Handbook: Conducting Workshops on Political Participation with Refugees

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Based on experiences in the project:

CAST YOUR VOICE
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF REFUGEES

Content

1. Introduction

While Western societal discourses are increasingly dominated by the consequences of the rapid influx of newcomers in the aftermath of the so called „summer of migration" in 2015, ironically it is not the refugees themselves being part of or even shaping these public discussions. In order to raise voices, demand interests and be part of public discussions in Western societies one needs to understand how discourses are structured (e.g. represented in the media) and resources are organised (e.g. collaborations with societal actors are formed) to shape them. Those skills are very hard to obtain in a new country that provides almost no role models for newcomers speaking for themselves in the media. The project CAST YOUR VOICE aims to co-develop pathways and tools with newcomers in order to better raise their voice in public discourses (e.g. the perspective of Syrian refugees in the diaspora on current developments as well as the future of their home country).

During the workshops we collected many great experiences, which we now want to share and motivate others to do similar workshops. We would like to treat this handbook as an open resource and hope to receive a lot of feedback on our experiences and add many more important points to our lists.

2. Preparatory considerations for the workshop

2.1.   General note on workshops with newcomers

When organizing a workshop weekend with newcomers, intercultural sensitivity is to not see participants as a special group that needs special treatment but to be inclusive for the needs of many different individuals. Being inclusive means:

☐ Taking care for travel and accommodation costs and informing participants already in advance about this
☐ Respecting prayer times (Check here and make sure you include breaks at these times and declare a room for male and female prayers: https://www.islamicfinder.org/prayer-times/)
☐ Taking special care of individual data (e.g. use Zenkit, Ethercalc, Signal for project and communication management as well as never use first and last name in any data security related non-secure document or app – use initials or numbers instead)
☐ Pro-actively asking for permission to take pictures on a consensus basis (try to take pictures without faces or blur them)
☐ Not putting any pressure on anyone to tell a story he/she does not want to tell
☐ Not including "going out for alcoholic drinks" in your social program around the workshop sessions
☐ Checking for food restrictions (e.g. halal, vegetarian, vegan)
☐ Booking separate accommodation rooms for male and female participants and making sure male and female participants have each a workshop leader of the same gender to work and communicate with
☐ Checking for language barriers: Let participants decide for English or German workshops or mix occasionally if it feels more comfortable!

Focusing on differences, doing workshops out of pity or being extraordinarily curious about individual stories is behavior that is neither creating a feeling of being on the same eye level nor a creative and safe group spirit.

2.2.   General note on political participation workshops

Any workshop that is focusing on political **participation** should start with participation in a holistic sense as early as possible. If one wants to create a feeling of self-empowerment, intrinsic motivation and maximum dedication for the workshop topics during the time together, one better already includes participants in the planning of the workshop. Here are some ideas how you can get the participants' ideas on board:

☐ Make a little survey a considerable time frame ahead of the workshop asking for topics and questions that participants want to discuss together

☐ Give some preparatory homework and then include a slot in the workshop in which they present the homework

☐ Get feedback from some participants on the methods you want to choose to approach topics (e.g. during lunchbreak or before the workshop)

☐ Include as many methods as possible, especially interactive ones, in which participants present or discuss and in which not you are in the middle of everyone`s attention

☐ Make every method adaptable for the participants' topics (e.g. start with a political topic you chose and then ask the group which other topics they would like to discuss in the group)

☐ If you do two workshops, keep the agenda for the second workshop as open as possible and let participants decide for what they want to learn or discuss about

☐ Create an instant messaging group to foster communication and discussions amongst team members on the first workshop

☐ Working in groups on a workshop on political topics is already political activity that can be analyzed: use the dynamics and discussions that happen right in front of you to discuss democratic principles and team work guidelines in political activities

☐ End your workshop with a call for action and concrete next steps to start real participation on the same day already

2.3.   Defining a target group

To make participation as a topic and goal as motivating as possible and create a group feeling in which discussions can arise but at the same time have a shared understanding for the challenges of each other, make sure you check for the following demographic factors:

☐ **Gender**: Make sure you have a balanced mix between female and male participants (except you do a female or male only workshop).

☐ **Educational background**: Be aware that personal challenges, individual history and prior experience with political participation often differ between groups of different educational background (pupil, apprentice, student, graduate).

☐ **Amount of free time**: Check if people are currently working, have high workloads during their studies or if they already do volunteer work. The amount of free time influences the individual possibilities for political participation.

