

Advocacy Laboratory

Brussels | 25 February - 2 March 2024

REPORT



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Sunday, 25 February 2024

After having met online in two preparatory meetings and having worked in small groups on some preparatory tasks the participants finally arrived in Brussels and met in person. Once at the venue they had a short introductory meeting with the facilitators and the representatives of the host organisation to better understand the final agenda of the Advocacy Laboratory, the logistics and the basic house rules. After dinner the participants, facilitators and the host organisation got to know each other through some team building activities. The facilitators for the lab were introduced to the participants: Anja Stuckert (ICYE) and Mariela Ortiz Suarez (SES).

Monday, 26 February 2024

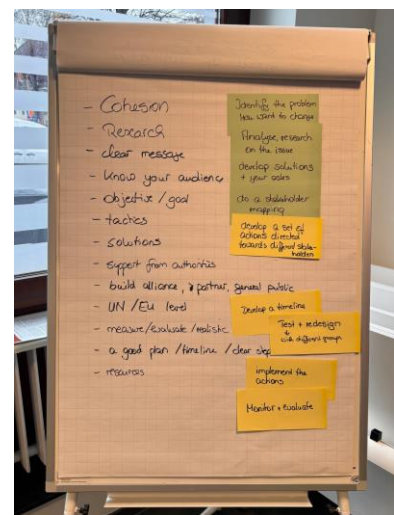
Session 1 – Our work so far

Objective: Understand the advocacy strategy objectives and recognise our capacities to support and lead the process

The session began with a welcome and presentation session about [Defining an Advocacy Strategy](#) by Anja, including a poem reading about Decolonisation by Santiago. The participants on the first day of the laboratory defined the [rules for a safe space](#) and agreed on several commitments.

Mariela, then visualised the 3 important conceptualisation concepts: (1) Defining our framework, (2) Producing and disseminating, (3) Influencing and generating change. The participants then identified the key elements that should be considered and included in the advocacy strategy:

- Cohesion
- Research
- Clear message
- Know your audience
- Objective/ goal
- Tactics
- Solutions
- Support from authorities
- Support from authorities
- Build alliances, partners, and general public
- UN/ EU level
- Measure/ evaluate/ realistic
- A good plan/ timeline/ clear steps
- Resources





In the following discussion, the participants concluded the advocacy strategy workflow process as follows:

- Identify the problem you want to change
- Analyse, research on the issue
- Develop solutions + your asks
- Do a stakeholder mapping
- Develop a set of actions directed towards different stakeholders
- Develop a timeline
- Conduct a risk analysis
- Test with different groups + redesign
- Implement the actions
- Monitor + evaluate

The participants were then encouraged to self-reflect on their personal skills to contribute to the implementation of the advocacy process. The aim of the activity was for the participants to not only identify their skills but also for the facilitators to better understand the capacities in the room in order to take these into account for the advocacy laboratory. The skills were classified into three areas of skills:

- Social-emotional skills
- Cognitive skills
- Operational skills

After the break, Ruslana presented the [EU Youth Strategy](#) with an explanation of the core themes, overall objectives and principles, the European youth goals, and elements of the EU Youth Strategy.



Following up on this, the participants defined the 'overall strategic objective' for the advocacy strategy around funding mechanisms and visa barriers in small groups and then voted on the best overarching one. Finally, the group agreed on the following strategic objective:

The goal of our advocacy work is to strengthen equity, diversity, accessibility and cooperation in International Voluntary Service. We will achieve that by addressing the mechanisms rooted in neo-colonial power relations and by working on changing mindsets and practices. We will focus our actions in two key advocacy fields: to decolonise funding mechanisms from donors and to strengthen youth mobility by addressing visa barriers.

