











# 5

## Ethics and Communication at Border Points

### Session 5 Manual

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**Usefull Tip:** click on these icons for quick navigation



# Objectives

## In the area of knowledge acquisition, after this session, participants will:

- Recall the main purpose of entry officials' communication with asylum-seekers and migrants at border points, in the context of ensuring access to asylum procedures and effective enjoyment of fundamental rights.
- Consolidate knowledge on main legal safeguards when communicating with asylum-seekers and migrants, including interpretation and, where required, legal counsel.
- Be familiar with the main methods and principles for communicating with asylum-seekers and migrants of different backgrounds, personal profiles and needs.

## In relation to skills and attitudes, participants will:

- Learn about communication with asylum-seekers and migrants taking, into account their vulnerabilities and strengths, in such a way that communication barriers and re-traumatization is avoided and sufficient information is gathered to be able to ensure efficient responses to their situations.
- Develop personal communication skills with regard to the formulation of sensitive and focused questions, and the ability to identify a person seeking protection through a simple interview with persons approaching the border.



# Session Outline

Methodology	Material required	Duration: (Total: 3h 30mins)
<b>5.1. Fish bowl exercise: Meeting possible asylum-seekers and preliminary interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Case studies</li><li>- Key messages for facilitator</li></ul>	1 hour
<b>5.2. Presentation:</b> <i>“Ethics and communication with persons in need of protection at border points”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Power Point projector &amp; large screen</li><li>- Key messages</li><li>- Power Point presentation</li></ul>	1 hour
<b>5.3. Practicing communication skills in small groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Role sheets</li></ul>	1 hour
<b>5.4. Cards on wall: Debriefing through lessons learned</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A5 cards</li></ul>	30 minutes



## 5.1. Fish Bowl Exercise

This exercise consists of a role play to familiarize the participants with the characteristics and techniques of an individual interview for identifying persons who may want to seek international protection. The case studies will correspond to some of the persons who crossed the border during the simulations carried out in session 4, so they will be relatively familiar to them.

Here are the basic steps of the role play:

1. Three participants form an inner circle, while the remaining participants in the outer circle are listening and observing (thus the name of the exercise: fish bowl).
2. One of the participants (from now on called A) in the inner circle will play the role of an asylum-seeker (**Khadija**), who is standing at the queue in the airport passport control lane for non EU citizens.
3. A second participant (from now on called B) in the inner circle will play the role of the border police in the airport cabin window who reviews the passports of the travellers exiting the plane.
4. The third participant (from now on called C) in the inner circle will play the role of the border guard in command of the border post. There will be two empty chairs beside him/her.
5. A will try to explain to B that s/he does not want to return to her country because s/he does not like the situation there. A does not explicitly apply for refugee status but signals serious concerns about returning.
6. B discusses with A and takes her to C, who has a more in-depth interview with A. B may join the interview. The interview should **not focus on the *bio data*, but rather on:**
  1. **Why A does not have appropriate documentation;**
  2. **How A managed to arrive to this country;**
  3. **Whether A wants to seek international protection.**
7. The other participants (who sit in the outer circle) are listening and observing. However, **whoever wishes so, can join A and B in the third empty chair and contribute to the discussion.** This should be done at the pace of one person joining the discussion at a time.



### Facilitation Tip 6: Maximizing the learning potential of a role play

1. Structure the roles play well, keeping it brief and clear in focus.
2. When explaining the instructions to the participants, caution those in the *fish bowl* against extensive monologue and encourage participants to give each other sufficient time to speak.
3. Give clear and concise instructions to participants.
4. Make participation voluntary.
5. Encourage participants to play their roles as close to reality as possible. This kind of exercise sometimes invites exaggeration and drama, often triggering explosions of laughter amongst observers in the outer circle – so it is easy to lose focus. Sense of humour is indeed a core ingredient of the learning experience. Yet, it is equally important that the role play is taken as seriously as possible to enable participants try to respond to daily challenges while in a safe and supporting environment.

The following two case studies correspond to true stories<sup>1</sup> although names have been changed.

