



HUNGARIAN  
HELSINKI  
COMMITTEE

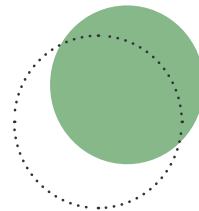
Human  
Rights

Defenders

of the  
Future



Engaging youth and teachers in the  
work of human rights defenders



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## Hungarian Helsinki Committee

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# Introduction

Since 1989, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee has been working to provide legal assistance to those whose human rights have been violated by state bodies. Besides litigation, from the very beginning it has been important for us to publicise these activities. On the one hand, we have been communicating more and more effectively to the wider society every year to let people know what is happening in the country, and also to prevent further violations. We have also long engaged in another way of raising awareness about human rights: education.

We have trained police officers, judges, border guards and asylum officers, both Hungarians and foreigners, though currently it is more often foreigners, because the current government does not usually allow state employees to attend human rights training courses run by independent NGOs. But equally important for us has always been the training of non-governmental actors in the public sphere, such as journalists, other NGOs or students. Among young people, our attention as a legal aid organisation has so far mainly been focused on law students, for example by holding law clinics or university courses or providing them with a place for their internship.

For many years we have also held sessions in secondary schools. However, it was through our Youth Engagement and Sensitisation (YES) project that we were first able to raise awareness of the rights of this age group in an organised and well-thought-out framework. The project was supported by Terre des hommes in Germany. We not only trained young people, but also involved them in our activities in a way that had not been tried before.

In almost two and a half years of YES, we have been able to meet a number of long-standing needs:

- \* the possibility to work with the same people not just for a short period of time, but over months and even years,
- \* a board of young people for the Helsinki Committee,
- \* developing a broader social base by actively involving young people and teachers.

This handbook tells the story of this work through five processes. The chosen tool of engagement is critical pedagogy, which is described in chapter 1. We continue with four processes for engaging young people. We start with the Young Voices for the Voiceless group, which we called the Youth Council at the beginning of the programme, before the group renamed itself. It was called a council because it gave its opinion on the various activities of our organisation. Our long-term engagement with them is shown by the fact that they have worked with us for a year and a half and in many different ways. Then we will present the eight-month process of the Social Participation Course for activating refugee and immigrant youth. Then we will cover the niche summer camps on human rights for Ukrainian refugee youth and Hungarian students. We conclude with a look at human rights youth mentors. The mentors' two-month programme has achieved a level of engagement between the social participation course and the Youth Council. With them, we have reached an advanced level of youth engagement, as we have developed their competences as facilitators, mentors, task developers, researchers and presenters. With the mentors, we also combined the key lessons learned from the three other programmes, the Young Voices, the Social Participation Course and the Human Rights Camps, and secured the participation of the most motivated young people we met. After engaging young people, the handbook will continue with the fifth process, which aimed to raise awareness of rights among teachers in different ways. We also consider it important to work with teachers because they will help us to reach more young people with knowledge about human rights protection.

At the end of the book, we include some of the human rights exercises we have developed or adapted.

We hope that our handbook will be a useful resource for students eager to take action, teachers hungry to share human rights knowledge, and other NGOs who also want to involve young people in their work. The handbook is a summary of the lessons learned from the successes and failures of our YES project. It is intended to contribute to enriching the similar work of others.



# Using critical pedagogy in the educational activities of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee

As the Helsinki Committee staff who led the activities presented in the handbook, we chose critical pedagogy as our main teaching approach and applied our own interpretation of it. We were introduced to this approach at the School of Public Life's training course on the Pedagogy of Liberation.<sup>1</sup> The focus of critical pedagogy is on collective reflection, recognizing the social processes around us and taking action against oppressive relations, rather than classroom hierarchies and one-way knowledge transfer. We believe in this method and have made certain elements of it the basis of our own teaching. We have sought to move away from the traditional teacher-student hierarchy, and doing so has opened up a number of possibilities.

On the one hand, in the design and implementation of the exercises, we also recognised that participants come to the training with relevant knowledge because they are experts in their own lives, experiences and very different topics of interest to them. Group members were encouraged to share their knowledge on a topic because of their life experiences. The trainers took on the role of facilitators, where the frontal transfer of knowledge was replaced by participatory, interactive learning and peer learning. The topics covered (human rights, Helsinki Committee's areas of expertise) were approached from the participants' interests. The facilitators explored the topics with the participants, recognising that they themselves are not infallible and do not have all the knowledge or ideas.

On the other hand, we thought about what we learnt not only in itself, but in its social context. We interpreted the situations and problems of the participants, both individually and in their communities, in a broader context. This perspective led to an understanding of the context in which society works. For example, on the one hand, when learning together with participants about human rights, the group (and the facilitators in it) could learn about the experiences and thoughts of a participant. On the other hand, the participants could also recognise any rights violations they had experienced or had become aware of. The roots of some of the problems and their impact on the wider community were also explored.

And the recognition of the social context has also made it possible to talk about possibilities for action. So part of the process is action for a more just society. This action can be something as small as a minor shift, though of course it can also be something larger. Together and individually, the group reflected on what could help move towards a more just situation. Action is something that the participants have the power and ability to take (e.g. formulating

<sup>1</sup>School of Public Life, <https://kozeletiskolaja.hu/>. Recommended reading Éva Tessza Udvarhelyi: The Pedagogy of Liberation. The theory and practice of critical pedagogy. School of Public Life, 2022, <https://kozeletiskolaja.hu/post/a-felszabaditas-pedagogiaja-a-kritikai-pedagogia-elmelete-es-gyakorlata/>.

a critical question or feedback to a teacher, writing a letter to a decision-maker or actively participating in a community event). The liberating effect of critical pedagogy will make people who have not been active in this field more likely to take action against social inequalities affecting them and their environment. This is because individuals, individually and collectively, discover the social conditions in which they live and what they can do to address injustice.

And why should critical pedagogy be the teaching method of a human rights organisation? Because the cornerstone of a rights-conscious society is active participation in community affairs and the confidence that one's opinions and knowledge matter. That is why it is important for us that young people not only hear about human rights, but also think about the issue in context, exercise their rights, demand their enforcement and support their communities in doing so.



# 2 Young Voices for the Voiceless – the Youth Council of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee

## 2.1. The birth of the idea and recruitment

There were several reasons for setting up a youth group in the Helsinki Committee. We wanted to reach more young people through it and communicate more effectively with young people. Our aim was to include young people's perspectives in our youth-related activities. We wanted the members involved to be able to mentor other young people and train teachers. Our longer-term goal was for the members of the group to become adults committed to human rights, who would influence their communities' approach to human rights. We also wanted to connect members with a new generation of human rights defenders.

We wanted to have a diverse group, so that as many different experiences and ideas as possible could be present in the year and a half of collaboration. We also felt it was important to give young people from different social backgrounds the opportunity to be part of a community that, in addition to the set tasks, would also serve the personal development of the participants. To achieve this, we used the following recruitment methods:

- \* online posts on the Helsinki Committee's Facebook and Instagram pages,
- \* asking our Roma activist friends to spread the word,
- \* asking other NGOs to spread our call to young people who use their services (e.g. young people who are refugees or otherwise socially disadvantaged),
- \* running sessions in secondary schools (including "second chance" schools) where we could present the programme in person,
- \* sharing the call with young people already known to us.

Applications were received through all these channels. However, we can conclude that personal advertising of our programme was the most effective way to reach young people. It is always more time-consuming to go somewhere in person, but it is worth it. Potential applicants could then get a first-hand impression of what the future work together would be like by attending one of our workshops and asking questions about the Youth Council start-up.

## Recommendations for recruitment

- ↳ In the call for proposals, be as specific as possible about what will be done (e.g. organising and delivering training and camps) and how (e.g. emphasising teamwork), so that people who are really interested in these activities will apply.
- ↳ Target group recruitment should be as personal as possible.
- ↳ It is also worth using targeted advertising on social media.
- ↳ It is worth raising the awareness of the young people targeted about human rights violations that affect them personally, to help them understand the issue (e.g. that they are studying in schools where their teachers have been dismissed for disobeying laws prohibiting unauthorised strikes).

## 2.2. The application procedure and applicants

32 applications were received for the six places. In the end, we decided to increase the number of applicants from six to seven. We were afraid that if someone dropped out, a group of five people would feel too small. We were right: one of the participants left the group for family reasons, but the group still felt whole with the remaining six members.

We organised two rounds in the application process. Applicants were asked to send a two-page description (introduction and cover letter) by e-mail. In order to make the application process more accessible to those who do not write well in English, we also provided the option to send the applications by video. The e-mail application alone may have been too demanding for some of our target group, but we could not find any other way to lower the application threshold, and we needed to build up this level of digital competence for the subsequent collaborative work.

When applying, it was an advantage if someone had experienced their own vulnerable situation and wanted to help others who were in a similar vulnerable situation. However, being of Roma or refugee background was not in itself a guarantee of admission, because we were also looking for the ability to think about the simpler issues related to the functioning of society in the context of this identity, and whether or not the applicants with a specific identity were open to others because of or perhaps despite their identities. Thus, we had a young person from a refugee background born in Hungary who was not considered mature enough to participate in the Youth Council because he was so defined by his own grievances that he did not seem to be open to the difficulties of others. Later, the same young person enrolled in our Social Participation Course exclusively for migrant and refugee youth (see chapter 4), where he was able to fulfil his potential.

We appreciated if the applicant was able to see the events around him/her and the disadvantages

he/she was facing critically, on a more abstract and complex level than the individual grievance. This could be the dismissal of a striking teacher, a lack of consequences for bullying in schools or a lack of access to adequate state care. We also took into consideration if someone had been involved in some form of expressing the community voice (e.g. protests, petitions) before. We tried to select the group members to include people who had experience of mentoring and teaching young people, as most of the tasks that were asked of the Young Voices were also about mentoring other young people.

Based on the motivation letters, we interviewed 24 applicants. Many of them were invited to a group interview. We used the fishbowl method. The group exercise consisted of the following elements:

- \* Candidates had to agree on a topic and discuss it for 10 minutes.
- \* In two small groups, the candidates were each given a short story about an imaginary client of the Helsinki Committee. The small groups had to compose interview questions for our client. First, everyone individually came up with a question, then they discussed it in groups and together they came up with the order and the final version of the questions. The small groups told each other the questions and gave feedback.
- \* Applicants had to imagine they were attending a camp together. They had to divide the chores between them.

The fishbowl method allowed us to see from the outside how the candidates communicate with each other and how they solve problems. It is a great way to see how people behave in a group: who disappears completely and who is uncooperative or over-dominant. The seven people selected ended up being great team players.

