

# Final report CAST YOUR VOICE

## Summary

The successful and sustainable integration of newcomers to Western societies needs to go hand in hand with political participation of newcomers. The project CAST YOUR VOICE aims to co-develop pathways and tools with newcomers in order to better raise their voice in public discourses and reach politically relevant participation. With two pioneer groups of in total 25 newcomers who study at German universities, the project was able to develop, pilot and reflect approaches and tools for newcomers to raise their interests in public discourses and thus become more politically engaged in their host country. The 25 students were mainly scholarship-holders of different German foundations and thus have a basic support infrastructure for designing own projects. The first group of 11 newcomer students from all over Germany met for three successful and empowering workshop weekends in August and September 2018 in Berlin. The second group of 14 students and two alumni of the first group met for one workshop weekend in Hamburg in October 2019. The groups of newcomers from all over Germany not only learned about opportunities to be politically active but also developed their own very concrete intervention ideas to make a difference in the political public space – be it a video or podcast based peer-to-peer information platform for newcomers, a soap opera film project portraying the reality and daily challenges of newcomers, a project for the better connection between student houses and local communities or a student association for refugee students fighting against discrimination. Furthermore, the project team disseminated the major project outcomes in a handbook on conducting political participation workshops with refugees via the project website (<https://cast-your-voice.de/>) as well as Facebook and Twitter. Regarding our learnings and future recommendations, we would like to highlight three things:

- 1) Selecting **fitting participants ahead of time** is crucial for a fruitful workshop atmosphere. Ideally, the target group is rather homogenous with regards to major characteristics (e.g. students, language level) while still being diverse (e.g. country of origin, gender, interests). Furthermore, participants need to be at a stage of inclusion at which it makes sense for them to think about political participation.
- 2) In order to talk about political participation with newcomer students, you should make sure to **create a safe space**: not only think the concept of a safe space physically regarding a comfortable workshop location, also include safe space aspects before the workshop by sharing all relevant information in very transparent way, deal with gender issues related to accommodation and reimburse travel costs even before the workshop and include it after the workshop by making sure nobody feels alone while reflecting on the workshop impressions (e.g. create a telegram group for digital exchange after the workshop).
- 3) Create a well prepared agenda for the workshop, but **be open and flexible** in what is needed for the specific group in every point in time during the weekend (e.g. having high-level and low-level presentation slides about political participation in your

country in your slide-deck and pick what is needed after you checked for the needs of the group). Make sure you always have a backup plan for the agenda to be shortened if some discussions take longer than expected. Furthermore, include political topics that are of specific interest for the group in your exercises (e.g. ask for topics of interest beforehand or during the workshop).

## Implementation

The implementation of all initially foreseen project activities of „CAST YOUR VOICE“ could be successfully implemented already by the end of September 2018. Within the frame of three successful and empowering workshop weekends in August and September 2018 being hosted in Berlin, the group of newcomers from all over Germany not only learned about opportunities to be politically active but also already developed their own very concrete intervention idea to make a difference in the political public space – be it a video or podcast based peer-to-peer information platform for newcomers, a soap opera film project portraying the reality and daily challenges of newcomers or a meetup café for newcomers and other society members to exchange on current political issues.

As the project team still felt inspired to use substantial remaining resources, a prolongation request was submitted and accepted by the TMF programme. The idea was to facilitate additional workshops with other newcomer and migrant organisations across Germany to empower their target groups with regards to political participation. After one piloting workshop with the Flüchtlingmagazin Hamburg on political writing, the project team realised that these workshops would be hard to scale up and connections with other organisations hard to realise. Therefore and in accordance with the TMF coordinator, the prolongation resources were then used to host one major workshop weekend with newcomer students from all over Germany October 11th to 13th closely comparable to the workshop series in autumn 2018 but condensed to one weekend instead of three as in 2018. The implementation of this major workshop in 2019 turned out to be of high value as it was the successful attempt to have the empowerment workshop programme carried out in one weekend - compared to a three part workshop weekend series as done in the first year. The main workshop elements and methods were scanned, filtered and applied in this workshop in 2019, taking into account all learnings from the first year. Thus, the budget was adapted to that all travel costs, catering and accommodation as well as preparatory team meetings and the workshop location could be covered.

