

Talk with me

Volunteer language mentors
for refugees



MANUAL

for an intercultural training
for young refugees



Why do we need to learn about cultures?

In the countries we grew up, we learnt how things should be done, what is expected of us, how we should behave, how things are organized and done, how we communicate, about family, how we express ourselves, what to eat, which music we listen to, how to work, learn, and to spend free time etc. So by seeing, learning from our parents, family members, neighbors, teachers, learning in schools, etc. we are shaped by the culture we grow up and live in.

But of course cultures can differ: not only from country to country, but also within our own country: for example you might see the world differently, if you come from a big city or were raised in a small village in a rural area.

But still – the culture we grow up in has an impact on our way of thinking, our values, behavior, communication etc.

Some of these differences are obvious, like visual “signs” of a culture, like the way we dress and style or typical gestures. But of course there are lots of “unseen” and hidden dimensions, we can’t see, which are not written down or explained, but felt and expected. And most of the time we are not aware of these cultural dimensions.



“Visual signs” of culture:

In order to make participants aware of the visual signs of culture, we use the exercise “Gestures” in mixed groups. How to express:

- Yes – no
- Disagreement – agreement
- Liking something – disliking something
- Expressing: “You are stupid or a fool!!
- Expressing: You are super!
- Hello and goodbye
- Stop
- Go away – come here
- Take attention

Then we talk about different signs of cultures, for example:

- Eating habits and traditions
- The concept of beauty
- Greetings
- Getting introduced and introducing yourself



“Invisible” dimensions of culture:

Then we discuss the different way of doing thing in different countries or cultures, e.g.:

- How to get to know each other
- Family
- Friendship: How to find friends and typical things you do with friends
- Leisure time
- Accepted physical distance: concept of nearness/closeness and distance
- Accepted loudness in public and private place
- Role of men and women
- How to get to know a girl- or boyfriend?
- Direct – indirect language
- Concept of time/ punctuality
- Concept of hygiene, cleanness and cleaning, etc.

But of course varieties of and in cultures exist. So therefore it is important to understand the different dimensions of culture and to be open minded! If you have intercultural competences, you are able to interpret and understand different situations better and to avoid intercultural conflicts and misunderstandings.

Dimensions of cultures

“How do we get culture?”

Exercise 1: Ask the participants: “How do you “get” a culture? Are you born with it? Did you “catch” it just living in a specific country?”

Write down the ideas and cluster them.

The result will be, that there are 3 methods of “getting a culture”:

1. **Learned** (formally and informally, consciously and unconsciously, through language, art, etc.)
2. **Shared /transmitted generation to generation** (family, peers, media, school, church)
3. **Based on symbols** (gestures, clothes, objects, flags, religious icons, with language probably being one of the most important and influential)

Being in a new country means, that you have “missed out” on learning about the host culture. So you have to compensate for what you have missed out.

“How do we learn about a new culture?”

Exercise 2: Think of situations here in your new country, where you didn’t understand what was happening, where you had the feeling you were misunderstood or where things were completely different as in your home country. Think about cultural differences and some of the challenges you had faced as you communicate with others.

The trainer will cluster the situations described and will try to explain them depending on the language level of the refugees. The trainer might use the “Dimensions of cultures” theory of Geert Hofstede (see section “Intercultural training” of the young voluntary language mentors).

It is important to be aware of important “hidden rules, expectations, and values in your new country.

To have an idea, how to present this in easy language, we have developed a presentation about local culture, which might be an inspiration for you. In this version you will find a presentation about German culture.



„The Germans“

Important tips and information concerning Germans

But never forget: each person is an individual, so don't judge and have prejudices only based on nationality! Everyone is different – so be open minded!



Stereotype: Germans are always on time

- Punctuality means showing respect, not being punctual means being disrespectful
 - Punctuality is specially important for „official“ appointments (e.g. doctor, public administration) or at work or at school
- Keep an appointment and be on time!!!
- If you cannot meet the deadline, inform the person before!



Stereotype: the Germans work disciplined

- „Think first, then act!“
- Develop plans
- Do plans step by step
- Results
- Efficiency!!!



Phase	Maßnahmen	Zeit
1. Zielsetzung	Bestimmung der übergeordneten Ziele und der daraus resultierenden Teilziele. Klärung der Verantwortlichkeiten, Rollen und Rollenverteilung. Festlegung der Meilensteine und Zeitplan.	10-15 Min.
2. Analyse	Bestimmung der übergeordneten Ziele und der daraus resultierenden Teilziele. Klärung der Verantwortlichkeiten, Rollen und Rollenverteilung. Festlegung der Meilensteine und Zeitplan.	10-15 Min.
3. Planung	Bestimmung der übergeordneten Ziele und der daraus resultierenden Teilziele. Klärung der Verantwortlichkeiten, Rollen und Rollenverteilung. Festlegung der Meilensteine und Zeitplan.	10-15 Min.
4. Umsetzung	Bestimmung der übergeordneten Ziele und der daraus resultierenden Teilziele. Klärung der Verantwortlichkeiten, Rollen und Rollenverteilung. Festlegung der Meilensteine und Zeitplan.	10-15 Min.
5. Evaluation	Bestimmung der übergeordneten Ziele und der daraus resultierenden Teilziele. Klärung der Verantwortlichkeiten, Rollen und Rollenverteilung. Festlegung der Meilensteine und Zeitplan.	10-15 Min.



Stereotype: Germans love rules

- For Germans rules and regulations are important
- The Germans stick by their rules
- Anyone who violates the rules, has to expect a penalty
- One expects the worst!