At the end of the programme, we asked the Young Voices to give feedback on the application process and the multi-round tasks. One of them said:

*“Through several rounds of recruitment, we got a better idea of what it was going to be about, rather than just having a letter come in and then you’re a good fit or not. I had no idea that we were going to be meeting and working with other applicants at the application stage. It was a surprise at first, but when you think about it, it was really useful because we weren’t applying as individual applicants, so to speak, but really as part of a team.”*

Someone else put it like this:

*“I think it’s given you the opportunity to really create a set-up that works well and really has different people with different opinions, and I think it would have been harder to do without the rounds.”*

## Recommendations

- ↳ When asking applicants to write a cover letter, make clear points about what they want the letter to cover. This is particularly useful for those who may never have written a cover letter before.
- ↳ If it is apparent from the applications received that there is not enough diversity in some way (e.g. in our case, there were few boys), it is worth recruiting more from people who have applied in small numbers.
- ↳ It is worth asking for a group task using the fishbowl or other methods.
- ↳ Give potential applicants the opportunity to apply by video instead of writing. This will help those who do not like writing to apply more easily.

## 2.3. Building a diverse team

In the end, a team was formed with members from refugee backgrounds, non-Hungarian speakers and participants with a Roma identity or who grew up in children’s homes. There were members who had gone to the best secondary schools in Hungary and could continue their education anywhere, and others who had little chance of continuing their education in the near future. It was also a mixed group in terms of economic status and living environment.

The group was therefore diverse in terms of ethnicity, social class and migration/refugee background. However, gender diversity was missing. We only selected one boy from the small number of boys who applied, but the group dynamics would have been better if the gender ratio had been more equal. Overall, with this group we really achieved our goal of creating a diverse young community. The proportions were relatively evenly distributed, but in hindsight the dynamics might have been better if there had been one more member from a more difficult economic or social background. Particularly because one refugee member of the small group eventually dropped out for family reasons, and her departure greatly reduced the representation of members from more vulnerable backgrounds in the group.

This is how the Young Voices responded when we asked them how diverse they thought our team was:

“

*I think it's diverse, and that's a totally good thing, because I think it's helped us a lot to work together because we have different life experiences, different knowledge. For example, there were people who had more knowledge on a particular topic, and people who had less knowledge on a particular topic, and vice versa. So I think that we complemented each other very well in the way we worked together.*

“

*The fact that we come from different backgrounds could have been a disadvantage because we didn't experience things in the same way. But what I found with us was that we learned from each other and no one judged each other's worldview and that was good.*

“

*I also think it was as diverse as it could have been. Obviously, it depends on who is applying for the programme, but I think we've managed to put together a team that's not very monolithic, and I think that really helped us in the training to gain more insight into particular topics through each other's experiences. I think it's fundamentally more positive, but obviously there are difficulties in that we grew up in a different way. Not very differently in some cases, but that maybe we need to be more patient with each other, or more open.*

## Recommendations for working with a diverse group

- ↳ It is worth trying to organise and recruit a group in which a wide range of experience is represented. This could be based on ethnic, gender, social background or even migration experience, coming from different educational institutions, or having other talents that allow young people to exchange valuable experiences.
- ↳ If you want the voices of members of a social group to be heard within the group, they should be more numerous rather than equal. (For example, in our group of six or seven people, three members from refugee backgrounds would have been more visible and audible than one or two.)
- ↳ Celebrate the diversity of the group by giving members the opportunity to share their different experiences. Do this in a way that is comfortable for each team member.
- ↳ Based on the “brave spaces” approach<sup>2</sup>, focusing on differences rather than similarities can be liberating for all members.



<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of the Brave Spaces approach, see here: [https://ulexproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Toolkit-for-creating-brave-spaces\\_print.pdf](https://ulexproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Toolkit-for-creating-brave-spaces_print.pdf)

## 2.4. Activities

### Timeline of the team's activities:

**April–June 2023**

10-week-long training course

**July 2023**

First retreat (camp)

**August 2023–January 2024**

First phase of work

- ↘ co-facilitation of a human rights summer camp
- ↘ communication assistance
- ↘ further training opportunities
- ↘ giving lectures
- ↘ individual mid-term evaluation
- ↘ participating in helping Helsinki's clients

**February 2024**

Second retreat

**March 2024–August 2024**

Second phase of work

- ↘ training of secondary school teachers
- ↘ human rights workshop in secondary school
- ↘ co-facilitation of a human rights summer camp
- ↘ Social Participation Course: advice, co-facilitation and operational assistance
- ↘ participation in conferences
- ↘ participating in helping Helsinki's clients
- ↘ communication assistance
- ↘ further training opportunities

**August 2024**

Third and final retreat, evaluation

## 2.5. The training

Youth Council members were given a 10-session training course at the start of their participation. Two staff members of the Helsinki Committee - Magda Major and Zoltán Somogyvári - worked with the group, alongside an external expert, Alexandra Szarka. Some of the exercises used in the training are described in Chapter 8. The aim of the training was to deepen the participants' understanding of human rights, and in particular of the central themes of the Helsinki Committee, thus laying the groundwork for more than a year of joint work after the training.

Based on the principles of critical pedagogy, team members were involved in the process. During the selection process, we asked applicants what they would like to learn about in their training. Later on, we involved the selected members in the transfer of knowledge where appropriate. For example, we created the session on refugees with team members who have a refugee background, taking into consideration to only talk about what they would like to talk about. We also used a variety of critical pedagogical learning tools in the process of working together.

The training covered the core issues of the Helsinki Committee: refugees, the rule of law and criminal justice. We clarified key concepts such as: refugee, immigrant, migrant, discrimination, segregation, rule of law. We also learnt about the situation of the Hungarian Roma, homelessness and school segregation, as these were topics that were of interest to the participants. We also wanted to give the group a broader human rights perspective on the problems of Hungarian society.

The sessions were interactive and we talked a lot with the young people. For each session, we prepared a session plan based on what we had experienced in the previous sessions and the feedback we received. We mixed different types of exercises to find something for everyone (e.g. individual or group exercises) and also depending on what best suited the topic to be taught. Forum theatre, role-playing situational exercises and expert mosaics (see Chapter 8 for descriptions of some of these) worked particularly well.

In the project that funded the work, we asked for funding to pay a monthly stipend for their participation throughout their work and already during the ten-week-long training as well. In the project, we considered it important to pay the young people a stipend for their work because we wanted them to see themselves as experts. It was also important to us that no one should drop out of the group because they could not afford to volunteer. During the training, the work involved giving feedback on the training and actively participating in the training process.

At the end of the training, we went on a two-day camp (retreat), where we further strengthened the team's cohesion, evaluated the training and planned the next phase of our work together. It was at this retreat that the group named itself Young Voices for the Voiceless as a result of a community consensus naming process.

In the evaluation, young people reported that they found the role-playing games very useful in learning about specific human rights. Many described it as interesting for them to experience these situations and then gain additional knowledge, such as about legislation. It was very important for them to learn a lot not only from us but also from each other, as they had many opportunities to share their opinions and experiences. Some of them pointed out that during the training, we, the facilitators could have shared our own opinions and experiences more often on a topic discussed



and that we could have given them more critical feedback. The usefulness of the many team-building exercises was also highlighted by the Young Voices, which helped them to go from being strangers to friends.

It was a great experience for us to train such a diverse group of people over three months. It was motivating to come up with new human rights exercises for each session, because they made us rethink our own activities from a pedagogical point of view. We learnt a lot from the questions and feedback from young people, and incorporated these into our work with the Young Voices after the training. The following chapters are about this more than a year of collaboration.

### Recommendations on youth training

- ↳ Ask for feedback from the young people at the end of each session, halfway through the learning process and at the end.
- ↳ Together with them, develop training activities that are linked to their identity.
- ↳ Ask them to share their knowledge and experience in a way that suits them.
- ↳ Stress the importance of diversity and experiential expertise throughout. This builds self-identity and confidence.
- ↳ The training should involve as many colleagues from the NGO who do not otherwise have daily contact with young people as possible. This will help both young people and these colleagues to get to know each other better, and the group can learn from more experts.
- ↳ The training should also include practice in a task that will be used in future work together (for example, in our case, reviewing texts for clarity, or working in a team to devise an activity).
- ↳ Use a variety of methods to convey information, including video, text and pictures. Young people have different learning styles and different sources of information, so it is good to use as many different media as possible.

## 2.6. Trainings and workshops provided by the Young Voices

One of the main activities of the members of the Young Voices has been to facilitate trainings and workshops organised by the Helsinki Committee together with their Helsinki colleagues. We have trained secondary school teachers with members of the group (more on this in chapter 7). We have also implemented human rights summer camps with the Young Voices (more on this in chapter 4). Members of the group have also planned and delivered school workshops with us. In our programmes for young people, the involvement of the Young Voices was very useful because, as peers, they knew better than we did what topics would interest young people aged 15–20, and how to present them.

The Young Voices also held a session for a group of Swedish secondary school students on the situation of the Hungarian Roma. The topic was chosen by the Swedish students. In preparation,

the young people interviewed colleagues who have worked or are currently working for the Helsinki Committee on issues that affect the Roma minority: hate crimes, illegal police checks and examples of discrimination against Roma in Hungary. The Swedish students reported back that they had learned a lot. And the Young Voices were particularly impressed by the Western European students' keen interest in Hungarian social issues and were proud of themselves for sharing their knowledge with them.

With the Young Voices, we held a human rights workshop for 15-year-old students at a secondary school in Cegléd. The joint learning session was devised by the young people and was about the situation of Ukrainian refugees and how to help them. At the end of the session, we asked for feedback, and the participants said that the session had made them understand that they could help refugees themselves.

## 2.7. Assisting the Helsinki Committee in its communication work

One of the reasons why we wanted to create the Young Voices was to help participants in our communication. As a human rights NGO that employs many legal experts, it is important that our communication is not overly legalistic, full of long and complicated sentences (in either verbal or written form). We therefore asked for the group's help to make some of our communication materials more understandable in general, and especially for young people. Two members of the Young Voices from refugee backgrounds also attended a training course given by a well-known Hungarian television expert. They learned how to tell their own story in a way that is interesting for others, but still comfortable for them. Later, the whole team was also trained on how to become better public speakers.

