

WHAT MIGRANTS CARRY WITH THEM

“What migrants carry with them”, using bags to highlight migration, gender and climate change’ is created by WIDE in Austria

WIDE is an Austrian network of NGOs and individuals who engage for women’s rights and feminist perspectives in development policies and humanitarian aid. <https://wide-netzwerk.at/wide-austria/>

This method is part of the online trainers hub, which is one of one of the key adult education tools developed in the multi-year collaboration entitled: **“Gender and Climate Justice: Knowledge for Empowerment”, in brief COPGendered**. This project builds up tools and knowledge for learners to upskill themselves (in groups, individually or with a teacher) in the relationships between gender inequality and the climate crisis. This includes providing tools for adult education providers. The project which lasted for three years ended in November 2025.

The associations involved are in this project: WIDE+ (Europe), GenderCC–Women for Climate Justice/LIFE e.V in Germany, WIDE in Austria, GADIP in Sweden, KULU Women and Development in Denmark, Mundubat in Spain and CSCD in Bulgaria.

COPGENDERED PROJECT PARTNERS



Mundubat



Center for Sustainable Communities Development



KVINDERNES U-LANDSUDVALG
KULU - Women and Development



Bildung Umwelt
Chancengleichheit

wide Entwicklungspolitisches Netzwerk
für Frauenrechte und feministische Perspektiven



Co-funded by
the European Union

METHOD PREPARED BY:

Daniela Paredes Grijalva

PROOFREADING:

Alison Whyte

EDITING:

Janine Wurzer, Gea Meijers and Gioia Buonsanti

LAY OUT:

Stephanie Höglund

PICTURES AND ILLUSTRATIONS:

The illustrations are downloaded from Canva and are free to use for commercial and personal purposes. The method provided may be used freely as long as WIDE Austria is clearly credited as the source.

This project is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the writers and participants and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or of the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



“WHAT MIGRANTS CARRY WITH THEM”, USING BAGS TO HIGHLIGHT MIGRATION, GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This method raises awareness on the issue of human mobility and, in particular, forced migration in the context of climate change, how intersectional factors such as gender enable or make it hard to migrate, what migrants contribute to societies, and how migrants are perceived by the communities that they move to. Participants are asked to place themselves in the shoes of a person deciding to migrate or not, making the people behind migration visible. This exercise asks participants to replace the common perception often framed in terms of “what migrants lack” to “what migrants carry with them” one where migrants contribute skills and knowledge, through the metaphor of bags and their contents.

SUMMARY

This exercise is based on three personal stories of people who are considering migration in the context of climate change impacts. These stories are analysed in small groups, using the metaphor of different bags that collect the needs and capacities of the person in the story. Through these personal stories, the intersections between gender, climate change impacts and other factors become part of the discussion. Finally, participants discuss the contents of the bags in the plenary. The stories come from different continents: the Americas, Africa and Asia. Facilitators may also use other alternative or additional stories, provided they include key elements explained below.

Time needed: Minimum 90 minutes

Space needed: Enough room for groups of five to six people to discuss without disturbing each other

Number of participants: Best for a group of 12 to 30 persons

Age: Adult learners of all ages

Material needed:

- 6 bags (or basket, container, etc), 2 for each story. It can be especially nice if you select bags that somehow match the story (e.g. for a story from Africa, you could use a basket from this region, etc.).
- Cut paper or cards.
- Writing and drawing utensils (markers, pencils etc.)
- Paper copies of the stories and/or audio files of the stories

Material provided in this guide: sample stories as text and audio (links are included)

Citation: Daniela Paredes Grijalva (WIDE Austria)

With special thanks to 3 wonderful voice actors who remain anonymous.

FACILITATION GUIDE DETAILED DESCRIPTION

STEP 1: PREPARATION

In the preparation prior to the workshop, organise the materials and reflect on the stories you want to discuss. You can decide to replicate this method with the same stories. Or you can revise the personal stories provided in this facilitation guide or you can craft other or additional stories targeted to your audience and their areas of interest.

The stories can be prepared in the form of text, audio, or video or you can have actors or participants narrate or perform the story for the group. The stories should include several personal markers of difference such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability and other identities. The stories should also include elements related to the environmental and labour conditions of the place the person in the story comes from. Also include elements that highlight the opportunities or limitations of the person due to his/her/their gender and the societal expectations that accompany this gender.

Make sure that you put enough copies of the story and writing utensils, paper, and/or symbolic objects into the bags. These can be actual objects such as a bottle, to which participants give a particular meaning. Each group will get one bag that includes the story, a card indicating they are the “haves” or “needs” group, and writing materials.

STEP 2: INTRODUCTION

Allocate 10 minutes to provide a basic introduction on the topic and stories to all participants. The focus of this introduction is to come to a shared understanding among all participants on how climate change impacts mobilities, migrants’ rights and gender inequalities are connected through incorporating an intersectional lens. During the introduction, you can check if everything is understood by participants to enable them to carry out the exercise.



This method also aims to make migrants visible as competent persons with agency. As part of the introduction, explain that migrants (international or internal) may have needs because of the migration experience, but that does not mean they lose their “haves”. To make sure everybody understands what is meant by the concept of needs and haves, ask participants to come up with some of their own needs and haves. You may provide examples from migrant communities that your participants are familiar with. An example of a need could be “legal and safe pathways for international migration” and an example of a “have” could be “social networks in the place that they migrate to” or a specific ability.