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 was set up 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).

This aim to support newcomers to gain the experiences and knowledge for political participation and (further) develop own ideas to be politically active was stated as a big need by the participants of the different workshops hosted. In the workshop evaluation sheets, the majority of participants explained that they acquired the knowledge to start their own projects (fundraising, public relations, project management, teamwork). Participants explained that it was particularly valuable for them that they discussed their ideas for being politically active within the “safe space” only among other newcomer students with comparable backgrounds and experiences. Finally, one can assume that needs of the projects were met as some participants later realised activities in order to shape local political discourses and contexts (e.g. newcomer student group, Syrian youth organisation, make discrimination within university and scholarship programmes visible).

## Results & Outcomes

### 1. Participants in workshops:

- **Workshop Series in 2018**
  - 13 registered participants of one German scholarship-foundation
  - 11 participants in total (2 drop-outs)
  - 8 participants in workshop 1
  - 9 participants in workshop 2
  - 8 participants in workshop 3
- **Prolonged workshop weekend in 2019**
  - 37 applications of four German scholarship-foundations
  - 16 registered participants (based on first-come-first-serve)
  - 14 participants (2 drop-outs)
  - 2 former participants as co-facilitators of the former year

### 2. Discourse intervention teams:

- **Workshop Series in 2018**
  - **Voice of Refugees:** Youtube channel to answer legal and every-day questions of refugees (5 people)
    - **current status:** conducted a user survey in facebook to find out about questions of refugees that should be addressed
  - **Refugee Cast:** Twitter for voice messages with quotes from refugees (3 people)
    - **current status:** group stopped activities and supports air transport project (see at the end)
  - **Art Café:** Meet-up of different cultures to do art together and discuss political topics (2 people)

- **current status:** outreach for team members at university
- **Refugee Movie project:** Youtube channel with videos of refugee stories (2 people)
  - **current status:** outreach for team members at university of participant
- **Syrian Youth Assembly Germany:** Group of young Syrians that organizes and advocates other young Syrians to get influence and involvement in the Syrian peace process. One member joined the workshop and want to start the German branch of the assembly.
  - **current status:** successfully founded an association in Germany with support of CAST YOUR VOICE facilitators
- Some month after the workshop weekend two participants started at their local university in northern Germany an informally organized **student association for newcomer students fighting against discrimination**. We are still in touch and the founders told us that the idea and the motivation for starting the association started at the CAST YOUR VOICE workshop weekends.

Three projects are currently applying for funding and do not want to publish their names at the time of this report:

- **Project name not public:** Creating work opportunities for refugees (1 person)
- **Project name not public:** Shared economy approach for air transport with positive impact on climate change (2 people)
- **Project name not public:** Connecting people at university via food-sharing (2 people)
  - **current status:** applied for funding at a foundation, but so far not successful
- **Prolonged workshop weekend in 2019**
  - **“DFK - Deutsch für Kurd\*innen”** (translation: “German for Kurdish people”): Instagram-based live translation for Kurdish-German (so far, there are no online translation services for Kurdish people like google translate etc.)
  - **Student association for newcomer students fighting against discrimination** in a university in western Germany
  - **Student-exchange project** for bringing students from Afghanistan for their Master studies to a German university
  - **Free digital platform** for the project management in (social) startups and (social) projects
  - **“EFARELO”:** project for the better connection between student houses and local communities in a city in Germany
  - **“Project for projects”** - building a consulting network where social projects can better connect and learn from each other

### **3. Increased perceived self-efficacy:**

## **Workshop weekends in 2018**

- The means of self-efficacy increased from  $m=3.515$  to  $m=3.741$  on a 5-point Likert scale. The perception of political activity from  $m=3.121$  to  $m=3.333$ . For further explanation of the research design, please refer to section 7.) below.

## **4. Handbook for conducting workshops on political participation with refugees**

The train-the-trainer handbook is designed for all organisations or individuals that are interested to conduct political participation workshops for people with refugee background as well. It has been published on the project homepage: <https://cast-your-voice.de/handbook/>.