### KHADIJA ↻

Khadija is from Somalia and she fled the war. She wanted to come directly to the UK because her children were already here, and she did not want to take the risk of travelling irregularly across two continents. *“My mind it was here because my children they was here, yeah, I never ask somewhere else.”* When her children left Somalia the journey was much easier and cheaper. *“That time it was easy, no, not like today. It was \$100 I think, the journey, but now \$2,000, \$3,000... everywhere is increasing... Before they didn’t look very well and, you know, and every country now has, yeah, border guards... it’s harder now. My children when they come to here, I pay one man, I give him money, they took them from Somalia to here, nothing problem.”*

She applied for a visa to enter the UK while she was in Ethiopia but her application was repeatedly refused. *“In Ethiopia they told me you have to your child ask you... my son, he ask but they give negative... I don’t know the reason, they give three times.”*

The only option she felt remained was to travel on to Sudan where she crossed the Sahara desert overnight into Libya. *“It was so difficult but that is the Sahara, is so big, you can’t imagine what is the difficulties there, it’s so dry... how many people died... during my journey not one died but on the way, you saw, on the way the people died on the floor, there are bones, there are these things.”*

From Libya she took a small boat to Italy with 15 other people, and then travelled up through Europe to The Netherlands, where she was able to get a boat to the UK. She was returned to The Netherlands by the UK authorities but made another attempt to join her family, trapped in a lorry on a small, overcrowded boat. Bad weather made the crossing impossible and the boat was stuck in the dock for five days.

*“It was Sunday night, they told me tomorrow morning you get to UK 8 o’clock but... because it was windy we stayed there. Sunday there, Monday, Tuesday... inside the lorry, we don’t have water, we don’t have anything inside and we feel scared that when you go out you can’t come inside the lorry. And Thursday night about 9 o’clock and is come UK about 1 o’clock like this. I was really sick [...]. I go out, I say, no I can’t stay inside anymore.”*

It has taken Khadija two years and US\$2,000 to reach the UK.

### RASHID ↻

Rashid is a 32-year-old Afghan who arrived in Greece. He escaped Afghanistan with his wife and child by hiding in the back of a car and arrived in Pakistan. In Pakistan he could not find a job to sustain his family and he linked up with somebody who said he would help him. When he reached Iran he was hidden in a cellar with others until it was safe to walk across the border to Turkey. During the night a group of Iranians came to the cellar with guns and stole all their money and documents. They were warned that if they complained, the smuggler would kill them.

He continued the journey by lorry from Istanbul to the coast where he boarded a boat bound for Greece. The boat was small and massively overloaded and experienced problems reaching Greece in the bad weather. For five days he was trapped on the boat with 52 other people, as it was tossed about by the waves. *“Was small, 52 we’ve been together... everybody cried a lot and we were scared and 17 people they been in coma... the weather was very hot and we couldn’t find any water to drink... the waves were very high.”*

When he tried to seek rescue from the coastguard the smugglers threatened him with a knife. *“I spoke with the boat driver and I say to him “Please come I can’t speak English, speak with the police” and he switch off the telephone... and he said “oh, they gonna put me for twelve years in the jail, in two hours we will reach Greece”, and for that we spent five days in the sea... a lot of time [Greek] police call to us and they ask us “Where are you? We like to help you but we couldn’t find you where are you”, because we couldn’t see everywhere, everywhere was water and for that they couldn’t come and they couldn’t find us.”* He eventually made it to Greece. *“Everywhere was very dangerous and when I lived in Afghanistan and was almost killed that was better than that journey which I came here. I was very scared and everywhere was very dangerous. But now I survive and cannot go back to be killed with gun. I have to hide here.”*

<sup>1</sup> British Refugee Council, *How UK Border Controls are Endangering the Lives of Refugees*, December 2008.

# Feedback to Participants

Please see the below *Facilitation Tip 7 on providing feedback to participants on role plays*. It is sometimes useful to explain the main principles of constructive feedback to the group of participants, to maximize their ability to contribute to the learning process of the group as a whole.

The facilitator should first conduct a debriefing with the three participants of the role play:

- Questions for the interviewers:  
“How did it go?” “How did you feel?” “What was difficult/easy?”
- Questions for the asylum-seekers:  
“How did the interviewers make you feel?” “Were you able to tell your story?”

Thereafter, the facilitator should ask the participants of the outer circle (who observed the role play) to elaborate on their impressions: “What went right and what went wrong?”; “What would you do differently?”

If there are issues that did not come up during the discussion with participants, the facilitator should raise them, again building on the facilitation tip below on feedback.