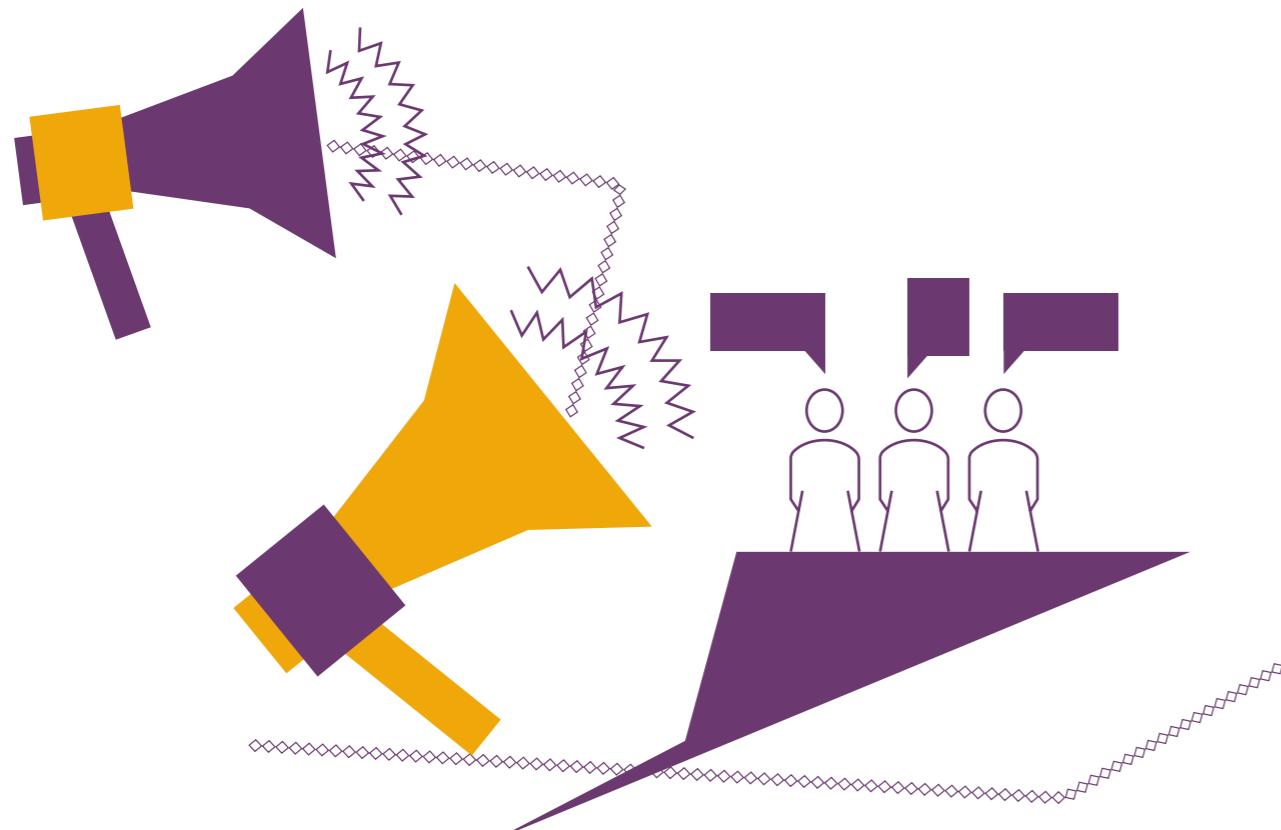
Examples of the communication activities of the Youth Council:

- \* They suggested ways to make our article on democracy more understandable for young people.
- \* They gave advice on the types of posts on social media that would be of interest to them and their friends.
- \* They evaluated the effectiveness of the cooperation between NGOs and influencers. They collected information on which influencers they and their friends follow.
- \* They painted the famous Ferencváros bench<sup>3</sup> with a message about the rule of law and featuring the Helsinki Committee logo.
- \* The Helsinki merchandise ideas were reviewed.
- \* They made videos on the rule of law.
- \* They were featured in the Helsinki communication encouraging people to vote in the 2024 elections.

<sup>3</sup> More on the rule of law bench here: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C0hZCbYlgEA/>

## Recommendations on how to involve young people in communication work

- ↳ At least a short, specific communication training for young people is useful to help them speak more confidently in public situations.
- ↳ It is important that the communication tasks, deadlines and responsibilities are clear between the young participants and the organisation's communication team or specialist.
- ↳ Encourage young people to use everyday language in their communication, as this will make their message easier to understand for other young people. This is also important because it goes against the normal expectations in schools.
- ↳ Make use of participants' digital skills. For example, an online search can take them to sites and topics that are less accessible to older generations.



## 2.8. Evaluation by the Young Voices of the year-and-a-half process

At the end of the year-and-a-half-process, we again went away for a two-day camp. Here we used a focus group discussion method to gather detailed feedback from the Young Voices. We also devised the questions together with the Young Voices. We looked at why people had signed up, how much the fact that they had been paid for their work played a role, and how they thought it would be worthwhile to recruit and publicise such a group. They gave their views on the group dynamics, as well as the benefits and challenges of the group. We also talked about how they think it makes sense to involve young people in the work of an NGO (see chapter 6 for more on this).

At the final evaluation, the members formulated the following:

*I feel that from the beginning I was able to be myself as I saw fit, which I think is relatively rare for me, because I'm mainly in a school environment, and this was probably the only team where there are no school expectations, and I think that absolutely helped, and the continuous team building and this smaller, more comfortable environment meant that I felt absolutely safe.*

*We are the generation of the future, and the involvement of the current youth in society is very important - it will strongly determine our future. Through a programme like this, young people themselves learn a lot. Moreover, it can also benefit the NGO in question in terms of getting to know how people without a university degree approach issues that are basically dealt with by people with a degree. And we have grown up in a different generation, we are affected by different influences and social problems, and Helsinki or another NGO can incorporate that into its work.*

*I was struck by the natural kindness that permeated the group. And that everyone was genuinely supportive and open. Maybe I'm comparing it to school life, but I've experienced that in very few places. It was really nice to feel that here, it gave me a safe environment and I could always be myself when I wanted to be.*

*We managed to put together a diverse team, and the training also helped us to gain insight into certain topics through each other's experiences. We also learned a lot about how to be more patient and open to each other.*

The Social Participation Course is a political integration activity. It is not party political, of course, but political in a broader sense: it is about how to get involved in shaping public affairs. This is not easy for refugees and immigrants in Hungary. Indeed, Hungarian society is among the most hostile towards foreigners, according to a Eurobarometer survey.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Generation Z is even more hostile to foreigners (76%) than Generation Y (68%), the cohort immediately above them in age. In addition, the Hungarian government has been undermining the legal functioning of the Hungarian asylum system since 2015. The authorities have gone so far as to make it almost impossible to apply for asylum in Hungary, with a few exceptions including those from Ukraine. According to the Central Statistical Office (KSH)<sup>5</sup>, in 2023 a total of 31 people applied for asylum in Hungary (of which 28 were first-time asylum seekers).<sup>6</sup> Hungarian legislation has been in open violation of EU law for years.

Integration support for people already recognised as refugees or people with subsidiary protection has also been reduced to almost zero. Yet their numbers have fallen dramatically in recent years in Hungary. In 2023, a total of 11 people were granted the highest form of international protection, refugee status, and 11 people were granted subsidiary protection. They receive neither decent financial support nor quality Hungarian language learning opportunities, nor real help with their housing and employment needs. Refugees from Ukraine who are granted temporary protection in Hungary are also covered by more favourable rules on integration, but the support provided to them is not sufficient for integration. NGOs try to fill all these state tasks, but they cannot meet the need without the active involvement of the state, and often have to work against government propaganda and against the backdrop of hostile legislation. Yet refugees still arrive in Hungary who really need protection. For example, Afghan women who are being stoned by the Taliban, Iranian Christians who are not free to practise their religion in their country of origin and LGBTQI Ugandans who are threatened with death by their authorities.

In addition to the government's disregard for asylum seekers' rights and the right to care for refugees, it has also been waging an intense xenophobic hate campaign since 2015. Refugees and

<sup>4</sup> Alex Clark, Pamela Duncan: „Young more anti-immigration than old in parts of Europe, polling shows”, The Guardian, 28 May 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2024/may/28/young-more-anti-immigration-than-old-in-parts-of-europe-polling-shows>.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ksh.hu/stadat\\_files/nep/hu/nep0026.html](https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0026.html)

<sup>6</sup> People who have fled from Ukraine are not counted here because they are covered by the European Union's so-called temporary protection rules. Temporary protection is granted automatically to Ukrainian citizens, and always for one year only, which has been extended several times as the war has dragged on. The European Union Member States also use the term temporary protection to refer to people returning to Ukraine after the war.

migrants, or those perceived to be refugees and migrants, are also disadvantaged by the hate campaign in a number of ways because of the daily rejection they face. In the light of the above statistics, it is even more painful that foreigners aged 15–23 in Hungary are rejected by their Hungarian peers at an even higher rate than those aged 24–38.

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee has been running civic participation courses for refugees and migrants since 2021, against the headwinds described above, and for precisely these reasons. We want refugees to understand who they are in Hungarian public life, to know that they too have the right to exercise a number of basic rights, such as founding a civil society organisation, demonstrating, expressing their opinions (whether in the press, at public events or on social media), practising their religion and for many of them even voting.<sup>7</sup>

The YES project's Social Participation Course ran from November 2023 to June 2024. This was the fourth such course in the history of the Helsinki Committee. The first three courses were for adult refugees and immigrants living in Hungary. In these courses, we concluded that our younger participants were more motivated to partake in the training process we offered, perhaps also because they were more easily engaged in such a voluntary activity. The course was aimed at young people aged 15–25 from refugee or immigrant backgrounds, with a particular focus on young Ukrainians fleeing Russian aggression in Ukraine. We ended up with a wonderful team: five Ukrainians, two Afghans, one Iranian and one Palestinian.

The objectives of the social participation course were:

- \* Helping participants to identify social problems of interest to them and to develop and implement a social action in response to them.
- \* Creating a community of young people who can rely on each other during and after our course.
- \* Helping young refugees and migrants to feel at home in Hungary by empowering them with a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities, enabling them to actively participate in society and shape the life of their communities.

We put a lot of emphasis on building a community of participants, believing that if they are a good team they can work together more effectively. We used sociodrama methods to get to know each other and what social issues are important to all of us. We also used different experiential pedagogical methods, as well as exercises to reflect on ourselves, such as forum theatre exercises or the social atom.

Following our principles of critical pedagogy, we asked the diverse group of participants to share which social issues they are most interested in. We also looked at what role models they had and collected what values these role models represented that were important to the participants. This helped us to come up with a common list of values that we all consider important. Finally, the group voted for the following three social issues that were most important to the participants:

- \* problems of refugees,
- \* problems of homeless people,
- \* the impact of war on the natural environment in Gaza and Ukraine.

<sup>7</sup> Pursuant to Section 10 (2) a) of Act LXXX of 2007 on the Right of Asylum.

Small groups were formed around each of these issues, and they expressed a wish to take a social action on their issue in the following period. Once the social problems we could address had been outlined, we asked participants to conduct interviews with people who are affected by these problems or who are experts on the topic. In doing so, young people gained a better understanding of their issues, became more confident in tackling the task with an external expert, and were better able to design a social action that would respond in a relevant way to the problem of their choice.

In May 2024, we organised an expert meeting for the teams working on the three themes. A creative tools activist, a communications expert and a social media expert gave the teams feedback on their ideas. Following the meeting with the experts, we held a two-day camp outside Budapest, where we focused on developing the social action. The three teams eventually decided to organise a big joint social action; the event was later named the Open Windows Afternoon.