☐ **Socio-economic background**: Be aware that different socio-economic situations allow a different amount of free time to be committed to political work and that different challenges arise and thus inspire different topics of interest.

☐ **Country of origin:** Participants of the same country of origin are likely to have deeper discussions on the politics of their home country and on Germany's foreign affairs with this country. Mixed groups are likely to discuss on a meta level. Make sure you have either a homogeneous or a vastly heterogeneous group regarding this demographic factor.

☐ **Current location**: Participation options vary depending on if people live on the countryside, in a bigger city or in Berlin.

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☐ **Current status in asylum process**: Depending on the current status within the asylum process, participants have different options and capacities to participate politically and also a differing motivation to shape local politics.

☐ **Language Level**: Make sure that all participants have the same language level in either German or English.

☐ **Prior experiences in political participation**: Depending on the individual prior experience in either home or host country, different topics can be discussed on different levels of difficulty.

2.4.   Attaining participants and communication

Attaining suitable participants ahead of time is crucial for a fruitful workshop atmosphere. Ideally, the target group is rather homogenous while still being diverse. The target group of the participants in the project at hand was: students at German universities, in most cases with scholarship, newcomer background, C1 German skills. Most of the participants were Syrians and lived in cities within Germany. If all participants come from the same country, discussions will focus on the politics of this specific country which can intensify the process; however, with mixed groups results could be more generalizable. Regarding diversity, make sure you target an equal number of female and male participants and that the way you communicate does not exclude minorities.

Find here some advice from our recruiting and communication experience:

☐ Choose email for longer information including dates and tasks.

☐ Offer an instant messenger option (e.g. via signal or telegram) for quick arrangements.

☐ Choose easy language, structure your email logically and use bold letters for important information.

☐ Make sure information is dosed and is not too much at once.

☐ Include links to google maps locations.

☐ Send regular reminders and call participants in the week before the workshop if everything is working out as planned.

☐ Make very clear that the weekend is for free and that all costs will be reimbursed.

☐ Create an instant messaging group with all participants after the workshop to increase team spirit.

☐ Give some preparatory tasks (e.g. questions to answer, short presentation task, an easy paper to read) to increase the engagement already before the workshop.

2.5.   Organisation of the workshop

Whatever method you choose and as much preparation you invest – in the end the real success will depend on the atmosphere of the place you meet and the comfort that participants experience during the workshop. Make sure to check the following criteria when you organise the workshop:

Timing and Program

☐ Better choose a Saturday and Sunday for your workshop as participants are less likely to work and/or study on weekends or have administrative appointments. If you work with students, workshops during semester vacation periods are advisable.

☐ Choose start and end time of the workshop in a way that makes it possible for everyone to arrive in time from their accommodation / apartment in the city and to leave on time with train or bus on Sunday.

☐ Make offers for Friday (e.g. to connect the participants that already want to meet) and Saturday evening (e.g. to have dinner together), but make clear that the offers are not obligatory.

Location

- ☐ At least two rooms with at least three seating options for group work plus one extra location for lunch – explain which room is the female and which the male prayer room during breaks.
- ☐ Enough light and air – open windows regularly
- ☐ Functioning beamer
- ☐ Moderation material (cards, pens, flipcharts, Metaplan wall, sellotape, pins)
- ☐ Maybe kicker or other game for breaks

Catering

- ☐ Make sure you ask for food restrictions
- ☐ Ideally opt for vegetarian food or food that can be chosen individually (pizza, burritos, sandwiches)
- ☐ Coffee, tea, juices, water
- ☐ Fruits and cookies

Travel

- ☐ Can be organized by participants themselves (maybe give max. amount)
- ☐ Make sure you raise money for travel costs (also city public transport!): Reimburse costs directly at or after the seminar
- ☐ Get in touch with participants that have long travels if the start and end dates of seminar are possible for them

Accommodation

- ☐ Make sure the hostel is not to far from the workshop location
- ☐ Choose female and male dorms and make sure the hostel guarantees that this works out (better call them)
- ☐ Send booking confirmation with your name and the name of the participant as PDF to participant as hostels often don´t have the participants name but your name in their list if you paid for it
- ☐ Make sure you pay in advance and get a receipt

3. Description of Workshop I

3.1.   Getting to know each other

The first 90 minutes of the workshop should be dedicated to the process of getting to know each other and gaining an understanding of what the workshop will be about. This section should include the following points:

