

Ethic and communication at the border

Protection Training Manual for European Border and Entry Officials

Session 5

The purpose of communicating at the border

Many asylum seekers do not actively apply for asylum

- They may ignore the right or the procedures to do so
- They may be victims of trafficking
- They may suffer trauma related to persecution or the difficult journey.

Role of Entry Officials

- To deal with persons approaching the border in a **protection-sensitive** and **rights-respecting** way
- Determine any health care or other urgent assistance needed
- Provide basic information on asylum application process
- Refer persons to relevant authorities (i.e. to ensure access to asylum procedures, child-care institutions)
- Decide on entry into the territory of the state
TAKING INTO ACCOUNT ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Pre-requisites to communication

- **Access to interpreters**
- **Access to legal counsel**
- **Confidentiality**

Self-awareness on barriers to communication

- Stereotypical assumptions
- More subtle forms of bias

Some tips:

- Recognizing that we may hold or be the victim of biases is the first and most crucial step in combating prejudice
- Groups are not homogeneous: focus on the particular individual, rather than on the ethnic or national background.
- Remember that communicating with individuals at the border intends to assist THAT PARTICULAR individual, not to solve migratory pressure on the borders.
- Active listening
- Respectful and professional attitude

Sensitivity to culture, age, gender and other diversity factors

CULTURE

- Arriving persons do not know the new environment
- Entry officials do not know the cultures of arriving persons
- Cross-cultural communication raises anxiety levels

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Maintain self-awareness on biases
- Do not jump to conclusions: active listening
- Try to be aware of increase of anxiety level and to manage it by:
- Paying more attention to the communication process, as such
- Gathering more information on the actual situation of the migrant or asylum seeker

Gender

Likely to arise in situations of border control and affect communication process and decisions

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Do not label women as vulnerable or fragile, but be aware of their specific needs, particularly if undocumented
- Communicate separately with adult members of families or groups of migrants
- Do not push women to talk about problems related with sexual violence
- Ensure presence of female border staff
- Promote availability of female interpreters / legal counsel

Children

- Entry officials must be aware of standard referral procedures
- Immediate liaison with national child care institutions
- Access to medical aid or assistance PRIOR to any interview (also check if hungry, tired, toilet need, etc)
- Should always be interviewed in the presence of a trusted adult (parents or legal tutors)
- Special child-friendly environments: “safe” locations

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL needs of persons at border points

Effects of traumatic experiences on communication during border controls:

- Fear of speaking honestly to State officials as a result of persecution suffered
- Refuse to talk about past experiences due to feeling of helplessness
- Fear of reprisals by traffickers / smugglers
- Lack of awareness of right to be treated with respect and dignity
- Incoherence due to fatigue or poor command of language
- Serious memory gaps due to post-traumatic stress disorder

Basic Tips on dealing with trauma survivors

Ensuring interviewing by TRAINED STAFF on trauma

- Developing a positive rapport with individual: express empathy, listen actively
- Indicate naturalness of anxiety and stress and reassure that traumatizing circumstances need not happen again
- Set in train a healing process (against re-traumatization)
- Ensuring urgent rest, support and counselling (CLEAR links with national referral institutions)

Asking the right questions

- **Remember purpose of the interview:**
 - not refugee status determination
 - checking for right to enter
 - checking protection and assistance needs
- **Open questions**
- **Closed questions**