## Facilitation Tip 7: Providing feedback on role plays<sup>2</sup>

### A. Give positive feedback before any developmental comments

Most people respond to praise, encouragement and recognition. The phrase ‘negative feedback’ should be avoided if possible and the term ‘developmental feedback’ used instead. Preface developmental feedback with a positive statement, and it is more likely to be favourably received. Example: “I’m very pleased with the way you have settled in, you are really very popular with your colleagues. I do feel though that you need to take more time to reflect on your answers to questions.”

### B. Encourage

If the facilitator likes something about a participant, or feels that they have done something particularly well, the facilitator should recognise this, give positive feedback and encourage them to build on their strengths. The facilitator should always try to end the feedback on a positive note.

### C. Concentrate on what can be changed

The facilitator should direct the feedback only towards things that an individual can do something about.

### D. Give details

Detailed feedback gives more opportunity for learning. Example: “The way you phrased that question was helpful to the participant because it gave him/her the opportunity to explain.”

<sup>2</sup> From “OSCE Training Guide for Anti-Trafficking Trainers”.

### E. Allow the other person to accept or reject your feedback.

The facilitator cannot impose beliefs, opinions and attitudes on others. At best, demands for change are met with initial resistance, and at worst with intransigence and a feeling of resentment. Skilful feedback offers the person information about himself/herself, which he/she can consider and from which he/she can learn. Whether or not the feedback from the facilitator is acted upon is a matter for the decision of the receiver.

### F. Offer alternatives

Turn negative feedback into positive suggestions. Example: "It would save time if you collated all the information first rather than....."

### G. Take responsibility for feedback

Avoid "You are...." Statements which suggest universally agreed opinions of the other person. Start with "I think...." or "In my opinion...." It is important to take ownership of proffered feedback.

### H. Be aware that things may change as a result of your feedback

There is always the chance that the recipient will be annoyed or hurt by negative feedback, or that the relationship between the facilitator and a participant might change as a result. The facilitator needs to think about this before giving feedback.

### I. Ask whether or not they agree with the feedback given

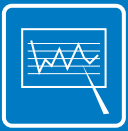
The facilitator should give the person a chance to think about and discuss the feedback in his/her presence. The recipient is unlikely to act upon feedback with which he/she disagrees.

### J. Ask if he/she has been told something similar before

If he/she has, the feedback given will reinforce the fact that some kind of change is needed. If the recipient has not, it will at least establish that the issue is between just the facilitator and the participant.

### K. Ask him/her to suggest alternative forms of behaviour etc.

The most positive step towards setting a clear objective about change is to enable the other person firstly to acknowledge the need for change and secondly to reach his/her own conclusion about how things could have been done differently.



## 5.2. Participatory Presentation: Ethics and Communication with Persons in Need of Protection at Border Points

The **presentation** should not be in the form of a “lecture”, but, rather take the form of a participatory presentation. Some guidance on such a way of presenting follows.



### Facilitation Tip 8: Delivering a participatory presentation

- In a participatory presentation, the participants intervene to share their own experiences with regard to the various concepts presented by the facilitator. Such presentations foster greater understanding of the participants on the content of the presentation. In addition, the participatory dynamic provides additional legitimacy to the concepts learned. These concepts are reinforced by the participants’ own experiences as well as by reality itself.
- The facilitator should ask the participants whether they can recall a concrete situation in the discharge of their functions, where that specific point became very relevant. He should invite all participants to reflect on the lessons, whether positive or negative, that could be drawn from such situations. These should be integrated by the facilitator into the presentation as such.

In this kind of presentations it is important to keep an eye on the clock. Participants’ interventions can lead to interesting and constructive debates and it is up to the facilitator to allow more time for certain discussions or to go back to the main presentation. However, the facilitator should try to allocate sufficient time to the discussions so that he or she can also cover the main issues selected to develop participants’ communication skills. To that end a co-facilitator could discreetly assist with time-keeping during the interaction with participants.





# Key messages for presentation

This presentation will be based on a checklist for entry officials communicating with asylum-seekers. The facilitator should explain that the presentation will relate to the morning's simulation as well as to the most recent fish bowl exercise.

