

OBJECTIVE 02

To promote Human Rights and Democracy, involving citizens in policy dialogue, design and monitoring

DIALOGUE AND CAPACITY STRENGTHENING WORKSHOP

Voices of International Students in Cyprus (VOIS Cyprus)



Photo Credit: Voices of International Students in Cyprus (VOIS Cyprus)



THIS ACTION INVOLVED

Conducting a series of thematic surveys to assess the relationship between the students and higher education and identifying problems international students face regarding discrimination, gender-based violence and housing.

Compiling responses from more than 700 international students in five higher education settings.

Organisation of a series of dialogue and capacity strengthening workshops, on 16 May 2019 and 28 February 2020 in Famagusta.

Production and sharing of the survey and workshop report with relevant stakeholders.

Production and dissemination of more than 30 short videos via social media for promoting the dialogue and capacity strengthening workshops.

ABOUT VOIS CYPRUS

VOIS Cyprus is a non-profit unregistered organisation formed in February 2018, which aims to bring to light the problems faced by international students in the northern part of Cyprus. VOIS Cyprus works actively to bridge the gap and maintain a successful dialogue between students, the public and local and private bodies. It aimed also to increase harmony and bridge the gap between local society/stakeholders and international students for the first time in the northern part of Cyprus.

STORY OF THE ACTION

The purpose of VOIS Cyprus' action was to create a forum where the local community and international students can meet to identify problems and break the existing stereotypes.

"The primary motivation for this action was the need to bridge the gap between the local community and international students in the northern part of Cyprus, primarily by identifying and advocating the interest of students."

Emmanuel Achiri



Photo Credit: Voices of International Students in Cyprus (VOIS Cyprus)

Through this action, VOIS Cyprus organised a dialogue and capacity building workshop to bring together the international student community and relevant stakeholders – local bodies, higher education and civil society – to address the international students' problems and empower the students in voicing and tackling them.

The first workshop included a presentation of the findings of the surveys on discrimination, gender-based violence and housing. This initial session was used for constructive discussions among approximately 250 participating students, representatives of higher education, the "police", the women's shelter of the Nicosia Turkish local community and civil society organisations. The aim was to identify and address the existing problems faced by international students. Short documentaries were also screened to raise awareness on the issues. The second workshop aimed at sensitizing the international student community to the importance and ways of societal participation, either as individual activists or in an organised manner, to overcome their problems. It focused on strengthening the capacity of approximately 180 participating students who were informed about the role of the "ombudsperson", advocacy and activism methods and tools to tackle some of their problems. Participants also brainstormed to find possible solutions to the six main issues identified via the survey and the workshops: discrimination, working conditions, housing, sexual harassment, healthcare and quality of education.

Despite the inability to produce feasible joint action plans due to the lack of engagement of local bodies, the action was very important as it was the first time that the local stakeholders and the wider international students community came together to discuss students' issues. It also cultivated a spirit of activism among students, leading to a growth in the organisation's membership.



"The two workshops were geared at increasing our visibility within the students and local community to shed more light on the difficulties faced by students. This visibility is a key part of our advocacy method and in this regard, the workshops amplified our platform. Many international students had previously been either too timid or too scared to be their own advocates or advocate for others. Thanks to these actions, many of the participants have joined our platform and are actively participating in our various advocacy endeavors."

Emmanuel Achiri



RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

VOIS Cyprus adopted a rights-based approach towards identifying and advocating some of the most pressing problems facing international students. Through a participatory and inclusive approach, the action has narrowed the gap and broken down stereotypes between the Turkish Cypriot community, local bodies and the international students. The action also strengthened the students' capacity to voice and advocate for a solution to their problems. It has further raised wider awareness by sharing a workshop report with relevant duty bearers, including local bodies responsible for interior and foreign affairs, the "police", the "ombudsperson", and CSOs, including the Queer Cyprus Association, the Refugee Rights' Association and the Universal Patient's Rights Association among many others.



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WHAT'S NEXT?

VOIS Cyprus plans to highlight and address specific societal imbalances concerning the international student community through constructive engagement with relevant stakeholders. To this end, the group has launched a series of ongoing campaigns dealing with mental health within the continuing pandemic and sexual harassment. It is also a founding participant in a recently established anti-racism network. VOIS Cyprus has been continuing non-stop advocacy efforts and online campaigns, having held several conferences, workshops, seminars and focusing on capacity building, gender issues, housing and working issues.

TO FIND
MORE ABOUT
THE ACTION



www.voiscyprus.org/projects/



www.voiscyprus.org/pub



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