

Take a step forward

"Everything flows from the rights of the others and my never-ending duty to respect them".
Emmanuel Lévinas

Themes	Discrimination and Xenophobia, Poverty, General human rights
Complexity	Level 2
Group size	10 - 30
Time	60 minutes
Overview	We are all equal, but some are more equal than others. In this activity participants experience what it is like to be someone else in their society. The issues addressed include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social inequality being often a source of discrimination and exclusion ▪ Empathy and its limits.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To promote empathy with others who are different ▪ To raise awareness about the inequality of opportunities in society ▪ To foster an understanding of possible personal consequences of belonging to certain social minorities or cultural groups
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Role cards ▪ An open space (a corridor, large room or outdoors) ▪ Tape or CD player and soft/relaxing music
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read the activity carefully. Review the list of "situations and events" and adapt it to the group that you are working with. ▪ Make the role cards, one per participant. Copy the (adapted) sheet either by hand or on a photocopier, cut out the strips and fold them over.

Instructions

1. Create a calm atmosphere with some soft background music. Alternatively, ask the participants for silence.
2. Hand out the role cards at random, one to each participant. Tell them to keep it to themselves and not to show it to anyone else.
3. Invite them to sit down (preferably on the floor) and to read their role card.
4. Now ask them to begin to get into role. To help, read out some of the following questions, pausing after each one, to give people time to reflect and build up a picture of themselves and their lives:
 - What was your childhood like? What sort of house did you live in? What kind of games did you play? What sort of work did your parents do?
 - What is your everyday life like now? Where do you socialise? What do you do in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening?
 - What sort of lifestyle do you have? Where do you live? How much money do you earn each month? What do you do in your leisure time? What you do in your holidays?
 - What excites you and what are you afraid of?


THEMES


DISCRIMINATION


POVERTY


GEN. HUMAN RIGHTS

COMPLEXITY


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5. Now ask people to remain absolutely silent as they line up beside each other (like on a starting line)
6. Tell the participants that you are going to read out a list of situations or events. Every time that they can answer “yes” to the statement, they should take a step forward. Otherwise, they should stay where they are and not move.
7. Read out the situations one at a time. Pause for a while between each statement to allow people time to step forward and to look around to take note of their positions relative to each other.
8. At the end invite everyone to take note of their final positions. Then give them a couple of minutes to come out of role before debriefing in plenary.

Debriefing and evaluation

Start by asking participants about what happened and how they feel about the activity and then go on to talk about the issues raised and what they learnt.

1. How did people feel stepping forward - or not?
2. For those who stepped forward often, at what point did they begin to notice that others were not moving as fast as they were?
3. Did anyone feel that there were moments when their basic human rights were being ignored?
4. Can people guess each other’s roles? (Let people reveal their roles during this part of the discussion)
5. How easy or difficult was it to play the different roles? How did they imagine what the person they were playing was like?
6. Does the exercise mirror society in some way? How?
7. Which human rights are at stake for each of the roles? Could anyone say that their human rights were not being respected or that they did not have access to them?
8. What first steps could be taken to address the inequalities in society?

Tips for facilitators

If you do this activity outdoors, make sure that the participants can hear you, especially if you are doing it with a large group! You may need to use your co-facilitators to relay the statements.

In the imagining phase at the beginning, it is possible that some participants may say that they know little about the life of the person they have to role-play. Tell them, this does not matter especially, and that they should use their imagination and to do it as best they can.

The power of this activity lies in the impact of actually seeing the distance increasing between the participants, especially at the end when there should be a big distance between those that stepped forward often and those who did not. To enhance the impact, it is important that you adjust the roles to reflect the realities of the participants’ own lives. As you do so, be sure you adapt the roles so that only a minimum of people can take steps forward (i.e. can answer “yes”). This also applies if you have a large group and have to devise more roles.