The facilitator should project on the wall the following [slide](#):

## Checklist for Entry Officials: Communicating with Asylum-seekers

1. Recalling the purpose of communicating at the border
2. Access to interpreters
3. Access to legal counsel
4. Confidentiality
5. Self-awareness on barriers to communication
6. Active listening
7. Respectful and professional attitude
8. Appropriate body language
9. Sensitivity to gender, age, and diversity factors that may affect communication
10. Psychological and emotional needs of asylum-seekers and migrants
11. Asking appropriate questions

**Note!** In order to make the presentation relevant for the participants, the facilitator should expand only on those points of the checklist for communication where participants need to make special progress. The selection of one point over another should be based on the impressions of the facilitator with regard to participants' strengths and weaknesses in communication following their performance during the earlier simulation and the fish bowl exercise.

### 1. Recalling the purpose of communicating at the border

- The interaction with asylum-seekers at the border aims to help entry officials respond in a protection-sensitive and rights-respecting way to persons who may wish to apply for asylum. It is therefore not an interrogation or a trial. It is an opportunity to discuss and understand the circumstances of the person, gathering the necessary information to take a decision on:
  - any kind of health care or assistance needed
  - communication to the relevant authorities to ensure access to the asylum procedure
  - entry into the territory of the State
- Some persons do not actively apply for asylum because they do not know it is possible or they do not dare because of specific circumstances (i.e. victims of trafficking, victims of torture, etc). To safeguard the principle of *non-refoulement*, border officials need to make every effort to identify persons who may want to seek international protection and ensure access to the asylum procedures.
- Entry officials will also need to provide information. They should expect that the person who may want to seek international protection may have basic questions about the asylum application process, and they should make every effort to understand the basics of the process to explain it to asylum-seekers if need be.

- Entry officials should avoid being distracted by outside parties or other things going on in the same room. They should focus on what they have to say and on listening carefully to what the asylum-seeker is trying to communicate.

## 2. Ensuring access to interpreters

- Any communication should take place in a language that the asylum-seeker is able to understand and to express himself or herself without difficulties. The entry official should ensure the service of an interpreter if needed.
- Before starting to communicate with the asylum-seeker, the entry official should ensure:
  - That the individual and the interpreter understand one other. Ask them to talk a little. If the interpreting arrangement is not satisfactory, then the interview should not proceed.
  - That the interpreter is not closely related to the applicant through family or other ties. Be aware of any factors that may influence the asylum-seeker's ability or willingness to communicate, such as gender, culture or religious elements.

## 3. Facilitating access to legal counsel

- Where national legislation provides for the participation of legal or other counsel to assist an applicant in presenting his or her claim, it is essential to allow such counsel to participate in the interview.
- The presence of a legal representative or other counsel, who is familiar with asylum and migration legislation and local jurisprudence, is helpful not only to the applicant but also to the entry officials.

## 4. Ensuring confidentiality

- None of the information provided by asylum-seekers, including about the fact that they intend to lodge an asylum application, should be shared with authorities of the country of origin. Entry officials need to reassure asylum-seekers of this guarantee.
- All data, including personal data, facts surrounding travel and any information on the asylum application, should be kept under strict confidentiality and those handling such data must abide by relevant national and EU laws on data protection. These also impose restrictions on disclosing or requesting information from the alleged persecutors in such a way which might reveal that an asylum application has been made.<sup>3</sup>
- Privacy is an essential condition for effective confidentiality. Communication cannot be established if there exists a fear of being overheard by others. Entry officials should therefore ensure that the area where they speak to an asylum-seeker is private.

## 5. Developing self-awareness on barriers to communication

- In any type of discussion or conversation between different persons, there are a number of potential barriers to effective communication. This is particularly true in the context of communications between border authorities and asylum-seekers, where such barriers can be, among others:
  - **Stereotypical assumption** on both sides: stereotypes are generalizations, or assumptions, which people make about the characteristics of all members of a group, based on an image (often wrong) about what people in that group are like.
  - **More subtle forms of biases:** such as those based on people's ethnic origin, socio-economic background or occupation. Such biases are more difficult to recognize, yet are a fact of life. These biases can affect how entry officials see asylum-seekers. They can also affect how asylum-seekers see themselves, and so lead to self-defeating expectations. Asylum-seekers may expect to be the object of others' prejudices, and so may expect to be ignored or dismissed.

<sup>2</sup> See EU Asylum Procedures Directive Art.22.