The Open Windows Afternoon was held in June 2024 in a community space in Józsefváros, in the most ethnically diverse street of Budapest, on Népszínház Street. The social action was entirely a reflection of the young people's ideas, organised together with the young people, who took on significant tasks and made the event their own. The following were implemented:

- \* a large information poster on the impact of wars on the natural environment in Gaza and Ukraine;
- \* a social media campaign on the impact of the wars on the natural environment in Gaza and Ukraine;
- \* a social media campaign to promote the event, with videos of the young organisers and the “living books”;
- \* a [cookbook](#) with the participants' favourite recipes, photos and motivation for the social problem of their choice;
- \* a clothing collection campaign for homeless people and the transport of clothes brought to the event to a temporary shelter;
- \* a living library, where visitors could talk to homeless and refugee people and one of the course participants;
- \* Afghan and Ukrainian food, which visitors were able to taste during the event, and the leftovers of which were given to homeless people in the area after the event;
- \* an installation on the theme of stereotypes and prejudices that divide people: a curtain of envelopes was placed in the middle of the room, and visitors could take the envelopes off one by one and create a new, colourful picture.

Some of our members were also trained as living books, so that they could talk about their own experiences in a way that was accessible and interesting for others. The living library training also enabled them to draw the boundaries of the conversation: if they were asked something they did not want to answer, they could say no, and could give a sign and exit the situation if they did not feel comfortable with it.

In their evaluation of the event, the young people said that they had been empowered by the fact that they had managed to organise and implement a public event together. They were proud of themselves for being able to show people they had never met before the social issues that concern them. The event was also attended by the newly elected councillor from the street, who also

comes from an immigrant background. This changed the participants' perception of politicians: they experienced that a politician in Hungary can be like them and show genuine interest in them.

## Recommendations

- ↳ Leave enough time for team-building sessions at the beginning of a similar, longer process.
- ↳ If you have the opportunity, organise a camp for the youth group. This will motivate them to work together.
- ↳ Invite experts who can enrich participants' knowledge of the social issues that concern them.
- ↳ When planning such a course, take into account the participants' busy schedules: do not overload them at a time when they are busy with school or work commitments.
- ↳ When planning, bear in mind that it is time and labour intensive to deeply involve young people in the implementation phase. However, it is a very worthwhile investment, and one that will be most beneficial for both young people and group leaders.



## Human rights camps for Ukrainian and Hungarian youth

In 2023 and 2024 we organised a four-day human rights camp for Ukrainian refugees and Hungarian youth.<sup>8</sup> The camps had several objectives. Firstly, to familiarise participants with the main themes of the Helsinki Committee through creative, interactive, experiential, human rights education activities that engage all their senses. Secondly, to make sure that young Hungarians and Ukrainians hear about each other not only from the media and second-hand. Young Hungarians should have their own lived experience with Ukrainian refugee youth, and vice versa, even if there may not be a common language for communication. To help overcome language barriers, we had two interpreters who interpreted for the participants and often acted as cultural mediators. We also aimed to get to know young people who could be involved in our future programmes.

In 2023, 14 young people were selected for the camps from a pool of around 50 applicants, and 16 young people were selected from a similar number of applicants in 2024. For the selection of young Ukrainians, interest in public affairs was an advantage. For young Hungarians, it was also an advantage if they came from the countryside, as our aim was to familiarise young people outside Budapest with the work of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee and to make them committed to the protection of human rights. We also wanted to have a similar participation rate between genders and between Ukrainians and Hungarians, to ensure a more diverse group. Hungarian candidates were also asked how they would achieve an end to the war in Ukraine if it were up to them. We wanted to avoid making young Ukrainians feel uncomfortable in the camp because of opinions that support the Russian position rather than their own.

The human rights camps were organised together with colleagues from the Helsinki Committee working in different fields. There were also staff from the Refugee Programme and the Criminal Justice Programme. The diversity of the organising team led to the following results:

- \* Participants were able to address human rights issues with the help of knowledgeable experts.
- \* The experts developed human rights games about their work, which allowed them to reflect on how to creatively communicate the key messages of their work to young people. They can use these games in the future.
- \* Working together has helped to build cohesion in our NGO: we have had the opportunity to work with colleagues we would not normally work with. Creative work with young people motivated those who might otherwise be used to doing a completely different type of work.

<sup>8</sup> The team organising the camps were: Laura Armstrong, Dániel Bacsák (in 2023), Blanka Csonka, Petra Kovács, Lili Krámer, Meri Shirzai and Zoltán Somogyvári.

It was also an opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience between the two programmes in preparation.

In both years, two Young Voices were involved in the organising team. Their role was twofold: they participated in the exercises as much as the other participants, but they were also involved in the planning and running of the camp, from preparation, through running the exercises at the camp, to evaluation. They also participated in team meetings every evening, where they provided the organizing team with useful information about group dynamics and how they thought the camp participants were feeling (as they were the same age as the young people participating).

The camp included a number of exercises, developed by our team, where we asked for three hours of activity in the mornings and then another three in the afternoons. The Ukrainian and Hungarian participants were able to take on the role of a helper who had a persecuted Afghan refugee knocking on their door. Here, in the safe space of the camp, they were able to use the Forum Theatre method to try out solutions to a difficult situation, where a refugee would be protected and not deported. They reflected on how to achieve decent conditions of detention in Hungarian prisons, and on the impact of the absence of a loved one on the family members of the detainees. The campers also worked on a creative project assignment in teams of four, where they laid the foundations for an imagined ideal community and presented it through posters and creative videos.

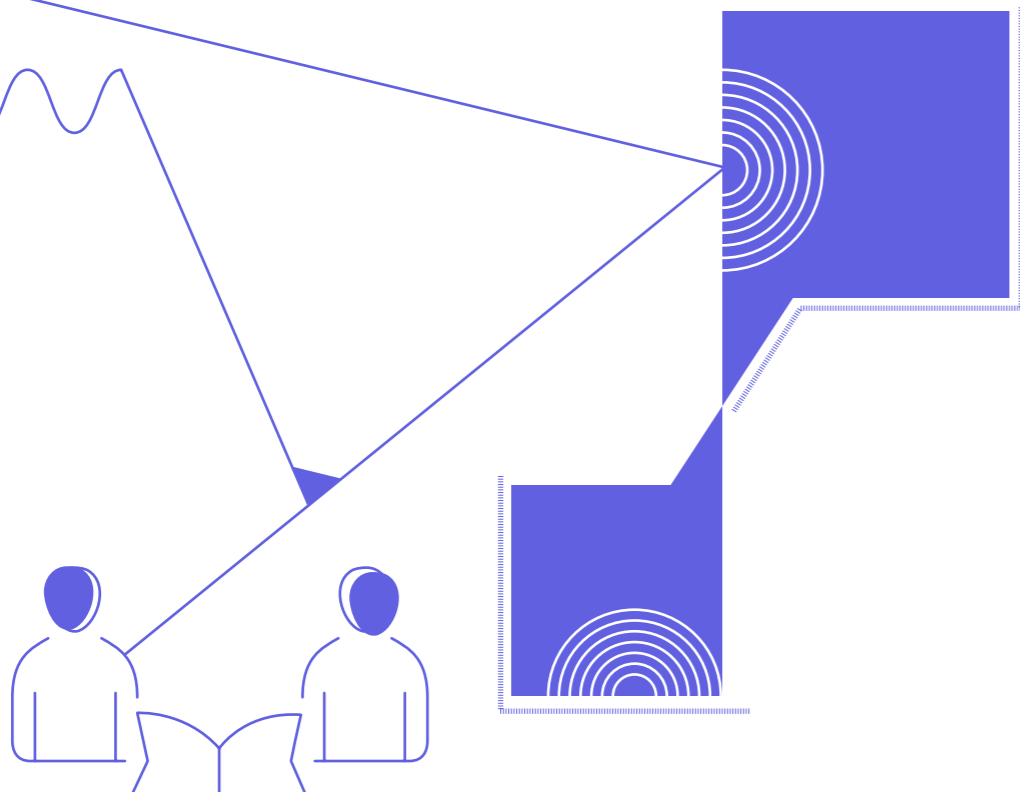
We learned a lot from being able to organise camps two years in a row. This allowed us to incorporate the lessons learned from the 2023 camp into the 2024 camp. While in the 2023 camp we caused ourselves unexpected situations by not rehearsing the exercises we had thought of in advance, in 2024 we played all the big exercises at the pre-camp retreat of the organising team. Here we gave each other feedback on how to improve and modify the exercises. Our team also learned to work together even better, and our interpretation skills improved. While in 2023, we could only work with consecutive interpreting, in 2024, Ukrainians no longer had to wait for translation when we spoke Hungarian, or Hungarians when our Russian-speaking colleague was leading a training session. The improvement was due to the fact that our interpreter helped us work faster and more efficiently with a microphone and headphones, saving a lot of time on each task.

The success of the summer camps exceeded our expectations. Through human rights exercises, we managed to increase the empathy of the participants for detainees and refugees who suffer human rights violations. The bi-ethnic camp was also very successful: friendships were formed that have lasted ever since: a Hungarian Roma boy is still chatting with his Ukrainian friends a year and a half after the camp, while a Hungarian girl has been helping her Ukrainian roommate navigate the Hungarian university admissions system since the 2024 camp.

We have also achieved our goal of making these young people, who were completely unknown to us before the camp, our committed allies for the long term. Three Ukrainian boys from the camp attended our Social Participation Course for refugee and immigrant youth, which started after the first camp. In addition, nine of the ten participants in the Human Rights Youth Mentorship programme had previously attended one of our human rights camps. The work of the mentors is described in the next chapter.

## Recommendations

- ↳ Ukrainian and Hungarian young people (boys and girls separately, of course) should be accommodated in mixed rooms. This makes the intercultural experience much richer for them.
- ↳ If possible, use simultaneous interpretation (e.g. using a special headset). This way, no time is wasted waiting for consecutive interpretation.
- ↳ Before the camps, try out the human rights exercises with your team and give each other feedback on the exercises. This will make the exercises much better and give you more confidence when you put them into practice in real time at the camp.
- ↳ Each day, hold a team meeting with the camp organisers to evaluate the day's events and discuss the next day (if any changes are needed based on the participants, etc.).
- ↳ Include enough free time in the programme when you are not giving tasks to the participants.
- ↳ Give young people a variety of different ways to give feedback, so that everyone can find a form that suits them and is comfortable for them (e.g. feedback box, written feedback and group oral feedback).



## Human Rights Youth Mentors

### 5.1. Implementation of human rights school sessions

The last big element of our YES project was a two-month advanced group with Magda Major, Laura Armstrong and Zoltán Somogyvári. This was the creation of a team of human rights youth mentors, open to those who had participated in any of the following activities over the two years:

1. in the Young Voices for the Voiceless team;
2. the Social Participation Course;
3. in human rights camps.

We had originally planned to work with six people, but we received 14 applications for the six places. We had such creative and motivated people apply that we decided to increase the number of human rights youth mentors from six to ten (three from our social participation course and seven from our human rights camps). Two former Young Voices also applied, but we asked them to join the facilitation team of three Helsinki staff members instead. As the Young Voices had attended the longest and most comprehensive training of the three groups above, we thought they could help the team as mentors to the mentors. In the end, we only had to turn down two applicants. We were pleased to be able to pay all 12 participants a monthly fee for the duration of the mentoring programme in October and November 2024.