Tuesday, 27 February 2024

Session 2: Mapping and identifying the key stakeholders, networking, building alliance

Objective: A strategic way to approach the key stakeholders

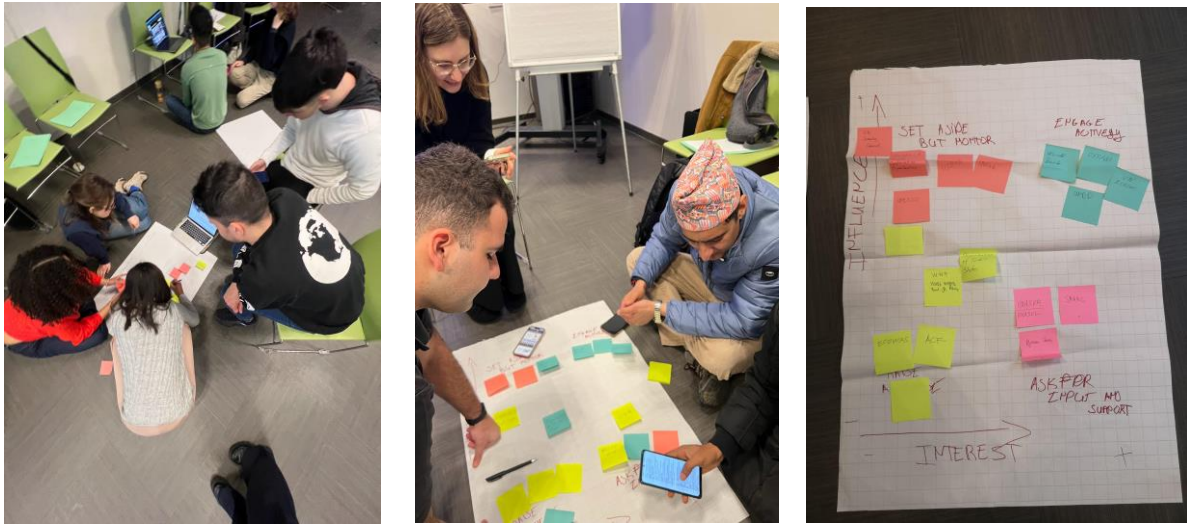
The second day was primarily devoted to mapping and identifying the key stakeholders. In the beginning, there was a recap of the first day shared by two participants. Then the participants learned about strategic advocacy which is "working with people with power". There are different types of power:

- Power over (taking decisions for others)
- Power within (knowing one's rights, building one's own assertiveness)
- Power with (working with others to promote change/ collective action)

In this session, participants started to map and identify the key stakeholders in four different groups. The maps are based on how strong the stakeholder group's influence is and their correlation to the focus of our advocacy work plan. Each group had an opportunity to present the map and explain their analysis.

The activity sought to promote proximity between the participants and the different decision-making institutions. Participants had to identify the levels of influence or levels of interest that different stakeholders might have on our advocacy issues.

Most of the identified decision-makers have influence in Europe (EU Commission, European Youth Foundation, European Parliament, Council of Europe Advisory Council of Youth, FPI,CULT, HOME), while others are influential at global level, like the World Bank and or at regional level, as UNASUR, African Union, SAARC.



While it was not possible to reach a common map with a detailed analysis of the stakeholders, the mapping exercise provided an understanding of the political ecosystem in which we need to build our capacity for advocacy.

Session 3: And then....it was time for the networking event!

Objective: The aim of the networking meeting was to highlight the importance of networking as part of an advocacy strategy; of disseminating and visualising the advocacy asks and of finding synergies with other organisations.

After lunch, we welcomed about 30 people from like-minded organisations (YFU, YMCA, JAVVA, Compagnons Batisseurs, DBA, SCI), other groups that share common issues (Young Greens, Politics4Her, Racial Justice Task Force), the board of CCIVS as well as institutions related to IVS (EACEA, NA Belgium, Bureau international jeunesse, ESN).

After the welcome words by the project coordinator of Decolonise! IVS, Ingrid Danckaerts, there was a mind-opening keynote speech by Chafik Allal, a staff member of [ITECO](#), who from his personal and professional experience gave us some food for thought on what it means to decolonise our work.

Under the title: *“Decolonisation: a buzzword or a real need to change the mindset and the way we work?”* he outlined key elements of colonisation and how they persist even after the liberation of the colonised countries from their oppressors, showing how existing conflicts are often based on colonial history. He also drew clear links to structural racism and existing mechanisms that keep certain people in power and exclude others. To decolonise also means deconstructing the notion of race and the value attached to the concept of being “white”. This idea of valuing

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people differently is still very present in existing domination mechanisms. He highlighted the importance of being allies in addressing all kinds of inequalities.