- These prejudices and biases can be dangerous when interacting with asylum-seekers at the border. If entry officials are not fully aware of such assumptions, they can view asylum-seekers as a problem.
- Stereotypes are especially likely to be wrong in tense or complex situations, such as in the midst of larger group arrivals or dangerous sea operations. When people are subject to a lot of pressure and confronted with problems with which they can do little to help, their image of the people they have to deal with tends to become more and more hostile. As communication gets cut off, people make generalizations and assumptions about asylum-seekers based on very sketchy and often erroneous information.
- In this context, it is easy to perceive faults in the border control system's capacity to help and "project" those faults onto the asylum-seekers, preferring to believe that they are aggressive, self-serving or deceitful. They may grow worse, as communication is shut down and escalation heightens emotions and tension.
- **Recognizing that we might hold or be the victim of biases is the first and most crucial step in combating prejudice.**
- It is essential to focus on the particular individual, rather than on their ethnic or national background. It is important to remember that there are often greater differences within a group than between groups.
- It is also important to remind oneself that border control will not bring the solution for migratory pressure, abuse of asylum procedures nor will it save all victims of trafficking. Entry officials should try to avoid putting too much pressure on themselves and remain realistic about their own self-expectations and focus on the concrete situation at hand.

## 6. Active listening

- The goal of active listening is to understand asylum-seekers as well as you understand yourself. Pay close attention to what the asylum-seeker is saying. Ask him or her to clarify or repeat anything that is unclear or seems unreasonable (maybe it isn't, but you are interpreting it wrongly).
- Attempt to repeat their case, as they have presented it, back to them. This shows that you are listening (which suggests that you care what they have to say) and that you understand what they have said. It does not indicate that you agree with what they said—nor do you have to. You just need to indicate that you do understand them.
- Avoid developing a “selective ear” that listens but does not “hear” indications of need for international protection: some persons may be asked about the transit routes from their home countries or about the means of transport and they may reply that they had chosen a specific means or route because of fear of persecution or serious harm to their families.

## 7. Maintaining a respectful and professional attitude

- In accordance with the principle of non-discrimination and human dignity, respectful treatment should be the norm in all circumstances. [Pls. refer to point 8 of the checklist, *‘Being sensitive to Gender, Age, and Diversity’*, which is very much related to this].
- The *‘do no harm’* principle: entry officials should treat each woman, man or child seeking asylum or with specific protection needs as if the potential for harm is obvious until there is evidence to the contrary.
- To maintain a *professional* attitude, there are two major pitfalls to avoid:
  - Appearing judgemental or mistrustful: the entry official is there to hear about his or her situation in a totally neutral way;
  - Being overly sympathetic: entry officials work within a legal framework which imposes certain specific conditions when it comes to border control and assistance of migrants and asylum-seekers.
- No matter what they think of the asylum-seeker, if they are treated with respect and dignity—even if entry officials think they do not deserve it – communication will be much more successful, and it will be easier to understand the possible protection or other needs of the asylum-seeker. This means that personal attacks and insults should be avoided, as should verbal or non-verbal signs of disdain.

- Body language:
  - Maintaining a steady and friendly visual expression and keeping eye contact with the asylum-seeker suggests that you are paying careful attention to what is being said.
  - The eye contact and overall communication in general should be with the applicant, not with the interpreter or the legal counsel. However, be aware of cultural and gender differences in communication, especially regarding non-verbal communication. This is particularly important in the context of cross-cultural communication [Refer to point 8 below];
  - Avoid reading papers while the asylum-seeker is speaking. If you need to check on a document, wait until there is a pause.

## 8. Being sensitive to cultural, gender, age and other diversity factors that may affect communication

### 8.1. Culture

- Generally speaking, communication with another involves predicting or anticipating their responses. However, communication may get distorted if this automatic responses appear in cross-cultural exchanges.
  - As a first step in developing cross-cultural awareness, entry officials should recall that many of the arriving migrants and asylum-seekers have limited knowledge of their new environment, including its norms and values.
  - In the same context, they need to bear in mind when communicating with them that they, as entry officials, do not have much more knowledge of their culture, beliefs or habits.
  - Therefore, in cross-cultural exchanges, it is essential to maintain self-awareness of possible cultural differences and make every effort not to anticipate possible behaviours or responses.
  - Entry officials should react slowly and carefully to statements by migrants or asylum-seekers, not jumping to the conclusion that they know what is being thought and said.
  - Active listening can sometimes be used to check this out by repeating what one thinks he or she heard, one can confirm that one understands the communication accurately.
- Interaction with persons of different cultures at border points can trigger an unusual level of anxiety in entry officials. The uncertainty related to cross-cultural communication increases as it is possible to anticipate a wider array of possible negative outcomes. Entry officials may fear the possibility of dishonesty, fraud or abuse of the asylum system by migrants. At the same time, they may fear the possibility of feeling helpless or incompetent. For example, in some cultures, avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect, while in Europe it can be interpreted as a sign of dishonesty.
- Generally these anxieties can be reduced by paying more conscious attention to the communication process, and by gathering more information on the actual situation of the asylum-seeker.