With the human rights youth mentors, our goal was:

- \* to enable them to create human rights school sessions in multicultural teams (all teams had Ukrainian and Hungarian participants, and one team had an Iranian participant);
- \* to allow them to explore a human rights topic according to their own interests (but still be connected to the broad activities of the Helsinki Committee);
- \* train them to be confident facilitators of human rights workshops;
- \* share their knowledge with their peers and teachers in Hungarian secondary schools.

At the beginning of the process, a four-session training was held for the mentors. Here, we introduced them to our three core themes: asylum, criminal justice and the rule of law, and to our clients related to these themes. We learned about the differences between the roles of facilitator, teacher and mentor, and then prepared them for difficult facilitator situations by role-playing. Despite the short duration of the training, we also intensified it by asking mentors to work individually and in groups between sessions. Finally, the participants were able to choose individually which of our

three core themes they would like to have a school session on. We then divided them into three teams, taking into account that each team should include young Ukrainian refugees. Within the three themes, the teams were then free to decide on the key theme of their school session and the human rights focus. The three teams chose the following themes:

- \* identifying propaganda;
- \* youth participation in elections;
- \* discrimination especially against foreigners and Roma people.

Once the themes for the sessions had been decided, the teams were asked to research their theme and come up with a session plan. We helped them with a predefined sample session plan. The session outlines were then further developed in an intensive and exciting two-day camp. Here, the teams had the opportunity to try out the exercises they had devised on other participants, and were able to improve the plans with feedback from each other.

The three school workshops took place in three public schools in November 2024: Kaposvár, Sárbogárd and Budapest. A total of 43 students were reached. When planning the workshops, it helped our teams a lot when they had the opportunity to meet online with the teacher who was later present at the session. They could ask him or her about the students, their level of language skills, and how the topic they were preparing would affect the young people who would be attending the workshop. There was one workshop before which this discussion was not possible and that session was more difficult because of the lacking information.

The mentors communicated with each other in English throughout the training and, because of the diverse and multilingual mixed small groups, the school sessions were also held in English. For us, the lesson was that many of the Hungarian students remained passive, although there were active students in all classes and there was a wide variation between the different sessions in this respect. There may be a number of reasons for this, but the enforced passivity of the Hungarian state education system is certainly one of them. The students were faced with too many experiences at once, which are not common in traditional education: a lot of interaction, being taught not by adults but by young people their own age (who could be them). Speaking in public in English was also a challenge for many of them. Although we changed the language of the small group sessions to Hungarian several times, this did not necessarily make the students more active, which is why we think there may have been several factors behind the passivity. Here, we found that when they had to put themselves in the shoes of the third or fourth actor, they came up with more and more ideas on the subject.

Despite the passivity, we also received positive feedback from students who did not speak during the session. The positive feedback is also a lesson for us that we should not underestimate the feelings that passive participants experience during and after the session, and the ideas that are generated in them, which can lead to new actions in their lives.

Together with the human rights youth mentors, we also developed a human rights questionnaire to measure the knowledge of young people in Hungary about human rights and the activities of Hungarian NGOs. The questionnaire also asks about human rights violations suffered by young people and how they would take action against these violations. The questionnaires were also taken by them and their peers, aged 15–25 and living in Hungary, whether Hungarian or foreign

citizens. This participatory action research<sup>9</sup> will be continued in 2025, also in a participatory way. First by evaluating the data together with the young people, and then based on the data, by coming up with a joint action with the young people to increase the human rights awareness and engagement of 15–25 year olds living in Hungary.



<sup>9</sup> Participatory action research is a way of asserting the right to research, where people concerned about a topic or problem investigate the reality around them in order to understand and then change it. Source: School of Public Life, <https://kozeletiskolaja.hu/kutatas/>

## 5.2. Feedback from mentors

Feedback was sought from mentors at the end of the process through a five-point evaluation. We asked mentors to draw a circle around their palm and answer a question by writing on each finger. We collected their most typical feedback on the five questions below:

**What was the most outstanding part of the programme for them:**

**How they will be able to use the knowledge and experience they have acquired:**

**What they suggest we do to make our next programme better:**

**What they have learned about themselves:**

**Why they would recommend the programme to others (if they would):**

"the fact that working with a diverse team, while sometimes tiring, is also extremely rewarding"

"that I am very social and that I can lead sessions with confidence"

"that I can do it! because it's not that hard if you prepare enough."

"that I can be much more flexible than I expected and that I can be 'non-perfectionist' when I want to be"

"that it is much easier to work with my peers than I had anticipated"

"more opportunities to get to know each other better"

"the programme should be three months instead of two, but the sessions should be shorter: two hours instead of three"

"not just one trial session, but another based on the feedback received"

"more information about the participants of the sessions should be obtained beforehand in order to have a more pleasant experience"

"more time for planning"

"the role-playing games, I felt that everyone got very creative in them"

"food and the human rights questionnaire"

"my favourite activity was the acting and my favourite part was the workshop itself"

"when we embraced our differences through an exercise of 'brave spaces'"

"I really liked the discussion and action tasks"

"I can also facilitate human rights sessions at other NGOs and spread the word about human rights"

"I now feel more confident working with a diverse and English-speaking team. Plus my spontaneous thinking has improved."

"the programme has inspired me to further projects"

"I know a lot about human rights now, so I will mention them more in my life"

"I got a solid foundation on human rights and how to facilitate, which I can build on"

"because they can experience a real learning process"

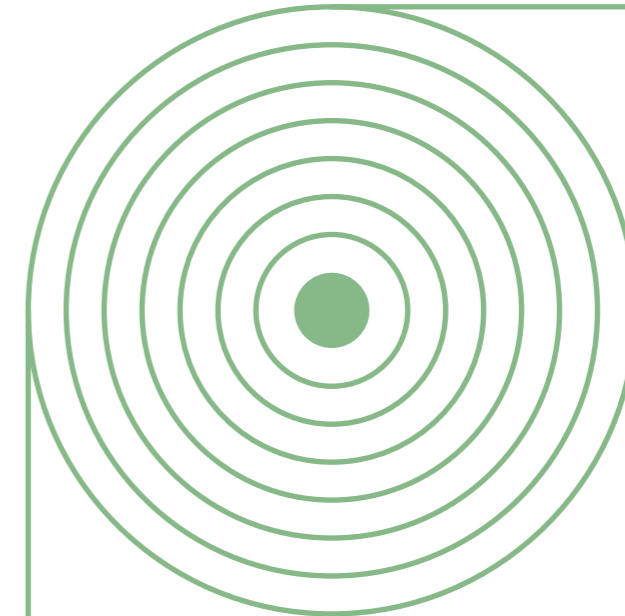
"because I learned a lot from the other mentors"

"the people were nice too, so if you want new friends you can make them here"

"because the topics are not too abstract for my values and vision, I would recommend this programme to many more people than another NGO's programme"

"because I get paid and my confidence and planning skills have multiplied"

The mentoring programme has also reached many of our other goals. For example, participants have deepened their knowledge of human rights and become ambassadors for human rights protection. The work of the Helsinki Committee has become more familiar to young Hungarians and their teachers, and this has strengthened their sense of solidarity with our target groups and our issues. We have been able to build stronger links with schools, and have become "allies" through whom other teachers have invited us to give sessions. The mentors have also learned how to deliver and facilitate human rights workshops, and they can take this knowledge further, so the energy invested is multiplied. The mentors have become more involved in the work of the Helsinki Committee, and we hope that they will become volunteers in the long term.





# 6 How do we involve young people in the work of an NGO?

According to Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory<sup>10</sup>, people have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Every workplace would do well to make its employees feel autonomous, competent and connected to the organisation. This is just as true when an organisation wants to involve young people in its work. Below we show the efforts made to meet these three basic needs in the case of Young Voices, the participants of the Social Participation Course and the human rights youth mentors.

## 6.1. Autonomy

Based on the principles of critical pedagogy, the Young Voices were asked to participate in the design of the ten-sessions-long initial training, the further training opportunities and the methods and themes of the joint work process. The organisational framework limited the possibilities somewhat, but they were still able to shape their own work. Feedback from participants was regularly sought, both individually and in groups. This allowed them to feel listened to and understood, and to participate in shaping the processes with them. In this way, they not only passively accepted what we asked them to do, but also actively shaped what they learned about and what work tasks they engaged in during the year and a half. We always asked them how much time the tasks we assigned them would take, so that we would not overburden them. We encouraged them to say no if they could not or did not want to do the task because of time constraints. We encouraged participants to formulate criticisms during the joint work. It took some time for the young people to do this, as it is not a common practice for participants socialised in Hungarian public education. But they got into it and were able to give constructive criticism of both the conditions around them and of our work together.

After ten weeks of training, we asked them several times during the one year of the work process what further training they needed. They had the opportunity to participate in several further training sessions and, as they all wanted to improve their public speaking skills, we organised a separate training on that skill. As a further expression of autonomy, the group chose to call itself Young Voices for the Voiceless.

<sup>10</sup> Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York, NY: Plenum.

Throughout the eight months of the Social Participation Course, we also tried in many ways to give participants a sense of ownership of what we do together. We asked for feedback throughout the course and incorporated it into the next sessions. They also chose the themes of the social action that the course aimed to address. Here, we did not even make it a condition that the topic should be directly related to the work of the Helsinki Committee. In this way they could learn not only about the situation of refugees, but also about homeless people and about the protection of the environment. The social action in the form of a mini festival, the campaign leading up to it and all the programmes that were implemented were also conceived by them. They also jointly decided the fate of the funds available for the social action.

In addition to asking for and incorporating feedback, the autonomy of the human rights youth mentors was ensured by the fact that they came up with the topics for the school sessions. We had one constraint: the topic had to have some connection with the activities of the Helsinki Committee. As the organisation provides legal assistance on a wide range of issues, the mentors could choose a very different focus, so they ended up dealing with propaganda, voting rights and discrimination.

## 6.2. Competence

It was no easy challenge to give six to seven Young Voices meaningful tasks on a weekly basis. We followed a planned educational curve, first providing a longer training session on human rights issues related to the work of the Helsinki Committee (refugees, rule of law and prisoners' rights), then giving them an insight into the different parts and methods of our work and providing them with additional knowledge to enable them to contribute meaningfully to the work of the organisation. Young Voices members also had the opportunity to participate in training courses and conferences that were organised for the Helsinki Committee staff.

Several experts helped to increase the competence of the participants in the Social Participation Course. They received feedback on their ideas for action from several rounds of experts in communication, campaign strategy and creative activism. Several participants also interviewed experts in their field. Specific training was organised on the chosen living library method to enable young people to organise their own living library to a high standard and in a safe way.

The human rights youth mentors were trained in public speaking skills to help them become more confident in school sessions.

Furthermore, the competences of all the young people involved were developed in the following ways, which can be applied to anyone: they were given meaningful tasks to work on, which were not too easy but also not too difficult. They volunteered to take on different tasks so that everyone could work on those that suited their skills and interests. We gave specific and clear instructions and set deadlines so that our expectations were clear to participants. We gave honest feedback after each completed task.