During the coffee break, some participants conducted an interview with Chafik to further understand key elements around decolonisation:

1. To be aware of the problem is the moment when we start talking about decolonisation.
2. It is important to understand the mechanisms which are used by those holding power to dominate other people.
3. When working on change it is necessary to see how change on a small scale can also trigger change at a large scale.

The session continued by using the *World Café* methodology to present the different tools and outputs produced in the framework of the Decolonise IVS project. It was a space for all attendees to understand better how our project through different methodologies and tools worked on the decolonisation of IVS:

- the Participatory-Action Research (PAR) process led by Joelle and Anne,
- the Decolonize Card Game “Reverse Injustice” led by Javier and Kerry,
- the Self-assessment Tool for organisations led by Hana and Dinesh,
- the Youth Advocacy Group and the Policy Papers led by Dani, Hani and Kofi.

Participants had an opportunity to join two discussion groups and get a deeper understanding of each methodology or tool.



Photo from left to right: PAR, Card Game



Photo from left to right: Self-assessment Tool, Policy Papers

Finally, all attendees gathered again in the big group for the *Fishbowl Debate*.

This is a method where a few people are invited to start the debate by answering thought-provoking questions related to decolonisation while sitting in the middle of a circle (like a fishbowl) with the other participants/audience standing around them. People from the audience can replace someone in the fishbowl and contribute with their input to the discussion.

The key question for the Fishbowl debate was:

“How to influence the systems we are part of so that we can build more inclusive and environmentally sustainable youth exchange programmes?”

The debate started with four people, Kerry Hargadon (SCI International), Luz Gutierrez (VASE Ecuador), Nefertiti Bikin-kita (FYEG, the Racial Justice Task Force) and Ratherford Mwaruta (Zimbabwe Workcamp Association) who kicked off with some reflections on the following question:

“After hearing the intro speech from Chafik, what do you think are important things or key issues to work on when we talk about decolonising international volunteering?”

Afterwards some more questions were launched:

- How do you see colonial legacies still influencing your work nowadays?
- What do you think needs to be done to address these challenges?
- In order to tackle some of the wider changes that are needed in society, how can we actively work on this systemic change so that fundamental changes are actually happening?

Some highlights from the debate:

- *“Stop saying them and us, decolonise even the way we talk, decolonise the way we speak North and South.”*
- *“When an individual goes to help another there is immediately a power structure.”*
- *“Forget these terms of North and South, but if you want to make it equal you forget about the colonial legacy, cannot just erase these differences, the concept of international volunteering is European, born after the 1st World War, and it’s also a privileged thing (to go from the North to South it is a privileged).”*
- *“How can you be inclusive when it’s tokenism, and visa barriers, bridging the gap but making that bridge a two-way street, and South-North, not only does it not make sense, but it also can be impossible, not actually implementing things to make it more inclusive.”*
- *“We cannot talk about decolonisation without talking about colonisation, not just North to South, but also South to South challenges, what needs to be done, do we have resources, are will willing to take up the challenge to take that road, find a common ground to work with the Global South and Global North, as much as we want to decolonise the process, self-reliance is a process.”*
- *“The first challenge to fight is to prepare volunteers for the reality of the situation they are facing, you are not going to ‘help’ because they are poor, you are going to work together and learn mutually.”*
- *“Speak less and listen more. Volunteers see this as taking a year off / vacation. No consideration of the socio-economic differences. ‘Environmentally sustainable’ means something different here and in other countries in the Global South. What is needed, and what have you done up to this point that didn’t work? Decolonising IVS is also recognising the legacy of colonisation and the depravity that it has cost. We need to be able to see each other as equals.”*



Wednesday, 28 February 2024

Session 4: Our advocacy strategy

Objective: Develop concrete step-by-step strategies to bring the advocacy asks forward

The third day started with a recap of the previous day by two participants. After that, Mariela, the facilitator, showcased an example of advocacy work led by young people without parental care in Argentina with a presentation; [Doncel - The Power of Youth Voices in Argentina](#).