- ☐ Introduce yourself and your motivation for the workshop
- ☐ Ask for expectations and clarify which of them can be met
- ☐ Lead the group through the agenda, get feedback on breaks, give an overview about the learning goals of the workshop
- ☐ Explain location rules, catering, prayer rooms and ask if it is ok to make pictures
- ☐ Brainstorm some guidelines for working together with the group (e.g. respecting when someone else has a different opinion, being on time, letting each other finish sentences)
- ☐ Play a teambuilding / icebreaker game (Suggestion: Carousel Speed Dating with questions adapted to the target group)

3.2.   Deducting topics of interest from personal stories

In order to find an individual connection to the topic of politics autobiographical methods are very useful. In the workshop, the method "My first time politics" (aus *Toolbox Jugend.Europa.Politik*) was used to start reflection and conversation about the first time that politics played a part in the participants' life. On a timeline starting at the age of the oldest participants and ending in the current year each participant adds a card with the year and the event that was the first touch point with politics. It is important to give enough time for each story and to be prepared for emotions which are often connected with political events in the past. After the personal storytelling, participants were asked to deduct general topics of interest from their personal stories. They were also allowed to add other topics that they just heard about in the media and are interested in. One participant volunteered to cluster the topics to four bigger fields of action. With the method "written conversation" participants afterwards commented on the fields of actions regarding current news about the topics in the media, thoughts and wishes they have and calls for action. The four fields of action in the workshop at hand were: "Integration & Citizenship", "Economy & Politics", "Sustainable Politics", "Designing Democracy".

3.3.   Learning about formal & informal political participation

Political participation is more likely to work if one knows where and how to participate. Therefore, the workshop also included one session of civic education. The following topics were discussed in this section:

- ☐ Definition of politics, political participation and civic education
- ☐ Current discourse about integration → definition of discourse, the influence of media, hard facts on volunteering with refugees in Germany
- ☐ Overview of formal and nonformal participation (Ragab, N. & Antara, L., 2018)
- ☐ Conditions for participating in formal activities and situation of refugees in Germany
- ☐ Introduction of several informal participation options (see PDF "Overview of informal participation & topics)

3.4.   Expressing opinions and working in political teams

If one wants to be actively involved in politics, it is important to pratice the expression of one´s opinion as well as discussions in teams. With the method "opinion barometer" (from *Toolbox Jugend.Europa.Politik*) participants have to make decisions if they agree or disagree with a statement (e.g. "one cannot be unpolitical", "integration has to come from society not from people that need to be integrated") and afterwards discuss with each other about the individual thought processes. Participants learn to react to a political statement, to make decisions and defend them and to adapt their decision if other arguments convince them. It is possible to open the method for statements from the group. In the workshop at hand the statement "society is influenced more by women than by men" was discussed for the context of the German and Arab (Syria in particular) societies respectively. The statement proved to foster a fruitful discussion about gender equality and gender processes in different societies.

In a second method, two subgroups each had to design a constitution for a planet (deducted from a method in *Toolbox Jugend.Europa.Politik).* The task was to answer a set of questions regarding decision-making processes on the planet, divisions of tasks to settle the planet and sanction mechanisms on the planet. First, the groups each presented their constitutions and got feedback from the other group on the adherence to democratic principles. Furthermore, the groups compared the two constitutions to their home and their host countries and reflected on good and bad examples of democracy. Second, the groups were asked to reflect on the decision-making process within the group to come to a final conclusion for the constitution: Were they working in a democratic way? Did they have a leader to make final

decisions? How did they deal with opposing opinions? What was the role of minorities in the group? In the workshop at hand, the group work was a mirror for the constitution that was decided for. The trainer should make very clear how difficult it is to always adhere to the principles of democracy also in smaller group tasks and how important it is for political group work to not forget talking about the decision-making processes in the group, to clearly divide the tasks and to hold people accountable for their actions.

3.5. Reflecting on future pathways for integration

In order to start one political participation project together over the course of the workshops the participants worked on future pathways for integration of newcomers in Germany. For this purpose, they split up in three groups with each group dealing with one part of the integration process (Part 1: First day in new country – Decision on asylum, Part 2: Decision on asylum – Finding Job/Starting University, Part 3: Finding Job / Starting University – full integration). For each part the groups reflected first on the needs one has in this stage, second, they listed the offers of the German society and state that fulfill those needs, third, they came up with new offers that are needed if the current offers do not fulfill the needs yet. Based on those open gaps, the participants also brainstormed some potential activities that they could start in form of informal political participation. The outcome can be digitalised afterwards and adapted as an open source document on the project homepage by other refugees and newcomers.