### 6.3. Relatedness

In the case of the Young Voices and the mentors, we were in the fortunate position of being able to offer a monthly stipend. In return, we asked for roughly four to five hours of work per week (with the camps, they averaged eight hours per week). In the case of Young Voices, this allowed us to include the less privileged in our work. If they had not received this payment, they would have had to work elsewhere. That being said, in the final evaluation, many of the Young Voices reported back that they wanted to participate without the salary, but that it was easier to find the time and that their sense of work and partnership was stronger.

In various other ways, we ensured that young people felt part of the Helsinki Committee throughout the three processes. In the case of Young Voices, we have constantly emphasised that the young people's team is part of the Helsinki Committee and that the members are young staff. This had a noticeable effect, and over time they came to refer to themselves as Helsinkians. Most of the working meetings during all three processes were organised in our office, so that the young people could spend time where the whole staff was working. They felt at home in the office spaces, especially in the kitchen. Several of our colleagues were asked to meet the young people and talk to them about their area of expertise or explain the specific work tasks involved in person. We also reinforced the Young Voices' and mentors' connection to the Helsinki Committee with Helsinki T-shirts, water bottles and hoodies. The Young Voices and mentors were also able to participate in training sessions given by external experts to Helsinki Committee staff. Many colleagues from Helsinki came to the Social Participation Course participants' social action and gave very positive feedback about the event to refugee and migrant youth.

### 6.4. Young Voices' feedback on the involvement of young people in the work of an NGO

Our Youth Council was also asked in the final evaluation how they think it is worthwhile for an NGO to involve young people in its work. Among other things, they said that the very idea of young people aged 15 to 20 working in an NGO gives a sense of reassurance to other young people, as they do not feel unqualified to be involved in an NGO. They also said that although they do not have the background knowledge of a professional who has been working in an NGO for a long time, when young people organise an event, other young people find it more welcoming.

We also asked the group if they thought it was worthwhile for an NGO to give money to young people for their work. They said that they thought it was a good idea to pay a stipend, for a number of reasons. For one, it gives a better chance of getting a diverse team together, as members from less well-off backgrounds do not have to work (as much) elsewhere. Some people pointed out that the salary made them feel that they could have expectations of other Young Voices and that they could ask more of the others because they knew that it was not voluntary work for them either and that they were not playing with their free time. Also, the salary attracts more applicants. And the selected young people can feel more motivated and appreciated. One of them summed it up like this:

“

*It's also a great feeling to volunteer. But of course, you need a certain situation in life to be able to volunteer.*

### Suggestions for involving young people in the work of the organisation

- ↪ Explain well what your NGO does, let them know why your place is so special and why their contribution is important to you.
- ↪ Young people may not yet be socialised in the world of work, so it is worth telling them exactly what is expected of them. Show them how to use the different tools (e.g. Google Drive), do not assume they are already familiar with or actively using them.
- ↪ Make your expectations about work tasks clear: give clear instructions and deadlines.
- ↪ Give honest feedback after every task and do not forget to mention mistakes. They will learn a lot from this.
- ↪ Ask for honest feedback and encourage participants to give criticism. Based on the feedback, make changes to the programme, communicate this to the participants where possible and inform them if something cannot be done.
- ↪ Plan the work of young people carefully and well in advance. This way, you can always give them nearly the same amount of work, and avoid them being overloaded or idle at different times.
- ↪ Assess the individual skills of the participants and take this into account when assigning tasks (e.g. if you like to write, write; if you can draw, design a graphic).
- ↪ Invite young people to as many informal organisational events as possible, such as workplace celebrations, or organise film screenings or board games.
- ↪ Create opportunities for the youth to meet as many staff of your NGO as possible at a task or event.
- ↪ Young people should also hold events and training sessions for other staff, which can be useful for both parties and can also be a great way to get to know each other.
- ↪ If possible, take them out into the field: the Young Voices was once present when Ukrainian asylum seekers were given legal advice by Helsinki Committee lawyers, and those who came will remember the experience.

## 6.5. Summary

Our aim with the Young Voices was to test how a young board could work well at the Helsinki Committee. We learned a lot from a year and a half of working together. The whole process was followed by two of us - Magda Major and Zoltán Somogyvári - in a team, which was important because it allowed the young people to relate to two different personalities and sets of expertise. The dual leadership was also effective because the team required regular face-to-face meetings, at least every two weeks, and this was often only possible with one of us present.

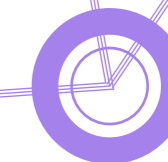
A lot of attention has been paid to the six council members to make them feel as autonomous, competent and part of the Helsinki Committee as possible. Perhaps because of this attention, it is another sign of success that, apart from the participant who moved abroad with her family, none of them dropped out despite the many life challenges and sometimes serious difficulties they faced during the year and a half, in terms of school, family, employment and housing.

The strategy of engaging groups of young people at different levels of commitment and tasks worked well. The human rights camps were open to anyone who wanted to engage with human rights for four intensive days. For the Social Participation Course we asked for a longer commitment, entailing attendance at weekly meetings for eight months. The Young Voices for the Voiceless required the longest commitment, as they worked with us for a year and a half. Finally, the human rights youth mentors had to take on more responsibility for a shorter period of time, but immediately, as they represented the Helsinki Committee in school sessions and conducted questionnaires in the second month of their two months of work. In their case, their commitment was helped by the fact that they had all participated in our previous programmes.

Our project was also evaluated by an external expert. She assessed, through interviews and questionnaires, the human rights commitment, sense of competence and skills of the young people who participated in our programmes. Her results show that young people who participated in several of our programmes - first in the human rights camp, then in the mentoring programme, or first in the Social Participation Course and later in the human rights youth mentorship programme - experienced a leap in their development compared to young people who participated in only one of our programmes. The external evaluation also confirmed our experience: that it is worth organising a camp and then engaging in longer processes with those who became more committed to human rights during the camp.

It is true for all three processes that if young people are treated as partners and given responsibilities, and their efforts are valued in different ways, they will also value their own participation. And finally, perhaps our greatest success is that young people in all three groups have been able to work together as themselves, and have learned not to take everything for granted, but to ask questions and make analytical criticisms of the social system around them, as well as of us.

## Our work with teachers



7

As with the human rights summer camps, we met the teachers for the first time at a training session over several days. We wanted to train teachers because we want Hungary to have students who know and respect human rights, and we believe that by working with teachers we can reach many more students.

### 7.1. Two-day training for secondary school teachers

In April 2024, seven secondary school teachers attended our two-day training course. The aim of the course was to show human rights practices to the teachers, who could later take them on board and use them in their own lessons. Based on our principles of critical pedagogy, the course was held together with three members of the Young Voices. During the training, the young people were the trainers together with the Helsinki staff, and the teachers were the trainees.

Our aim was to reach teachers from different parts of the country and from different types of schools. This is important for the Helsinki Committee because we want to have teachers with a sense of justice teaching throughout the country. The seven teachers came from four regions of Hungary, some from vocational schools and one from a private high school. During the training we presented different learning tools and human rights topics, including:

- \* Forum theatre workshop on how to help an unaccompanied minor refugee at an asylum interview.
- \* Lecture on critical pedagogy;
- \* Discussing how trauma affects the memory of children and refugees. Two members of the Youth Council provided the professional content for these discussions.
- \* Discussing the fact that children growing up in state institutions have different educational and human needs than children growing up in families. This discussion was moderated by a Young Voice - who grew up in a children's home.
- \* A board game about the rights and obligations of Hungarian officials.
- \* A human rights chronology game in which they had to put each human rights event in chronological order.

After each exercise, we asked the teachers how it could be used in their own teaching practice. This allowed us to check how useful the exercises were for them and to use their feedback to improve the exercises. At the end of the training, we also gave them the human rights board games to use later.

The Young Voices, when evaluating the training, said that it was difficult for them to be the trainers and the teachers the trained. One of them also shared with us that with this situation an old dream of his had now come true. The teachers were unanimous in their positive assessment of the training and the expert contributions made by the young people. They also found the presentation on critical pedagogy by Alexandra Szarka thought-provoking.

### Recommendations on how to involve young people in secondary school teacher training

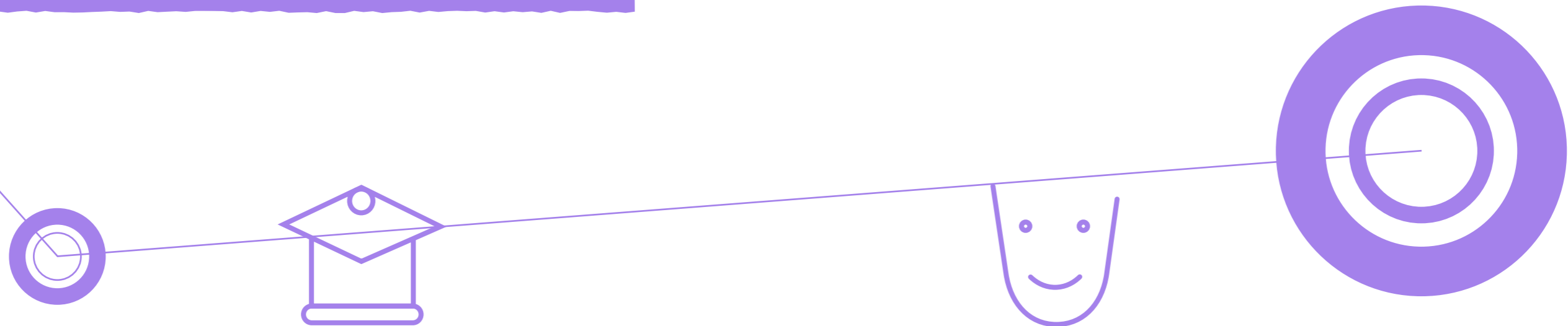
- ↳ Prepare young people for difficult training situations by role-playing exercises before the training.
- ↳ Make it clear to the applying teachers in the call for training and during the training that young people are equal trainers alongside the older people present.
- ↳ Young people should take on a role in the exercises that they are comfortable with.
- ↳ Rehearsing and practising some human rights exercises before the training course is a great way to see how the exercise will work. This gives the organisers the opportunity to make any necessary changes.
- ↳ In the case of a multi-day training, hold daily team meetings with the young people to see how they are feeling and to evaluate the previous sessions together.

## 7.2. Involving teachers in further activities of the Helsinki Committee

The teachers we met during the training were later invited to the social action of the Social Participation Course in June 2024. One teacher came and had the great experience of talking to a fifteen-year-old Iranian immigrant member of our course and a homeless activist during the living library. Furthermore, two of the three school sessions of the human rights mentors (see chapter 5) could be held in the schools of the teachers we met during the training.