## **5. Active telegram groups**

Even after one year, the 2018 telegram group that we created for communicating with all participants is still active. Discussions about political topics are started, ideas can be shared and participants invite each other to political and cultural events. There are personal messages, updates and general chats on a regular basis. Also the telegram group for the 2019 workshop weekend is active and recently some local political events as in Hamburg were shared among participants.

## **6. Website and Social Media**

CAST YOUR VOICE is regularly active on Twitter ([https://twitter.com/CAST\\_YOUR\\_VOICE](https://twitter.com/CAST_YOUR_VOICE)), Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/castyourvoiceCYV/>) and posts updates on the website (<https://cast-your-voice.de/>). At the ESU Together Moving Forward capacity building workshop in February 2019 in Brussels, video material was produced which we used to publish a short trailer explaining the main project concept (including the voice of a participant): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cupzbi4rtnQ>. We made sure to build networks on social media in order to disseminate the concept behind CAST YOUR VOICE and find followers for our ideas.

## **7. Accompanying research**

In order to have evidence-based insights into the impact of the capacity building workshops on the participants, the project coordinators carried out an accompanying field research design. While there is a relatively large body of research investigating the relationships and causality between individual conditions and political engagement for the general public, there is only very limited research applying these questions to subpopulations with refugee background such as higher education students. For the general public, research could confirm that the psychological construct of self-efficacy is a major predictor for future political participation (Solhaug 2006). According to the theoretical works of the psychologist Bandura (1997), perceived self-efficacy '[...] refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments'. Therefore, self-efficacy is a very necessary premise that activates ideas and knowledge for any action, also for the sake of civic and political participation. There are a) only very few studies examining the

degree of self-efficacy of newcomers in particular (Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson 2013) and b) no studies could be found – with the best knowledge of the project coordinators – that address the concept and influence of self-efficacy in the context of political participation of refugees. By building upon the above mentioned findings on strong relationships between degrees of self-efficacy and political participation in the general public, the project coordinators thus took up the hypothesis that this interrelation also holds true for young refugee students if connected interventions like political and civic engagement education is provided. The project coordinators were therefore interested investigating this hypothesis in the context of the evaluation for the political participation workshops series conducted within the CAST YOUR VOICE project. In order to evaluate related questions, participants filled out paper-pencil questionnaires. Finally, the project coordinators developed a research paper intended to be submitted at scientific journals dealing with issues of migration in the near future after the project end.

## **Inclusion of Refugee Students**

The implemented project CAST YOUR VOICE with its different workshops fostered the idea of the inclusion of refugee students at two levels: firstly, it integrated refugee students in the project design and implementation itself and secondly, the outcome of the project was to foster refugee participation in the public space through its capacity building character.

With regards to the first aspect, the idea for the project itself was shared with befriended refugee students in the earliest brainstorming phase with feedback taken into account for further steps. The planning of the first workshop series in 2018 was done together with participants in the way that the programme draft was shared in order to get feedback on praying times etc. Additionally, main content wishes for the workshops were collected among the later participants and programme highlights were adapted according to the participants needs. At the end of the workshops in 2018, participants expressed wishes with regards to the follow-up workshop weekend (e.g. wished for invitations of speakers, leisure time activities in the evenings etc.).

Also at least as important, the project outcome aimed at fostering the refugee inclusion in society by supporting newcomer students to be better able to realise political ideas and take part in public debates - be it at their universities, in their local communities or even formal public spheres such as political parties. The all together 25 participants of the workshops within the two years confirmed that they acquired relevant skills and experiences to develop and implement activities to shape politics locally and globally. All participants also developed their own ideas to be more politically active (find the concrete list of ideas in the previous section) and some participants even turned their ideas into reality to shape public perception and debate about refugees (also refer to concrete list of pursued ideas in the previous section).