Two working groups continued to present the research they had done on the decision-making process in the European Parliament. It was followed by a brainstorming session with selected objectives. Participants were divided into 4 groups and expected to think of 3 actions addressing the 3 fields:

- Communication and dissemination
- Political and influence
- Research investigation

After the discussions in each group, the groups presented the results to other participants. During the presentation of each group, all participants took a look together at all of the results and checked the similarities and differences to choose the most suitable for our advocacy plan. The discussion continued after lunch by creating a timeline for the proposed actions.

As one of the addressed fields was communication and dissemination, Julieta, the Communication Officer of CCIVS, shared a presentation about the social media campaign of Decolonise! IVS that had been done and the key learning points

As a part of the preparation for the next day, Anja and Mariela introduced the next day's activity and what we wanted to learn from the visit to the European Union Parliament.



To close the day, there was a feedback session where everyone shared their thoughts on how to improve things during the Advocacy Laboratory and their insights about things that were going on so far.

Thursday, 29 February 2024

Session 5: European Union Parliament and the advocacy approach

Objective: Understand European decision-making processes

The day started with a brief recap of the previous day which was followed by the continuation of the presentation by Julieta on the social media campaigns.



Furthermore, there was a session by [Europa Huis](#) about [Advocacy in the European Union](#) by Lies Cappoen. The presentation began with a fun interactive quiz when the participants had to answer related questions by doing some movements as a warm-up to the session. In the last part of the presentation, the participants had the opportunity to ask questions.

After the break, everyone visited the seat of the European Parliament. The visit aimed to understand more about the history of the European Union, how decisions are made in the European Parliament and its current situation.



In the evening, the group was invited to have dinner at the office of SCI Belgium and get to know the team.

Friday, 1 March 2024

Session 6: Creating our timeline and setting up a monitoring and evaluation process

Objective: Bring together all the work done in the Lab and make a follow-up plan.

Mariela and Anja did the recap of Thursday and participants were organised in different task groups. Each group was asked to come up with as many advocacy activities as possible to advocate for the two topics. As there was not enough time to fully develop all the interesting ideas that came up, the groups then focused on preparing a few key activities more in detail. A small group also worked on some interviews and audio-visual material to be used in the coming weeks for the dissemination of the outcomes of this Lab.