3.6. Calling for action

The ultimate goal of the workshop format is to call for action in political participation. Therefore, during the whole workshop, brainstorming processes about potential participation ideas were facilitated. In the end of the workshop, the ideas generated under the umbrella "topic and format matching" as well as out of the "future pathways for integration" methods were brought together and a call for action worksheet was handed out. The worksheet supports participants to reflect on a topic of interest, define a concrete participation idea, describe the method of informal participation of choice and inform about support they need. Furthermore, a peer coaching between participants process was facilitated and participants had to find a partner to give regular feedback on the participation idea.

4. Mentoring Process between the two workshops

Between workshop I and workshop II, participants used the worksheet to further elaborate on their participation ideas. Most of them used the peer call to get feedback, some even partnered up and built a team on one topic. In the week before the workshop, we conducted individual calls with each participant to support in the process of defining concrete and realistic participation ideas. Next to the individual process, the instant messaging group on Telegram became a safe place to share ideas, articles, discuss if some speakers should be invited or not and to share frustration with political events like German right-wing riots of the right-wing groups in Germany. The phone and Telegram contact served the purpose to keep the connection between participants running and the interest in the topic high between the two workshop weekends and beyond.

5. Description of Workshop II

5.1. Taking and presenting positions

After a collective wrap up of the most important takeaways of the first workshop weekend, the second weekend started with a game (traffic light game) to foster the skill of taking positions, bringing forth arguments for this position and adapting positions if arguments of others are more convincing. For this game, we chose topics that already popped up on the last

weekend and that guaranteed controversies. It was important to also give the option for abstention and to facilitate a discussion about the opinions. The discussion topics we chose were the following:

- The economy has a huge influence on politics.
- In a democracy everyone should be interested in politics.
- Politicians only think about their own benefits.
- Women are treated equally in Europe.
- There are solutions to the right-wing movements in Europe.
- It should be allowed to wear the burqa in Germany.
- There should be mixed classes of Germans and refugees in schools.

In the next sequence, the participants learned different presentation formats. The first part was designed to realize the importance of targeting a presentation to an audience. We explained that a presentation can have different goals, e.g. sharing information, finding team members or supporters, raising funds, giving a lecture, recruiting participants, etc. Depending on who is sitting in front of the presenter and depending on the goal of the presentation, a different presentation style and storyline has to be picked. We presented five different settings for a presentation:

- Holding a public speech in a networking event on political engagement.
- Pitching one´s idea in a fundraising challenge.
- Making a YouTube video about one´s own project.
- Posting in twitter with the project page.
- Telling friends about one´s ideas for political participation.

and the participants had to answer the following questions for each situation and discuss in plenum:

- What could be the goal of the presentation?
- Who is in the audience?
- What is the audience interested in?

Afterwards, the facilitators gave some head-on input on the following five topics:

1) What are the secrets of a good presentation?
2) How do I convince with a pitch?
3) What are guidelines for engaging workshops?
4) How do I make a convincing video?
5) What do I need to keep in mind for twitter posts?

Participants then filled out a worksheet which prepared them for pitching their own intervention ideas in front of the group in the afternoon. For the presentations, each participant had 5 minutes time to present their participation ideas and we did a feedback round including the presenters own reflection, the teams' questions and feedback on the idea and their advice for improving the pitch.

On the second day, we trained this skill again by using a talk show format. Three participants volunteered for either being the person that is against something, or the person that is strongly supporting something or the person that is always weighing up pro´s and con´s. Then, the whole group voted for a discussion topic (similar to traffic light topics) and one of the facilitators moderated the talk show. During this method it is important to keep the actors in their roles and ask polarizing question. It worked out very well to also include questions of the audience in the talk show. Afterwards, it is important to facilitate a reflection round and to make clear that everyone had to play a specific role that is not representing his or her real political opinion.

5.2.   Getting financial support

Input on financial reporting is hardly ever the favourite topic for an engaging presentation; however, it is crucial for most organisations to get some funding before they can get started with their idea. Therefore, we included a 30 min. short input presentation in our workshop that gave an overview over the following points:

- ☐ Connection between marketing and fundraising
- ☐ Sources of funding
- ☐ Guidelines for successful fundraising
- ☐ Fundraising process steps

We ended this section with training elevator pitches.

