

# Tree of Life

- Where do we come from?
- Where did our parents and grandparents come from?
- How many of our relatives have moved to other countries?

*This activity invites participants to explore their genealogical trees and to find out if any of their relatives have been foreigners somewhere.*

## Issues addressed

- Nationalism and ethnic “purity”.
- Empathy towards foreigners, immigrants and refugees.
- Personal and national identity.

## Aims

- To make participants aware of their own reality and cultural background.
- To understand the relationships between ourselves and the world.
- To generate empathy with other people who have travelled or emigrated to another country, and with minorities.
- To work upon participants’ identity and perceptions of the world.
- To raise curiosity about each other's cultures.
- To notice social and cultural prejudice and biases.
- To understand “national” culture in a relative way.

## Time

**Part A:** planning the activity 30 minutes

**Part B:** the research, a day or a week, depending on the time available

**Part C:** sharing the family trees, 30-60 minutes depending on the size of the group.

**Evaluation:** 30 minutes

**Group size:** 3 - 20

## Preparation

- An example of what a family tree looks like.

## Instructions

### Part A

1. Explain to participants the concept of a genealogical or family tree.
2. Ask them if ever they have ever thought of making their own family tree or if someone in their family has one.
3. Suggest participants go home and talk to their parents or relatives and try to draw up their own family tree as far back as someone in their family can remember.



4. Talk about the sorts of things people should ask their family for example, were there:
  - Previous relatives who have emigrated to another country or moved to another town.
  - Relatives who came from another country as immigrants or refugees, or married into the family.
  - Relatives who are members of a minority (racial, religious, sexual etc.) or who married someone from a minority.
  - Relatives who had another religion, spoke another language, etc.

### **Part B**

Give participants some time (from one day to one week, depending on how much time you have) to make up their trees.

### **Part C**

Invite the participants to share their findings with the rest of the group. This can be done in different ways:

Participants show their trees, pointing out how far they went back in time. If they so wish, they can point out which relatives moved abroad or came from another country. It is important that participants tell only what they want to tell (no one should feel under pressure to disclose facts that they do not feel comfortable with). Or,

Participants do not show their trees, but talk about facts they found out about their family that they did not know about before.

## **Debriefing and evaluation**

Depending on the size of the group, this part of the activity can be done first in smaller working groups. Each group may then be given the task of reporting back on common things that they have discovered. Ask them to answer questions such as:

- Why did your relatives move to another country (or immigrate into this country)?
- Do you think it is normal to put up barriers to people's need to find other opportunities in other countries?
- Have you ever thought of moving abroad yourself?
- If so, how would you like to be treated upon your arrival?
- How would you feel if you could not: practice your religion, speak your own language or had less rights as a human being than other people?

## **Tips for the facilitator**

Some questions and findings may be very personal, and it may even happen that the participants' relatives do not want to tell their children facts that they see as unpleasant or dishonourable e.g. someone who was gay or was in jail, etc. For this reason, attention must be given to make sure that nobody feels under pressure to say more than they feel they want to.

Similarly, it is important that there is already an atmosphere of trust in the group, which allows for the differences to be put forward. Otherwise participants may be reluctant to share something about their families, which they fear could lead to exclusion.

You will have to be prepared to give some ideas on how to make a genealogical tree.

If you want to make it a competition, tell them that the further back the tree goes or the more branches or leaves (representing family members) it has, the better.

This is a good activity to make participants aware of the fact that throughout history people have always moved from one country to another.

The best examples are the colonisation movements, but also within Europe people have often been on the move: Jewish and Roma people have often been forced to leave their country of residence; wars have always caused movements of people, so to have border changes.

Apart from forced movements, one should not forget the seasonal movements of people e.g. going on summer holidays to another country or going to work during harvest times, etc.

It often happens that young people, indeed most people, are unaware of their family background. We may be proud of our own past as a nation but are unaware of the fact that our ancestors have probably come from some other country, or emigrated to other continents. If this movement of people is normal, why should the movements and existence of other people in our country be seen as something negative and to be prevented?

### **Suggestions for follow up**

If you enjoyed finding out about your family history have another look at your country's history in 'The history line' (page 91). It is interesting to do this because what we learn in school is almost always based on the nationalistic and ethnocentric point of view of the majority.