### 8.2. Gender

- Very much related to cross-cultural communication, gender issues are likely to arise in situations of border control. Issues such as women's physical distance from others and dress code will be different across cultures. Again, it is very important that entry officials develop as much self-awareness as possible, particularly with regard to their own possible stereotypes or biases.
- Women should not always be labelled as vulnerable or especially fragile. In many situations of displacement, they have proven extraordinary levels of strength and resilience, including the capacity to sustain the whole family. Yet, they do have specific needs related to the fact that they are women in displacement, particularly if they are undocumented.

- It is therefore vital to identify possible protection concerns that female asylum-seekers or migrants may have, even prior to going into issues related to their migratory status. To do this, when families units arrive at a border, and border guards identify issues that require a closer examination, it is important to communicate separately with all members of the family. In particular, it is important to ensure that the female members of the family are given an opportunity to be interviewed separately. This will greatly facilitate the identification of possible protection concerns related to them.
- Women should not be pushed to talk about problems related to sexual violence nor, as with any other asylum-seeker, to provide any details on the substance of their asylum claim. If entry officials suspect that a woman has been a victim of sexual violence, or if she is unable or unwilling to discuss certain events relating to such an incident, they should ask discreet and indirect questions that could enable them to take appropriate protection measures.
- It is important to ensure the presence of female entry officials in border control operations and in the course of routine border tasks. Research has shown that increasing the presence of female officers improves the law enforcement response to violence against women. It also reduces problems related to sex discrimination and harassment.
- Entry officials should also make every effort to ensure that asylum-seekers, particularly women, can have an interviewer and an interpreter of the same sex. In most cases, women will feel more at ease if they can speak to another woman.

### 8.3. Age

- If a young person claims to be child (under 18), entry officials should always give them the benefit of the doubt and treat them as such, whatever their personal opinion on the age the person appears to be (it should be recalled that some children of different ethnic backgrounds and children who have gone through traumatic experiences will sometimes look older than others).
- Entry officials should limit their interviews to gathering basic information about a child's identity. It is usually in a child's best interest that s/he is interviewed in the presence of a trusted adult, preferably parents, guardians or legal tutors.
- Unaccompanied minors and separated children should always be referred to the relevant institution responsible for children where more in-depth child-friendly interviews can be conducted, and other appropriate steps taken.
- There are some basic rules to be followed in the case of unaccompanied and separated children:
  - Entry officials should be aware of standard referral procedures and immediately liaise with the national child care institution to ensure the assignment of a legal representative and a guardian.
  - Prior to interviewing children, access should be provided to any medical aid or assistance needed by the child and the interviewer should check if the child is hungry or thirsty, needs the toilet or wants to sleep. In all such cases, the needs of the child should be met before any interview commences.
  - The assigned legal representative / tutor / advocate / guardian must be present at all interviews with the child, which need to be conducted by specialists with training and expertise in interviewing separated children.
  - Special, child-friendly environments should be created as 'safe' locations for children during the interview process.

### 8.4 Older persons and disabled persons

- Generally there should be a friendly and non-threatening environment at the border for everyone, including for older persons and disabled persons, who should not be discriminated against in any way due to potential physical vulnerabilities.
- Entry officials should be mindful of identifying older persons who may need specialist support, facilities or health care.

- Entry officials should also take care to proactively identify persons arriving at the border with disabilities and ensure any specific needs are communicated and met.