5.3.   External presentations

Including external speakers is always very beneficial and opens up new point of views on the topics that are discussed. Possible speakers could come for example from other political participation initiatives, represent political organisations or could be other newcomers that are active in political discourse. They could give input on their own experiences with starting initiatives, share knowledge, do a workshop or a Q & A session. One more option for getting external input is visiting a museum or a government body.

Here is some advice on what to consider when you invite external speakers:

- ☐ If possible, ask participants about speakers who they would like to talk to.
- ☐ Ask speakers several weeks in advance. Good speakers are often quite busy.
- ☐ Save some money in your budget to organize presents and pay for travel costs.
- ☐ Have preparatory calls with the speakers to explain your mission, define the focus and method of their input and clarify organizational questions.
- ☐ Schedule enough time for speakers – best would be a 30 min. break after the speaker arrives for an informal Q&A after the presentation.
- ☐ Define in your team who is picking up the speaker at the entrance and send speakers your phone number for emergencies.

5.4.   Working in teams

Many social projects fail because working together in a group is not always easy. Therefore, we wanted to talk about important aspects of group work, especially in political settings. However, we did not have enough time for this section. We still want to describe the methods we had planned for this section.

This section starts with a reflection on group work settings during the weekend (especially during the utopia game, see chapter 3.4 above). The participants collect important rules for team work.

Afterwards, we focus on decision-making formats, e.g. consensus, consent or voting, and asked participants for pro´s and con´s of these formats. To make this input more engaging, we sent a short article about these decision-making formats ahead of the workshop for participants to read.

Finally, we discuss different types of group members, e.g. the yes-person, the opinion leader, the hard worker and reflect on each participant`s own personality as well as on typical behaviors of these group members. In a next step, we discuss options to deal with those group types.

As last element of the workshop weekends, we would have liked to include the set-up of a co-working space, in which participants work on different focus tables on specific aspects of their participation idea. Participants have 20 to 30 minutes for each table and work together with some other participants, afterwards they rotate to the next table. One table focuses on finance and works on a budget plan template which participants can fill out for their own project idea. The second focus table can be on project management and participants can fill out a Gantt chart for planning the next steps of their project. The third table can with communication and participants can practice what they have learnt in the communication workshop and practice tweet writing, flyer design or video storytelling.

6. Reflection on the role of the facilitator

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Taking over the responsibility to facilitate workshops with newcomers on political participation requires a high level of reflection on one´s one behavior and thought processes prior, during and after the workshops. Make sure you and your co-facilitator spend some thoughts on the following topics:

- ☐ **Taking a back seat:** Try to be a passive member on the weekend as often as possible and create a group spirit that runs the workshop weekend on its on!
- ☐ **Less is more:** Make sure you always have a backup plan for the program to be shortened if some discussions take longer than expected. Don´t stop a fruitful political discussion just to get in time through your program. If you are unsure, ask participants what they prefer: Discussing on or going to the next topic!
- ☐ **Dealing with the language barrier:** Even with C1 German skills, political vocabulary is difficult and new to many newcomers. Make sure you speak slowly, use easy language and describe new vocabulary. Ideally, you hand out a glossary ahead of the workshop weekend.
- ☐ **Co-creating the program:** Let the group own the program and don´t be obsessive on the plan you have made ahead of time.
- ☐ **Respecting the need for storytelling:** Make sure you include enough time for individuals to tell their personal stories when you start to talk about a new topic. Its easier to shift to a meta level discussion after you have given some time to discuss personal challenges with a topic.
- ☐ **Taking personal political education seriously:** In order to be a better listener and to react appropriately, you should make sure you have a good overview about the history and current political situation of the participants' home countries as well as on the postcolonial discourses. Be prepared to be asked for your feedback on political topics!
- ☐ **Don´t take sides:** It`s not your task to convince people of your own opinion. Be a neutral workshop leader when you present or when you are asked for your opinion. And be aware: what you include or not include into your workshop is also a form of influence!
- ☐ **Reflecting on implicit racism:** Be aware that almost everyone of us has unconscious biases, expectations or tendencies that can lead to racist behavior or thoughts without being aware of it. Make sure you get some feedback from your co-facilitator and from participants on any tendencies that they noticed.

7. Sources

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