

The language barrier

Can you answer these questions? Would your asylum application be acceptable?

Themes	Discrimination and Xenophobia, Human Security, Education
Complexity	Level 2
Group size	Any
Time	30 minutes
Overview	This is a simulation of the difficulties that refugees face when applying for asylum. Issues raised include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The frustrations and emotional factors refugees have to face ▪ Overcoming the language barrier ▪ Discrimination during the application procedure
Related rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The right to seek and enjoy asylum ▪ The right not to be discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity or country of origin
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To raise awareness about discrimination by immigration authorities in relation to asylum applications ▪ To demonstrate the importance of both language and intercultural education ▪ To develop empathy through being aware of the frustrations refugees face when applying for asylum
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Copies of the “Asylum Application” handout, one for each participant ▪ Pens, one per person
Preparation	Arrange the room so you can sit behind a desk and role-play the formality of a bureaucratic official.

Instructions

1. Let people arrive but do not greet anyone or acknowledge their presence. Don't say anything about what is going to happen.
2. Wait a few minutes after the scheduled start time and then hand out the copies of the “Application for Asylum” and the pens, one to each participant.
3. Tell them that they have five minutes to complete the form, but don't say anything else. Ignore all questions and protests. If you have to communicate speak another language (or a made-up language) and use gestures. Keep all communication to a minimum. Remember that the refugees' problems are not your concern, your job is only to hand out the forms and collect them in again!
4. Greet any latecomers curtly (for example, “You are late. Take this form and fill it in. You have only got a few minutes left to do it.”)
5. When five minutes are up, collect the forms without smiling or making any personal contact.

Note: This activity is adapted from Donahue, D., Flowers, N., *The Uprooted*, Hunter House Publishers, 1995

THEMES



DISCRIMINATION



HUMAN SECURITY



EDUCATION

COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 2

GROUP SIZE



ANY

TIME



30 MINUTES

6. Call a name from the completed forms and tell that person to come forward. Look at the form and make up something about how they have filled in the form, for instance, "you didn't answer question 8" or "I see you answered 'no' to question 6. Asylum denied." Tell the person to go away. Do not enter into any discussion. Go straight on to call the next person to come forward.
7. Repeat this process several times. It is not necessary to review all the applications, only continue for as long as necessary for the participants to understand what is happening.
8. Finally break out of your role and invite participants to discuss what happened.

Debriefing and evaluation

Start by asking people how they felt during the activity and then move on to discuss what happened and what they have learned.

- How did the participants feel when they were filling out an unintelligible form?
- Was this a realistic simulation of an asylum-seeker's experience?
- Do you think that in your country asylum-seekers are treated fairly during their application for asylum? Why? Why not?
- What could be the consequences for someone whose asylum application is refused?
- Have the participants ever been in a situation where they could not speak the language and were confronted by an official, for instance, a police officer or a ticket-controller? How did it feel?

Tips for facilitators

This is a fairly easy activity to facilitate: the main thing required from you is to do be "strong" in your role and you must be serious, tough and bureaucratic. The plight of the refugees is not your concern; you are here to do your job! The point is that many people do not want refugees in their country. Immigration officers are under orders to screen the refugees and to allow entry only to those who have identification papers and who complete the application forms correctly. The refugees frequently have a poor command of the other country's language and find it very difficult to fill in the forms. Also, they are in a distressed and emotional state. It is especially hard for them to understand what is happening because their applications are frequently denied and they do not understand the reasons.

Suggestions for follow up

If you want to look at the arguments for accepting or denying refugees entry into a country, look at the activity "Can I come in?", on page 98.

You will find more ideas for activities about refugees on the UNHCR website: www.unhcr.ch

Ideas for action

The group could invite an immigration officer to come and talk about the challenges of the job. Alternatively, arrange to visit an immigration office and see how the procedure for application

Key date

26 June

UN Charter Day

21 February

International Mother
Language Day

for asylum works. Group members could also interview asylum-seekers and immigration officers to find out their views on the situation and to raise any issues about injustices and/or irregularities of the procedure. The information could be used for refugee awareness campaigns, or fed back to the immigration department or to organisations such as the UNHCR.

Further information

Information and data about refugees can be found in the section of further information with the activity “Can I come in?”, on page 98.

Refugee or asylum-seeker: What are the differences and similarities?

Often people do not distinguish between the term “asylum-seeker” and “refugee”. They use the term refugee for any person who is seeking or who has already received asylum. Legally, the terms “refugee” and “asylum-seeker” are different and have different consequences.

An *asylum-seeker* is a person who wants to be accepted as a refugee, but who is still at the stage of having his or her application considered. During the asylum procedure immigration departments have to determine whether the asylum-seeker’s situation falls within the definition of refugee and whether or not s/he meets all the criteria. For instance, they have to show a well-founded fear of persecution and that they have not committed any serious (non-political) crimes, crimes against humanity or war crimes. The main rights that asylum-seekers have are the right to have their application fairly considered and the right to remain in the country where asylum is requested until the application is reviewed.

A *refugee* can be said to be an “ex-” asylum-seeker, that is, a person who has had his/her application accepted. There are various rights associated with the status of being a refugee, for instance, the right not to be returned to a country where s/he would face a risk to his/her life and well-being, the right not to be discriminated against and the right to receive some basic material assistance from the government of the country where asylum has been granted.

In the last five decades, several million people have been granted asylum in countries around the world. Currently there are approximately 1.2 million asylum applications pending world-wide.

HANDOUT

Asylum application form

1. Családi és utónév
2. Дата і місця народження
3. Viimeisin osoite
4. Անձնագրի համարը
5. Επώνυμο ή κύρια επασχόληση
6. Başvuran kişiye eşlik eden refakatçı veya yakınlarının isimleri
7. Meio e local de entrada no país
8. Ghaliex titlob għall-azilju?
9. Свидетельство преследований, на основании которых составлено заявление
10. Avez-vous déjà présenté une demande d’asyle auparavant? Veuillez donner des détails sur les pays, les dates et les motifs.
11. Dali imate rodnini ili poznanici vo ova zemja? Ako imate, navedete gi iminjata i adresite.
12. ما هي اللغات التي تتكلمها وما هي مستوى ثقافتك