

Work and babies

Are you planning to have a job? Then don't plan to have children!

Themes	Social rights, Gender equality, Discrimination and Xenophobia
Complexity	Level 2
Group size	10 - 25
Time	90 minutes
Overview	This is a role-play dealing with issues of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reproductive rights in the workplace ▪ Discrimination against women in the workplace
Related rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A woman's right to reproductive choice ▪ The right not to be dismissed on the grounds of pregnancy, maternity leave and marital status ▪ The right to equal employment opportunities and remuneration
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To develop knowledge about women's reproductive rights ▪ To attempt to make participants appreciate what it feels like to be discriminated against ▪ To promote equality, justice and responsibility
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A large sheet of paper, flipchart paper or board ▪ Space for small group work and role-play ▪ Props for the role-play, table and chairs, pen and paper
Preparation	Copy the scenario onto a board or a large piece of paper or flipchart paper.

Instructions

1. Explain that the activity involves a role-play about the issues of women's reproductive rights at the workplace. Conduct a short brainstorm about women's reproductive rights so participants understand the term.
2. Divide the participants into small groups (maximum five people per group).
3. Read out the following, which is the background scenario for the role-play:

"Maria has been unemployed for almost a year and is looking hard for a job. Ten days ago she went for an interview for her dream job - it was exactly what she was looking for! Everything went well and she was offered the position. The company asked her to have a meeting with Mr. Wladstock, the personnel officer in order to sign her contract.

She had already discussed her duties and other job-related issues at the interview. Just as Maria was about to sign the contract, Mr. Wladstock said that a condition of the job was that she signs a declaration that she will not have a baby for the next two years."

4. In their small groups, give participants twenty minutes to decide on an ending for the story and to develop it into a role-play. The role-play should start with the meeting between Maria and Mr. Wladstock and should not last more than five minutes.
5. Invite each small group to present their role play. Keep comments for the debriefing.

THEMES



SOCIAL RIGHTS



GENDER EQUALITY



DISCRIMINATION

COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 2

GROUP SIZE



10-25

TIME



90 MINUTES

Debriefing and Evaluation

Begin with a round of feedback from each of the small groups about how they developed their role-plays together with comments from the others. Then go on to talk about the implications and what should be done about discrimination of this sort.

- Was anyone surprised at the situation? Does it happen in your country?
- How did the groups decide what the outcome should be?
- Were the endings realistic? What were the good points - and weaker points - about the ways the Marias handled the situation? How hard is it to be assertive in such situations rather than aggressive or submissive?
- In your country, what rights do women have in the workplace when they get pregnant?
- Why would the company want to impose such a condition on Maria? Is it fair? Why? Why not?
- Were any human right being violated? If so, which ones?
- If Maria were a man, would the same thing happen? Why? Why not?
- In what ways do men see this issue differently from the way women do?
- What do you think can be done to promote and protect women's reproductive rights?

Tips for facilitators

Depending on the group, you may wish to divide the participants into small groups that are either mixed or single-sex (that is groups of only males and groups of only females). Choosing single-sex groups often leads to more provocative endings and richer discussion. Participants may not be familiar with the term "reproductive rights" and you may need to help them with some ideas in order to get the broad picture. Try to draw people out on the following points:

Reproductive rights include the right to:

- An enjoyable and fulfilling sexual relationship without fear of infection and disease.
- A choice whether or not to have children.
- A caring family planning service backed by a safe and empathetic abortion service that treats women with dignity and respect, and ensures privacy.
- Sex education

Bear in mind that the debriefing question about if human rights were being violated may bring up the controversial issues about abortion and a woman's right to choose, as opposed to the right of the foetus to life. This is a very important topic. It is also especially relevant to HRE, because it requires participants to be open-minded, to put aside stereotypes and pre-conceived opinions and to use their skills of critical thinking. It is a very good illustration of the inherent complexity of human rights. If the issue arises, you may like to consider taking it up at another time as a discussion in its own right.

Variations

Instead of dividing the participants into small groups, you can start with two volunteers to play Maria and Mr. Wladstock with the rest of the group as observers. Then you can stop the presentation at intervals and ask the observers to comment and to say what should happen next. Alternatively, observers can simply exchange places with the actors to develop a different angle and change the course of the role-play. See page 50, in chapter I, for more information about role-playing techniques.

Key date

15 May
International Day
of Families

Why not add other characters to the situation? You could include Maria's husband, who could be a trade union representative, and the role-play could go beyond the meeting with the human resources department.

Feel free to adapt the names of the characters to reflect common names in your country.

Suggestions for follow up

The group could do some research into reproductive rights in your country. Following that, they could hold interviews with both women and employers to find out how the legislation works in practice. They could also find out the impact of European law in this area on their own national law.

The group could also review the sex education that is taught in their country. Does it cover all aspects of reproductive rights?

If you want to explore other types of discrimination in the workplace you may like to develop the activity "Different wages", on page 107.

Ideas for Action

Take up issues about reproductive rights at your school or association council.

Further information***The role of the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.***

Aside from civil rights issues, the Convention also devotes major attention to a most vital concern of women, namely their reproductive rights. The preamble sets the tone by stating that "the role of women in procreation should not be a basis for discrimination". The link between discrimination and women's reproductive role is a matter of recurrent concern in the Convention. For example, it advocates, in article 5, "a proper understanding of maternity as a social function", demanding fully shared responsibility for child-rearing by both sexes. Accordingly, provisions for maternity protection and child-care are proclaimed as essential rights and are incorporated into all areas of the Convention, whether dealing with employment, family law, health care or education. Society's obligation extends to offering social services, especially child-care facilities, that allow individuals to combine family responsibilities with work and participation in public life. Special measures for maternity protection are recommended and "shall not be considered discriminatory". (article 4). "The Convention also affirms women's right to reproductive choice. Notably, it is the only human rights treaty to mention family planning. It states that parties are obliged to include advice on family planning in the education process (article 10.h) and to develop family codes that guarantee women's rights "to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights" (article 16.e).