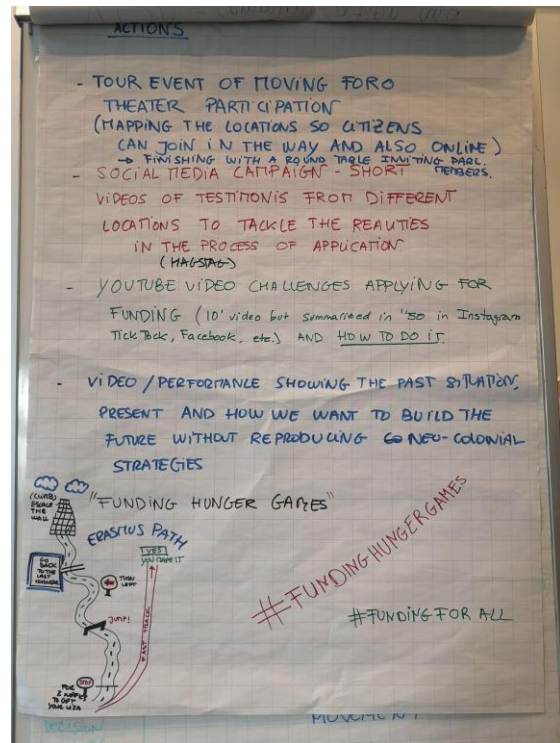
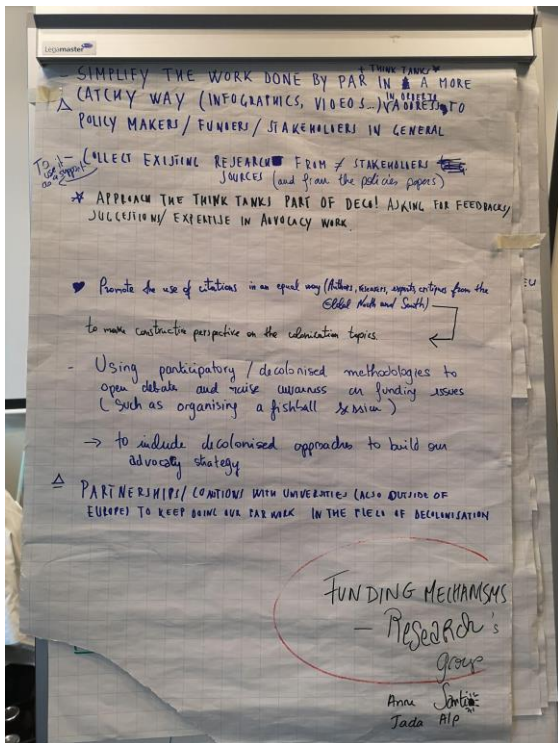
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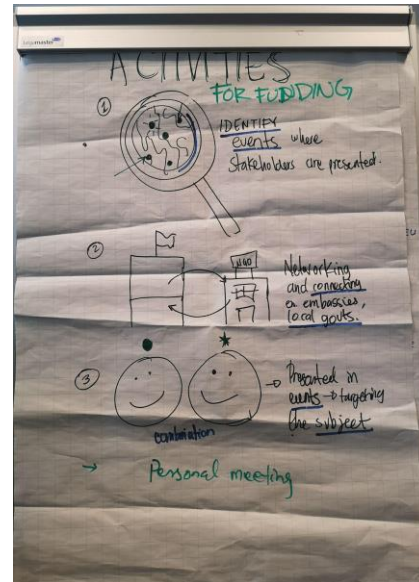
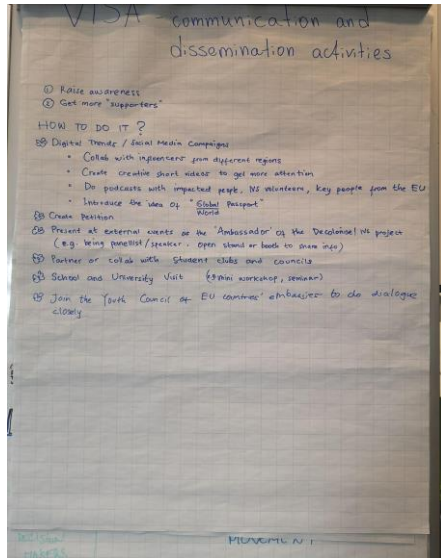
To make the final timeline we concentrated on 3 actions:

- Visa Policy Campaign,
- Funding Policy Campaign,
- Presenting Decolonise IVS at the Level UP event.

Furthermore, some interesting ideas and suggestions for developing the advocacy work were exchanged:

- Liaise with universities and other organisations (also from the Global South!)
- Attend events whenever possible (as a speaker or proposing a workshop)
- Work on the visual presentation of our advocacy asks—documents need to be attractive! Infographics, illustrations, videos etc.
- Use quotes and try to have representation from different groups making the voices of especially underrepresented group heard
- Set up a research group who can support the evidence-based advocacy
- Organise awareness raising events and workshops to find “supporters” and make people aware of the needed changes.





Session 7: Evaluation

At the end of the last day, we looked back at the whole week and shared some key learnings or highlights with each other. We also made a short evaluation exercise that showed in a visual way how we rated the major elements of the Lab. Overall participants were very happy with the outcomes of the Lab and really appreciated the international group. The diversity of the group was definitely one of the very strong assets of this Advocacy Lab. Furthermore, the workshop by Europahuis and the visit to the European Parliament were valued a lot as well as the dinner at the SCI Belgium office.

For the final night we visited a social project Recyclart in Brussels. The director, Roel Forceville, showed us around and explained the aims of the project.

Minute taker: Hani Nurlina



Photo [@Recycleart](#)