During the debriefing and evaluation it is important to explore how participants knew about the character whose role they had to play. Was it through personal experience or through other sources of information (news, books, and jokes)? Are they sure the information and the images they have of the characters are reliable? In this way you can introduce how stereotypes and prejudice work.

This activity is particularly relevant to making links between the different generations of rights (civil/political and social/economic/cultural rights) and the access to them. The problems of poverty and social exclusion are not only a problem of formal rights – although the latter also exists for refugees and asylum-seekers for example. The problem is very often a matter of effective access to those rights.

Variations

One way to get more ideas on the table and to deepen participants' understanding is to work first in small groups and then to get them to share their ideas in plenary. Having co-facilitators is almost essential if you do this. Try this method by taking the second part of the debriefing - after each role has been revealed - in smaller groups. Ask people to explore who in their society has fewer, and who has more, chances or opportunities, and what first steps can and should be taken to address the inequalities. Alternatively, ask people to take one of the characters and ask what could be done, i.e. what duties and responsibilities they themselves, the community and the government have towards this person.

Suggestions for follow-up

Depending on the social context you work in, you may want to invite representatives from advocacy groups for certain cultural or social minorities to talk to the group. Find out from them what issues they are currently fighting for and how you and young people can help. Such a face-to-face meeting would also be an opportunity to address or review some of the prejudices or stereotyping that came out during the discussion.

If the group would like to find out more about the issues relating to inequalities in education provision world-wide and the measures that are being taken to address the problems, you may wish to look at the activity "Education for all", on page 122.

Ideas for action

Take up the ideas from the follow-up. Follow through how you and young people can help groups and organisations working with cultural or social minorities, and turn the ideas into practice.

Key date

18 December
International Migrants
Day

HANDOUTS

Role cards

You are an unemployed single mother.	You are the president of a party-political youth organisation (whose “mother” party is now in power).
You are the daughter of the local bank manager. You study economics at university.	You are the son of a Chinese immigrant who runs a successful fast food business.
You are an Arab Muslim girl living with your parents who are devoutly religious people.	You are the daughter of the American ambassador to the country where you are now living.
You are a soldier in the army, doing compulsory military service.	You are the owner of a successful import-export company.
You are a disabled young man who can only move in a wheelchair.	You are a retired worker from a factory that makes shoes.
You are a 17-year-old Roma (Gypsy) girl who never finished primary school.	You are the girlfriend of a young artist who is addicted to heroin.
You are an HIV positive, middle-aged prostitute.	You are a 22-year-old lesbian.
You are an unemployed schoolteacher in a country whose new official language you are not fluent in.	You are a fashion model of African origin.
You are a 24-year-old refugee from Afghanistan.	You are a homeless young man, 27 years old.
You are an illegal immigrant from Mali.	You are the 19-year-old son of a farmer in a remote village in the mountains.

Situations and events

Read the following situations out aloud. Allow time after reading out each situation for participants to step forward and also to look to see how far they have moved relative to each other.

- You have never encountered any serious financial difficulty.
- You have decent housing with a telephone line and television.
- You feel your language, religion and culture are respected in the society where you live.
- You feel that your opinion on social and political issues matters, and your views are listened to.
- Other people consult you about different issues.
- You are not afraid of being stopped by the police.
- You know where to turn for advice and help if you need it.
- You have never felt discriminated against because of your origin.
- You have adequate social and medical protection for your needs.
- You can go away on holiday once a year.
- You can invite friends for dinner at home.
- You have an interesting life and you are positive about your future.
- You feel you can study and follow the profession of your choice.
- You are not afraid of being harassed or attacked in the streets, or in the media.
- You can vote in national and local elections.
- You can celebrate the most important religious festivals with your relatives and close friends.
- You can participate in an international seminar abroad.
- You can go to the cinema or the theatre at least once a week.
- You are not afraid for the future of your children.
- You can buy new clothes at least once every three months.
- You can fall in love with the person of your choice.
- You feel that your competence is appreciated and respected in the society where you live.
- You can use and benefit from the Internet.

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