the hearts of people around the world and blazed the trail for other transgender women. During the worldwide telecast of the competition, a video of Ponce's story aired. At the end she said, "My hope is … to be able to live in a world of equality for everyone … If I can give that to the world, I don't need to win Miss Universe, I only need to be here."

Ponce also prevailed in the fashion world, participating in shows for world-renowned designers. She was the first transgender woman to model for Agatha Ruiz de la Prada and Carolina Herrera and to walk the runway during Madrid's fashion week.

Ponce uses her recognition as a platform for activism. She collaborates with the Daniela Foundation, a nonprofit organization for transgender youth, where she speaks in schools and meets with children and parents struggling with gender identity issues. She works to raise awareness for suicide prevention among trans youth, and she has participated in conferences for Doctors of the World in Spain as an advocate for transgender equality.

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