## 9. Psychological and emotional needs of asylum-seekers

- Asylum-seekers experience many different stresses but, again, it is important not to stereotype them. Experiences and reactions differ. Most cope, some are vulnerable and a few may display disturbed behaviour.
- They may have lost family, friends, home, belongings, familiar surroundings and lifestyle. They may also have experienced war, separation, a shortage of necessities and fear of discovery, as well as hostility and material deprivation on their journey. Changes that affect them include language, lifestyle, living standards, status and relationship with parents and children.
- Entry officials should be aware of the **effects that traumatic experiences may have on communication during border controls**. For instance:
  - Asylum-seekers may fear speaking honestly about their situation to State officials, particularly those in uniform, and symbols of authority as a result of the persecution suffered in their country of origin. They may lack confidence in the ability of State officials to help them and even fear that they will do them harm.
  - A traumatized individual may become helpless because he/she experiences the world as unpredictable, threatening and assaulting, which fundamentally threatens the individual's sense of self. In this context, traumatized asylum-seekers and migrants may refuse to talk about experiences of distress and trauma.
  - This may be a result of a denial mechanism to protect their own psychological balance, a lack of awareness of their right to be treated with respect and dignity, or the fear of reprisals by smugglers or traffickers.
  - Incoherence may occur because of fatigue or strong feelings, or because of poor command of language. In serious cases, there can be total confusion in relation to reality and alterations of identity.
  - Asylum-seekers suffering severe post-traumatic stress disorder may have serious memory gaps, to the point that questions may arise on the credibility of their claims. There have been cases where asylum-seekers have not been able to remember their children's names, ages, nor even faces when questioned about especially traumatic events.
  - Such psychological effects, instead of being used against the asylum-seeker during the decision-making process, should rather be seen as a sign for urgent need of rest, support, counselling and potentially treatment.
- It is very difficult to provide precise advice on how to interview or communicate with victims of trauma. Persons experience trauma and react to interviewing in very different ways. As stated at the beginning of this presentation, interviewing in the context of border control should be done for a specific purpose. **If there is an absolute need to interview a trauma survivor at border points, a few basic tips drawn from experience with asylum-seekers and victims of trauma are:**
  - Persons who experience torture or other human rights abuses should be treated as survivors, rather than victims. Looking at their past should be done with the help of professional counsellors as, otherwise, it can contribute to increasing their trauma.
  - The interviewer should encourage the interviewee actively to participate in the interview. In this context, the interviewer should develop a rapport with the interviewee by personalizing the interview, expressing empathy, and listening actively. When creating a personal bond in this way, the interviewer may give some personal and biographical information about him- or herself (without compromising privacy) to which the interviewee can relate.
  - It could be very helpful to talk about the anxiety and indicate its naturalness, as well as the fact that talking about the experiences of the victim or witness do not mean that the event, will occur again.
  - An entry official is often the first State official a traumatized victim meets. Officials are, therefore, in a unique position to set in train a healing process. Specialized counselling should take place as soon as possible

after the traumatizing event has occurred, and in ensuing weeks subsequent counselling Sessions should follow.

- Border authorities should designate a liaison officer for such counselling institutions, who can ensure quick access and early referral.

## 10. Asking the right questions

- When communicating with asylum-seekers and migrants, entry officials should be prepared to follow up with questions on all relevant issues that can indicate the possibility of a protection concern. No effort should be spared in trying to identify the persons' immediate needs and utilizing the relevant referral mechanism. This requires that entry officials maintain an open attitude and remain alert and intellectually active during the interview process.
- Questions should be specific and in accordance with the purpose of the interview; entry officials should be able to alternate between open and closed questions, on the basis of their effectiveness, to improve communication at each stage of the interview.

### • Open questions:

- An open question is one that asks for general information and cannot be answered by “yes” or “no”. It is used to gather information on personal opinions and reactions, and is therefore most appropriate at the beginning of an interview.
- By using open questions, the interviewer provides the applicant with the opportunity to relate events in his or her own way.
- Open questions can be time consuming. If the asylum-seeker is nervous, emotionally upset, or has misunderstood the type of information that is being sought at the border, he or she may become confused and talk at length about irrelevant details. If this occurs the entry official must gain control of the interview by politely intervening and changing the line of questioning.
- The entry official must also take into account of the education level and cultural background of the applicant in order to assess whether he or she is capable of providing clear and relevant information in response to open questions.

### • Closed questions

- A closed question calls for a short response, usually “yes”, “no”, or a simple statement of fact.
- Closed questions serve to fill in information that is not clear from the asylum-seekers' statements, particularly when there are contradictory details.