## Challenges & Learning points

Challenges Workshop Weekends 2018	Solutions / learning points
<b>Low email-responsiveness</b>	Setting up a telegram group and always communicating the same information via several channels.
<b>Finding the right balance between interactive methods and head-on presentations</b>	We highly involved participants in carrying out the second workshop weekend and increased the frequency of alternating head-on presentations and interactive methods.
<b>Political discussions take their time and can lead to agenda changes</b>	Keeping the agenda very flexible and letting participants decide which topics they want to leave out if the time was not sufficient anymore.
Challenges Workshop Weekend 2019	Solutions / learning points
<b>Getting in touch with other scholarship foundations in order to improve our outreach</b>	We asked our contact from one scholarship foundation that supported us in 2018 to pitch CAST YOUR VOICE to other scholarship-foundations on a foundation-networking-event. Afterwards, the foundations who were interested were connected with us via email and we shared a one-pager and an invitation letter for their scholarship-holders with refugee background.
<b>Too many applications foreseen (outreach via four scholarship-foundations)</b>	Communicating a first-come-first-serve information in the application letter was very useful. The alternative would have been that we choose the “most motivated” applicants and ask them to write about their motivation, but we decided to keep the application as simple as possible. Asking those, who could not participate in the 2019 workshop, to be allowed to keep their email-address in order to be able to contact them for a future workshop weekend, hopefully in 2020.

**Inclusion of former participants as co-facilitators**

There was not enough time to meet the former participants for a long co-facilitation planning session before the workshop weekend, so we had phone calls with both of them and then they connected with each other as well in order to design a specific time slot within the weekend. Furthermore, we shared our agenda and asked for improvements. Lastly, we asked them to share their experiences throughout the workshop weekend whenever they want.

## Project Highlights

There is to some extent a discussion whether it is useful to have activities of whatever kind particularly addressed at newcomers. One could say that real inclusion happens if no separation of refugees from other audiences of programmes and workshops takes place. We as project team also reflected on this question parallel to the project implementation. In the end, we were very surprised that participants even proactively explained during the workshops that they appreciated the “safe space” atmosphere. Having experiences of forced migration is always connected to experiences with difficult political situations. This has to be taken into account when talking about political participation support with and for refugees. Syrian newcomers for example often share experiences in the revolution around 2011. Additionally, newcomers are not only confronted with politics in their past life before the migration but also experience politics in their host countries to an intense degree. Topics of migration and asylum are often being discussed intensely and emotionally in the public debate and newcomers therefore have a special relationship with politics. Taken all this into account, the workshop participants with refugee background appreciated that for the first time they could reflect upon their political experiences, perceptions and aspirations within a safe space among peers.

Connected to the major learning, that a special emphasis should be to create a safe space it is also of high relevance to not only think the concept of a safe space physically during the activity such as the workshop weekend itself. Before the actual workshop with all its emphasis on safe space aspects (such as acknowledging praying times and options, being sensible to gender issues etc.) one should also establish a safe space before the workshop by finding suitable communication formats in advance (mail, phone, etc.), share all relevant information in very transparent way, deal with gender issues related to accommodation, reimburse travel costs even before the workshop and so forth. After the workshop itself, we found out that it makes sense to also create a safe space even after the workshop ends so that participants don't feel alone while reflecting all the workshop impressions. Practically, we established a telegram messaging group during the workshop weekend where participants on their way home after the workshop as well as the days and weeks afterwards could share pictures, ideas, comments and anything else that connected the group.

## Follow up and future plans

Future plans in the context of CAST YOUR VOICE are related to two different layers. Firstly, the sustainability of the project results up to now and further actions aimed to be follow up after the initial project phase. With regards to the sustainability of the so far generated project results, the project team decided to share as much information about the project and its activities via the internet. The project website (<https://cast-your-voice.de/>) as well as further social media channels used (Twitter and Facebook) shed light upon the single project activities in order to inform and insport other civil society actors to carry out similar ideas. In order to inform the interested public how to carry out such political participation for newcomer workshops even practically, the project team released a handbook with concrete practical recommendations (<https://cast-your-voice.de/handbook/>).

When it comes to further plans to continue project activities and guarantee the sustainability of the project without the initial funding, the project team decided to be transparent with external project partners such as scholarship foundations with regards to its funding and initiated negotiations with foundations where prior participants of the project receive scholarships to step in as future funding partners.

## Timeline

Changes / delays

**Outreach to partner and other organisations for further workshops:** In the prolongation proposal we aimed at reaching out to other organisations for offering them to be facilitators for political participation workshops for newcomers interested at the other organisations networks. After one piloting workshop with a refugee magazine in Hamburg, we found out that this is related to disproportionately efforts as a lot of alignment needs to take place with the external partner(s). Therefore, we decided to use the residual resources to host another major workshop weekend with newcomer students from all over Germany in Hamburg in October 2019.