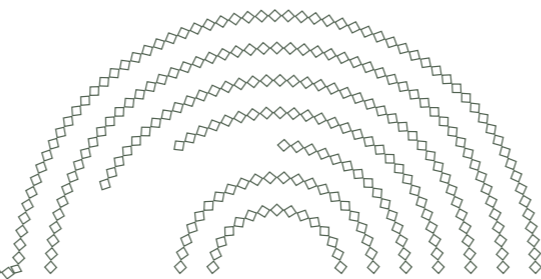
### Recommendations for the involvement of teachers after training

- ↳ Keep in touch with your teachers online after the training. Organise an online exchange of experiences on how they can use in their classrooms those human rights exercises and board games they got to know in the training.
- ↳ Invite them to professional or informal events that are relevant to them and that your organisation holds.
- ↳ Try to establish long-term partnerships with teachers, anticipating upcoming opportunities for them to collaborate (for example, to try out new human rights practices).





# Collection of exercises



## Description of the exercise

### Was the tear gas and detention justified?



#### Name of the exercise



#### Goals

Learning about the rights and obligations of police officers, the rights and obligations of demonstrators, enforcement and the judicial process. Debate and argumentation.



#### Human rights

- ↘ Right of assembly
- ↘ Freedom of expression
- ↘ Right to liberty and security
- ↘ Right to an effective legal remedy



#### Tools

- ↘ Role cards pre-printed

A printed version of the Helsinki Committee's [handout on demonstrations](#) in as many copies as there are copies.



#### Duration and number of staff

approx. 45–60 minutes, minimum 6 persons, maximum 12–16 persons



#### Description of the exercise

**Part I:** Gathering common knowledge and transferring information on the topic of the role play: a) the duties of police officer in general, b) more specifically what are the roles of a police officer at a demonstration (e.g. security, noticing violations), c) what are the rights and obligations of the demonstrators. For this purpose, facilitators will use the Helsinki Committee's [handout on demonstrations](#).

**Part II:** Role-playing - dealing with a complaint about a demonstration. We form three teams: a) protesters, b) police officers, c) judges. The complaint procedure is initiated by two students who were taken from a demonstration to a police detention centre by two policemen. If the group is large, a fourth team can be formed: d) the independent media team.

First, each group is given a role card and they each spend 5 minutes talking

through what they will say in the meeting. The facilitators go around to help.

**Judges:** they have to consider whether the police officer took into account the proportionality requirement: would it have been effective to take other measures less severe than tear-gassing the young people and taking them to the detention centre? Find out why the police officer rejected the use of a milder measure.

**Demonstrators:** they were tear-gassed and taken to the detention centre, which they say was unlawful because they were not aggressive and the police did not warn them in advance.

**Police officers:** they do not remember whether they warned students in advance that they would use tear gas. They took the students from the demonstration to the police detention centre because they were ordered to do so. They say there was a lot of chaos and that their action was proportionate and appropriate.

**Independent media:** they observe the hearing, take notes and at the end of the hearing they make a live, on-camera report or write a newspaper article to be read out.

The procedure will then be launched on the basis of the queue leader. The two parties are free to argue and convince the judge with their own words. Description of the procedure:

1. Demonstrators explain in two minutes what happened and why they are complaining.
2. Police officers respond in two minutes.
3. Judges will ask questions to both sides in two-minute intervals.
4. The demonstrators and the police stand aside to discuss how to answer the judges' questions.
5. Demonstrators react to what the police said.
6. Police officers respond to what demonstrators have said.
7. Judges can ask questions again.
8. The demonstrators and the police stand aside to discuss how to answer the judges' new questions.
9. Judges retire to deliberate and then deliver their verdict.
10. If there is a large group, and an independent media team has been formed at the beginning, they will now be given 5 minutes to make a live, on-camera announcement or newspaper article to read out.

The court's ruling depends on how the teams argued in the game. If the police officers could not justify the use of tear gas, then a decision upholding the demonstrators' complaint is a just verdict. Likewise, if the police cannot justify why the protesters were taken into custody, the judges should find against them for that reason as well. If the police officers' arguments are convincing, the protesters' complaint should be dismissed.



### Description of the exercise

11. At the end of the exercise, we step out of the roles and discuss how the game went for the participants and what they learned. Questions to facilitate the discussion:
- ↘ Have you been able to identify with the roles?
  - ↘ How did it feel to be in their role?
  - ↘ How did it feel to have a third party decide the dispute? How did it feel to decide the dispute?
  - ↘ Were the other team(s) convincing?
  - ↘ Have your views changed since you first thought about the situation?
  - ↘ Was it difficult to decide and report independently of emotions?



### Description of the exercise

Before the Forum Theatre role play, it is important to get the participants ready with some short visual theatre exercises. Theatre exercises can be taken from the Artemisszió Foundation's publication.<sup>11</sup>

1. Participants watch a scene with two facilitators. One of them plays a Ukrainian refugee who speaks Hungarian and is about to submit her asylum application at an office. The other facilitator plays the role of the ignorant case officer. The facilitator misunderstands the asylum seeker and does not want to take her asylum application, even though the asylum seeker has a right to it.
2. The game host asks the audience how they would help the asylum seeker in this situation if they were present. He or she will collect some ideas.
3. The game host asks the audience who would like to try out the role of helping the asylum seeker. The volunteer is given a hat or scarf to put on, indicating that he or she is stepping into the role.
4. The first player tries to help the asylum seeker to get the asylum application taken in by the case officer. The asylum seeker, however, will not let this happen and resists in all sorts of ways (e.g. by saying that it is a lunch break, or that the application has to be submitted to another administrator, or by telling the asylum seeker to come back the next day). The asylum seeker is helpless in the face of the difficulty of the situation and does not really understand what is happening around him or her.
5. The game host thanks the first player, who is applauded. The host calls a new player from the audience, asking who else has ideas to try as a helper. The second player tries a new idea. If he or she comes up with a good idea, the case officer may now ease up, suggesting to later players that he or she will take the application if they come up with convincing ideas. The host decides how long to let the players play. If someone is stuck, he or she will thank them for their effort, applaud them, and encourage another player to play.
6. If a player finally manages to come up with convincing ideas, the case officer will give in to pressure and take the asylum seeker's asylum application. Applause. (In any case, the facilitator in the role of the case officer should take the asylum request at the end of the game. Both he or she and the host can lead the players to a convincing argument. It is important to distinguish between the impact of good and bad arguments and strategies in the game. The takeaway should be that it is possible to change the situation.)
7. Demechanisation, i.e. stepping out of the role: everyone who has played says out loud, one after the other, "I am no longer the helper", "I am no longer the administrator", but XYZ (their own name).
8. Discussion: the host conducts this part in the following order:



### Name of the exercise

## Asylum procedure



### Goals

Sensitisation to refugee people in different situations and their daily difficulties in their new countries. To practice helping a vulnerable person in an assertive way. To learn about the Forum Theatre method.



### Human rights

- ↘ Right to asylum
- ↘ Right to good administration
- ↘ Right to an effective legal remedy



### Tools

- ↘ A hat or scarf to indicate that the participant is in the role of the helper.
- ↘ Three facilitators are needed:
  1. a facilitator playing the role of an ignorant case officer,
  2. the facilitator playing the asylum seeker,
  3. a game host (known as the Joker in Forum Theater).



### Duration and number of staff

30–45 minutes, at least four people (in addition to the three facilitators)

<sup>11</sup> Végh Panni, Szilágyi Sára, Proics Lilla: The dramaturgy of the forum theatre. Artemisszió Foundation, 2019, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EA8alnfD87QYhiVIdSIppUpiTdD5b66p/view?ts=65e9e1d1>.



## Description of the exercise

- a. What did you experience in your role?
- b. What solutions have worked for the case officer? What other solutions would have worked? Here, the host helps the participants to evaluate what worked well and what did not work so well. Solutions that worked well could include:
  - i. the helper wants to speak to the boss or asks for another case officer;
  - ii. the helper raises a common, everyday issue that the case officer can relate to personally;
  - iii. friendly but calm, firm, persistent attitude;
  - iv. official jargon, use of technical terms;
  - v. referencing legislation and the rights of the asylum seeker;
  - vi. confronting the case officer with his/her xenophobic attitude (if he/she played that way);
  - vii. arguing that it is in the case officer's interest to close the case as soon as possible;
  - viii. involving the client, the person concerned, in the conversation;
  - ix. threatening to complain or making a complaint;
- c. Who has a similar experience in real life?
- d. What did the participants learn from the game?

At the end of the game, the host points out that all players should be proud of their courage and ideas. It was not the last player who came up with the right solution, but all the players worked together to ensure that the case officer finally accepted to take in the asylum application.



## Name of the exercise



### Goals

Participants should learn about propaganda methods and learn to recognise when they see half-truths or misinformation.



### Human rights

- ↘ Freedom of expression
- ↘ Additional human rights: any (depends on the poster you bring)



### Tools

- ↘ Posters using propaganda printed or projected.
- ↘ For ideas for new posters: internet or pre-printed articles on the topic.
- ↘ To create a new poster: sheet of paper, markers or coloured pencils.
- ↘ Be prepared in advance to explain what propaganda is, e.g. with this article.<sup>13</sup>



### Duration and number of staff

approx. 50–60 minutes, minimum six people



### Description of the exercise

1. The facilitator will explain the key concepts of propaganda<sup>14</sup> and how it works. It is an advantage to show participants posters using propaganda. We recommend the article listed in the tools to help you prepare. 5–10 minutes
2. Depending on the number of people present, divide them into small groups. Each group should have at least three people.
3. Each group receives a poster using propaganda. Their tasks are:
  - a. Try to find the propaganda tools used by the poster. 3–5 minutes
  - b. Think about: What message does the poster want to convey? How is it trying to manipulate? 3–5 minutes
4. Come up with ideas on how to present the issue in a factual way, not in a biased way, but emphasising the complexity of the reality. To do this, look up the topic on your phone (or from the articles provided). 5–10 minutes
5. Make a new poster that presents the whole truth/reality, not just what the propaganda wanted to suggest. 5–10 minutes
6. The groups should show each other the original poster using propaganda

<sup>12</sup> The exercise was developed by our human rights youth mentors Gerda Balogh, Zhdan Timur and Dávid Goldinger.

<sup>13</sup> LibertiesEU: Modern political propaganda: How to spot it? iFit, <https://ifit.hu/modern-politikai-propaganda-hogyan-lehet-felismerni/>.

<sup>14</sup> Disinformation, false or misleading information, intended to change the opinion of the community, to support a cause.



#### Description of the exercise

and the new poster they have created, which contains the full reality. 5 minutes

7. A reflective discussion with the following questions:

- a. What was the experience like creating a new poster?
  - b. What did you learn from this exercise?
  - c. Have you ever encountered propaganda? What tools did it use?
- 10 minutes



#### Description of the exercise

- a. Representatives of the teachers' union: together with student unions and parents' organisations, they have collected 100,000 signatures for an increase in teachers' salaries (or anything else, e.g. restoring teachers' right to strike, starting teaching at 9 a.m., etc.). They want to hand the signatures to the ministerial administrator and get the minister responsible for education to negotiate with them.
- b. Students' union: together with the teachers' union and parents' associations, they have collected 100,000 signatures for a raise in teachers' salaries (or anything else, e.g. restoring teachers' right to strike, starting classes at 9 a.m., etc.) They want to give the signatures to the ministerial administrator and get the minister of education to negotiate with them.
- c. Representatives of parents' associations: together with student unions and the teachers' union, they have collected 100,000 signatures for a raise in teachers' salaries (or anything else, e.g. restoring teachers' right to strike, starting school at 9 a.m., etc.) They want to give the signatures to the ministerial administrator and get the minister of education to negotiate with them.