Entry officials should alternate between open and closed questions. This will help to reduce tension as the asylum-seeker will be able to express him or herself more freely during the interview. It will also help avoid making the asylum-seeker feel that the entry official is deliberately pursuing confusing or contradictory points.



## 5.3. Practising communication skills in small groups

This exercise aims to enable participants to practise the different skills and attitudes raised during the fish bowl exercise and the participatory presentation. Prior to explaining the instructions for the upcoming exercise, the facilitator should ask those who did the role play during the fish bowl exercise what they would have done differently after this presentation. After listening to the respective participants, who may come up with interesting tips for the rest of the group, participants should split into pairs: each of them will play (alternating) the role of interviewer (entry official) and the role of an asylum-seeker.

Role sheets to this end are available by means of the current links: [Annex 1](#), [Annex 2](#).

After the exercise, the one playing the role of the asylum-seeker will provide feedback to the interviewer. The feedback provided should concentrate on the procedure rather than on the content of the interview and it should be concrete and constructive. To the extent possible, participants should try to provide feedback against the checklist of the previous presentation on communicating with persons in need of international protection.

It would be useful to remind participants of the basic principles for providing feedback on role plays. [Please see *Facilitation Tip 7 on providing feedback on role plays*].

Each group shall conduct two interviews. Each interview should last five minutes, following which there should be a five minute debriefing. The facilitators should alternate as additional observers between the groups. In doing so, they should take note of any issues that may still need to be addressed in the plenary debriefing at the end of this exercise.





## 5.4. Cards on wall exercise: Plenary debriefing & brainstorming on key messages on ethics and communication at border points

To wrap up this session on communicating with persons potentially in need of protection, a participative brainstorming exercise should be carried out in plenary. This exercise could be done with the help of wall cards. Each participant receives three wall cards, and should write down (in big letters; one idea per card; 5-7 words per card) three key recommendations that he/she proposes for communicating with persons who may have international protection needs.

If the audience is large (e.g. more than 20 participants) participants should split into groups (3-5 participants) and agree on three wall cards they would like to present to the audience. The facilitator then starts collecting the wall cards. He/she places the first ten wall cards on the wall (with the help of masking tape or a remount spray).

Participants should decide which cards reflect a similar idea (based on the organizing principle of “similar impact”) where after the facilitator puts similar cards together (one below the other). Once all cards have been “clusterized” each cluster should be given a title (“e.g. “sensitizing our superiors”, “promoting clear procedures” etc.).

The resulting titles are the responses to the initial focus question and should be written down on a flipchart paper and put on the wall. Thereafter, the facilitator should conduct a focused debriefing with the participants on the resulting titles, trying to raise key messages that will apply to the entry official’s day-to-day activities.



## Background documents and further reading for facilitators

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Interpreting in a refugee context*, Self-Study Module 3, January 2009 [↗](#)
- British Refugee Council, *How UK Border Controls are Endangering the Lives of Refugees*, December 2008 [↗](#)
- Hungarian Helsinki Committee, (Magyar Helsinki Bizottsag), *Access to Protection at Airports in Europe: Report on the monitoring experience at airports in Amsterdam, Budapest, Madrid, Prague, Vienna and Warsaw*, December 2008 [↗](#)
- Italian Refugee Council, *Services at Borders: a practical cooperation, SAB project final report*, September 2008 [↗](#)
- Angela Mackay, "Border Management and Gender." *Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit*. Eds. Megan Bastick and Kristin Valasek. Geneva: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN-INSTRAW, 2008. [↗](#)
- UNICEF, *Guidelines on the Protection of Child Victims of Trafficking*, September 2006. [↗](#)
- M. Caparini and O. Marenin, DCAF, *Borders and Security Governance: Managing Borders in a Globalised World*, 2006. [↗](#)
- IOM, *Resource book for Law Enforcement Officers on Good Practices in Combating Child trafficking*, March 2006. [↗](#)
- Separated Children in Europe Programme, *Statement of Good Practice*, Third Edition 2004. [↗](#)
- OSCE, *National Referral Mechanisms: Joining Efforts to Protect the Rights of Trafficked Persons: A Practical Handbook*, 2004. [↗](#)
- World Health Organization, *WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women*, 2003. [↗](#)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Interviewing Applicants for Refugee Status*, RLD4, 1995. [↗](#)