**Delay of official registration as organisation:** Initially it was planned to register CAST YOUR VOICE as official organisation in order to be more sustainable for further funding opportunities. Due to the moving of the two project coordinators from Berlin to Hamburg and adapting to new bureaucratic contexts, the registration was postponed to after the official project phase.

## Visibility

- Website: <https://cast-your-voice.de/>
- Twitter Account: [https://twitter.com/CAST\\_YOUR\\_VOICE](https://twitter.com/CAST_YOUR_VOICE)
- Facebook Account: <https://www.facebook.com/castyourvoiceCYV/>
- Video explaining the main project concept (including voice of participant): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cupzbi4rtnQ> (produced at ESU Together Moving Forward capacity building workshop, February 2019 in Brussels)
- Pictures and description of the workshop weekends in 2018 (no faces except of trainers because of privacy reasons):
  - Weekend 1: <https://cast-your-voice.de/2018/08/19/the-room-full-of-energy-and-ideas-first-workshop-weekend-check/>
  - Weekend 2: <https://cast-your-voice.de/2018/09/09/second-workshop-weekend-finished-with-concrete-political-ideas-to-start-getting-real/>
  - Weekend 3: <https://cast-your-voice.de/2018/09/23/casting-out-voices-on-the-third-workshop-weekend/>
- Pictures and description of the workshop weekend in 2019 (no faces except of trainers because of privacy reasons): <https://cast-your-voice.de/2019/10/20/workshop-hamburg-october-2019/>
- Handbook on conducting workshops on political participation with refugees: <https://cast-your-voice.de/handbook>

## Budget

Budget heading	Budgeted	Expenditure in EUR
<b>I Name of Activity: Handbook/Interim Reporting</b>		
1 Travel costs team		€ 139,70
subtotal		€ 139,70
<b>II Name of Activity: Short Workshop with "Flüchtlingmagazin"</b>		
1 Preparation of workshop (travel costs team)		€ 136,30
2 Travel to workshop		€ 80,40
subtotal		€ 216,70
<b>III Name of Activity: Workshopweekend</b>		
1 Preparation of workshop (travel costs team)		€ 108,70
2 Local Transport		€ 106,10
3 Long-distance transport		€ 1.425,73
4 Accomodation		€ 760,00
5 Catering		€ 659,34
6 Workshop location		€ 420,00
subtotal		€ 3.479,87
<b>III Public Relations</b>		
1 Website hosting		€ 150,00
subtotal		€ 150,00
<b>III Workshopweekends in 2018 (see Interim report)</b>		
1 Three workshop weekends		€ 4.495,40
subtotal		€ 4.495,40
<b>TOTAL (I+II+III+...)</b>	<b>€ 8.600,00</b>	<b>€ 8.481,67</b>

# Final Comments

The project coordinators are very grateful to not only be able to realise the idea of CAST YOUR VOICE. The project would most likely never be reality without the financial and further support within the TOGETHER MOVING FORWARD (TMF) small funding programme. The project coordinators were more than positively surprised about the permanent and intense support from the TMF coordinator at the European Student Union. The TMF coordinator always asked the right questions before next project steps - not in a way of being critical and suspicious but rather in a way of helping to reflect upon the perfect ways to realise all activities. These additional motivational push was of tremendous value and always highly appreciated by the project coordinators of CAST YOUR VOICE. Additionally, it was a great pleasure to host the TMF coordinator at the workshop weekend in October 2019 in Hamburg. After long lasting exchange about the project, it was great to show how the project and its workshop concept looks like in practice. Participants of the workshop really appreciated the presence of the TMF coordinator, too. Last but not least, even the practical help from the TMF coordinator with coffee etc. at the workshop weekend is nothing we would expect and it made the site visit more than special.

Another highlight was the invitation of the two CAST YOUR VOICE coordinators and one former participant to the capacity building seminar of TMF in Brussels in February 2018. It gave us the opportunity to reflect upon milestones of the project in general and in comparison to the exciting project ideas with its people from all over Europe.