2. The groups are received by the administrator of the ministry. The actors want to hand over their signatures and present their arguments for the ministerial meeting. The facilitator, playing the ministerial administrator, does not want to receive the signatures at first, let alone the request to negotiate with the minister. It is up to the actors to come up with arguments. The facilitator's task is to resist them at first, but the arguments will gradually soften this hostile attitude.

The following may be good arguments and strategies:

- ↘ awakening the empathy of the case officer,
- ↘ referencing legislation,
- ↘ asking the administrator to put in writing that he or she will not accept the signatures,
- ↘ considering a complaint for breach of duty to cooperate,
- ↘ asking supervisor to act on the administrator's behalf,
- ↘ raising the issue of going to the media,
- ↘ raising the possibility of turning to NGOs for help.

3. At the end, the facilitator playing the administrator should relent and take the signatures. You can also convey the request to negotiate with the minister.

4. Demechanisation, i.e. stepping out of the role: everyone who has played



#### Name of the exercise

## Unite for the freedom of teaching!



#### Goals

Practising argumentation, teamwork, taking on the role of teachers, students and parents in order to understand the right to freedom to teach. Practising advocacy. Understanding the rights of citizens and the duties of public officials.



#### Human rights

- ↘ Right to freedom of teaching
- ↘ Right to strike



#### Tools

- ↘ Role cards pre-printed.
- ↘ A facilitator is needed to play the role of a ministerial administrator.



#### Duration and number of staff

about 45 minutes. At least 3–4 people.



#### Description of the exercise

Before the role-play, it is important to get the participants ready with some short theatre exercises. You can use theatre exercises from the Artemisszió Foundation's publication.<sup>15</sup>

1. Hand out the role cards and give the groups 5–10 minutes to develop their own arguments they want to make to the ministerial administrator. If there are at least 3–4 people in each group, each group should choose a spokesperson to present the group's arguments to the ministerial administrator. The exercise can also be played with only one person per role.

<sup>15</sup> Végh Panni, Szilágyi Sára, Proics Lilla: The dramaturgy of the forum theatre. Artemisszió Foundation, 2019, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EA8alnfd87QYhiVIdSIppUpiTdD5b66p/view?ts=65e9e1d1>.





### Description of the exercise

says out loud, one after the other, “I am no longer the representative of the teachers/students/parents”, “I am no longer the administrator”, but XYZ (his/her name).

#### 5. Suggested questions for discussion:

- ↘ How did you feel in the role?
- ↘ Which arguments worked well and which ones didn't?
- ↘ Who has a similar experience in real life?
- ↘ What did you learn from the game?



### Name of the exercise

## Take a step forward!<sup>16</sup>



### Goals

To raise participants' awareness of the diverse experiences of refugees and migrants and the vulnerability or privilege of their situation.



### Human rights

- ↘ Right to asylum
- ↘ Right to freedom of movement
- ↘ Prohibition of discrimination



### Tools

- ↘ The roles for the game, written on a piece of paper
- ↘ A hat
- ↘ Questions for the game described



### Duration and number of staff

approx. 30–40 minutes, 6–30 people



### Description of the exercise

1. Participants pull out pieces of paper containing the roles from a hat. Each person draws one. If there are more participants than roles, then more pieces of role paper should be put into the hat. It is fine for more than one person to have the same role.



### Description of the exercise

#### Roles:

- ↘ A Pakistani courier working for Foodora for low pay.
  - ↘ A German student studying at Semmelweis University.
  - ↘ A 17-year-old Roma girl who never finished primary school.
  - ↘ A Muslim girl living in a very religious family.
  - ↘ The owner of a Chinese shop in near-bankruptcy.
  - ↘ A 25-year-old Ukrainian refugee who is granted temporary protection.
  - ↘ The son of a Turkish immigrant who runs a successful fast-food restaurant.
  - ↘ A popular fashion model of African descent.
  - ↘ A rich businessman from the USA.
  - ↘ A famous Roma doctor who moved to Budapest a few years ago.
  - ↘ A Filipino worker employed by a factory.
  - ↘ The Vietnamese wife of a middle-aged Hungarian entrepreneur.
  - ↘ An Asian woman working in a Thai massage parlour.
  - ↘ An African-American basketball player in a Hungarian first division team.
  - ↘ An Indian computer scientist working for a multinational high-tech company.
  - ↘ An Afghan refugee who has been granted asylum but does not yet have a job.
2. The facilitator explains that all the actors currently live in Hungary. Participants imagine themselves in the role they have been drawn into. The facilitator should help them to put themselves in the role by asking the following questions:
    - ↘ What would your name be?
    - ↘ How do you look?
    - ↘ What is most important to you in life?
    - ↘ What is the biggest problem you have in your life?
  3. Have the participants stand in a line next to each other in the room. The facilitator reads out the following statements. If any of the statements are true for the participants in the role, they should take a step forward. Statements:
    - ↘ You can move to a better flat in the near future.
    - ↘ You could try to make some local friends.

<sup>16</sup> The exercise is a revised version of the “Take a Step Forward” exercise from the Compass Human Rights Practices Manual. The revision and the exercise based on it were implemented by our human rights youth mentors Lili, Andrei and David. The Compass contains many more great human rights exercises: <https://www.coe.int/hu/web/compass>



## Description of the exercise

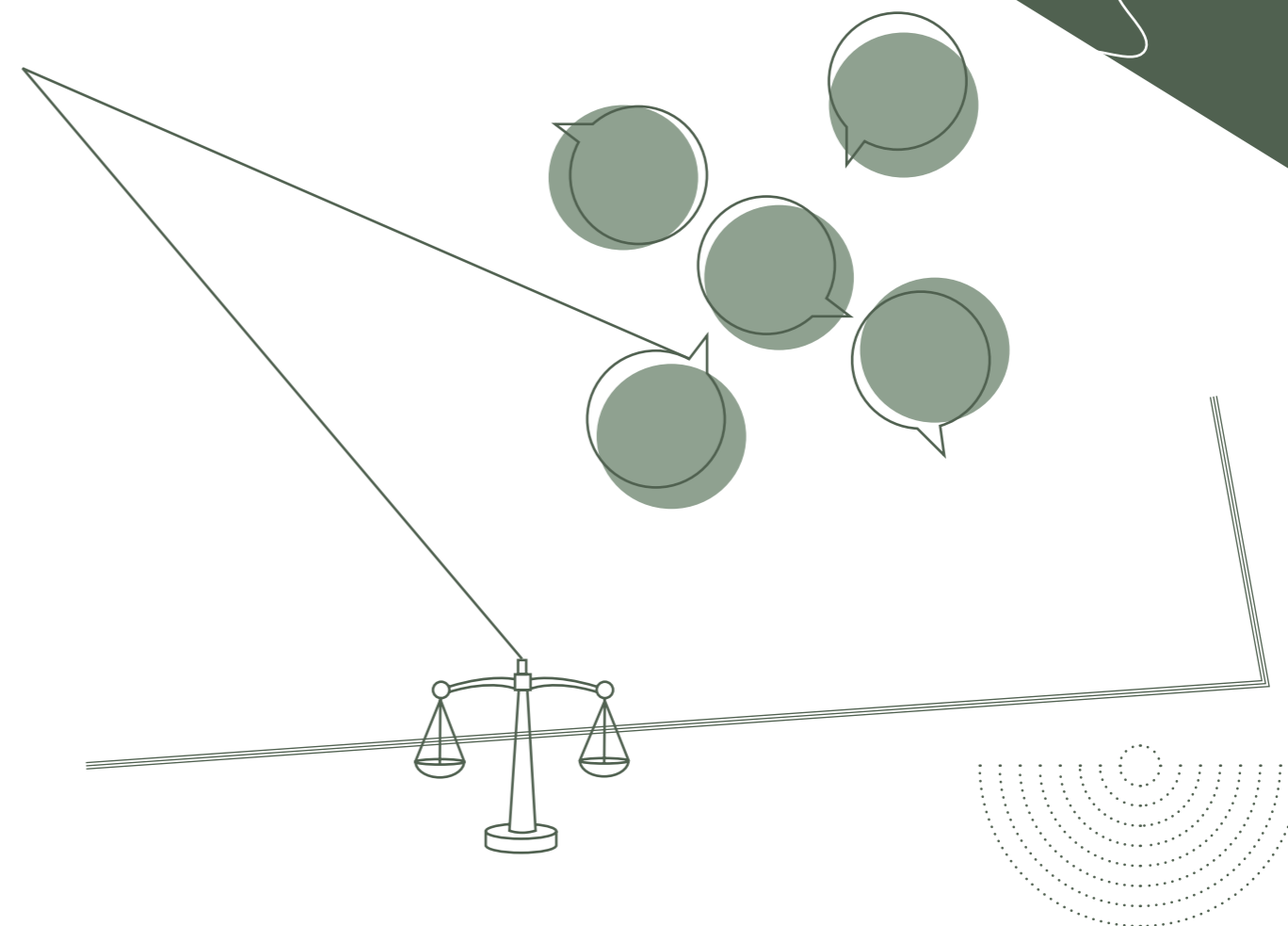
- ↘ You are not afraid to practice the precepts of your religion in everyday life and to wear the symbols of your religion in public.
- ↘ You are not afraid to stand up for your opinions in public.
- ↘ You are not afraid of being stopped by the police.
- ↘ You know where to go for help/advice.
- ↘ You ask for financial help from the government/charities.
- ↘ You never feel discriminated against because of your origin.
- ↘ The Hungarian media portray people in your situation objectively.
- ↘ You can buy a new laptop if your old one doesn't work anymore.
- ↘ You have a local friend who can help you in an emergency.
- ↘ You need to send money to your family members back home.
- ↘ You are not worried about your children's future.

### Questions for the processing discussion:

- ↘ How did it feel to move forward? How was it to stay put?
- ↘ When did those who often moved forward realise that some people were lagging behind?
- ↘ Have any of you felt that in some cases fundamental human rights are being violated?
- ↘ Can you guess who played what role? (At this point, participants can tell each other their roles.)
- ↘ How easy or difficult was it to get into a role? How did you imagine the person you were playing?
- ↘ Does this practice reflect society? If so, how?
- ↘ Which human rights are at risk of being violated for each of the actors? Were there any actors who felt that their human rights were not respected by others or that they were unable to exercise them?
- ↘ What could be the first steps towards tackling social inequalities?

If you have any questions or comments regarding the handbook, please reach out to Zoltán Somogyvári via email: [zoltan.somogyvari@helsinki.hu](mailto:zoltan.somogyvari@helsinki.hu)

We are also happy to read about the similar experiences of other young human rights mentors, teachers and organisations too.





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