You can use the following introductory text, which gives an idea of the tone and difficulty in terms of language that you are advised to employ: “Migration is a fact of human history. Migration means nothing other than moving from one place to another. We migrate near and far for many different reasons and we have done so since the beginning of humanity. Environmental change is something that will increasingly affect more and more people

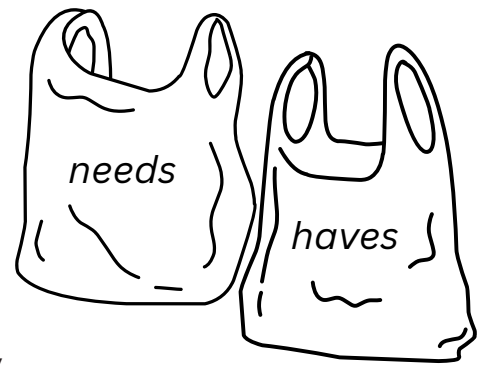
globally. Some people may migrate; others may stay. Regardless of where they are, people should have fundamental rights, labour rights and the right to a healthy environment. People have many different identity markers that impact their experience in the world, and this is certainly true of the experience of migrating.”

STEP 3: EXPLAINING THE EXERCISE

In this step, which will take about five minutes, divide the participants into 6 groups, one group per bag (this means 2 groups per continent: 1 for haves, 1 for needs). Explain the exercise.

You can introduce as follows:

Tell them that you have brought three stories (or more) of people who are affected by climate change and where migration takes place. They each have dreams and aspirations for the rest of their migration story. Each of these persons comes from a different continent. Also describe the materials you have brought: the stories printed out (or audio or video links), the two bags for each of the persons in these stories; one bag symbolises the person’s “needs” and one bag symbolises their “haves” to realise their aspirations and dreams. Every group gets small paper cards on which each group member can write down their thoughts about this person, especially what one thinks this person needs (needs bag) and has (have bag).



The stories are designed to showcase dimensions of gender, climate change and labour. You can tell participants that they can be creative with details that are not included in the stories, they can also put symbolic objects or drawings into the bags. If you want to tailor it to a specific audience, tell participants to do the exercise considering that target audience, for example a humanitarian organisation or a local politician.

Ask the participants to first read/listen/see the story which is written in the first person. Ask them to explicitly discuss the climate dimensions and the gender dimensions of the story and consider the various impacts of these factors on the person and their aspirations. Impacts can be physical (someone needs to move to another place), but also emotional (issues around one’s sense of identity and his/her/their psychosocial wellbeing).

Ask participants to write their ideas of needs or haves on the paper cards, make drawings or choose symbolic objects and put them into the respective “needs” and “haves” bags. Decide as a group how the rapporteur should present the person later to the plenary – remember s/he/they should use “I-statements” as if the rapporteur were the person from the story. To help manage the time during the plenary, please instruct them to present only the three key elements/cards/objects.

You can offer these guiding questions:

- What do you have in your own bag that you take with you? (Skills, knowledge, dreams, systems, policies, connections, etc.)
- What do you need in your bag to fulfil your aspirations? (Resources, projects, labour rights, gender equality, climate policies, etc.)
- What type of rights would you want to have in this situation?

Hand out the material to the groups (6 groups, one per bag, 2 groups per story). Tell the group to assign one rapporteur for their group. Explain that the rapporteur should later

present the person of the story and especially talk about the needs or haves of this person in the 'first person' : "I am Ty... I dream/aspire/want to.... for these dreams/aspirations, I have/need...".

STEP 4: GROUP WORK (AT LEAST 30 MINUTES)

The small group work should last for 30 minutes. As stated above, the task is that they read/listen to one of the case studies, they talk about the person from the story, how might this story continue and what might be the needs and haves of this person to realise their aspirations?

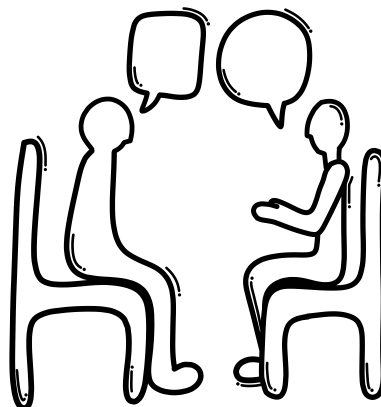
You can check on the groups and remind them to write their ideas on the paper cards, make drawings or choose symbolic objects and put them into the respective "needs" and "haves" bags. Also make sure that they decide as a group how the rapporteur should present the person later to the whole group – remembering to speak in the 'first person'.

STEP 5: PLENARY REFLECTION

You need at least 10 minutes for this section.

Bring everybody back together as a whole group. If possible, have the participants sit in one circle, then propose the following process: The rapporteur for each group stands up and presents in the first person "I am Thi... I dream/aspire/want to To reach my aspiration I need ... I have" Once the rapporteur has presented, he/she/they sits down and passes the bags with their contents to the other participants. The participants can engage in silence with each bag as much as they want, read the papers that are in the bag or look at the objects while the next rapporteur presents. Once all rapporteurs have presented and all bags have circulated, ask the rapporteurs to take the three most important messages out of each bag and put it on the floor in the centre of the circle. Ask participants for their reflections and interject to steer the discussion on:

- the multicausality of migration, including climate induced migration;
- gendered labour, values attached to these, remuneration, rights;
- having a rights-based and migration rights lens can open up more possibilities for justice;
- the multiple levels of intervention (global, local, national) for the migrant aspirations to be realized.



STEP 6: CLOSING THE WORKSHOP

Here are five minutes planned for this step. Ask the participants for their overall reflections about the workshop: 'Did the workshop help you to form new ideas about the intersections between environmental issues, gender and migration?', 'Do you have a specific takeaway?'

CONCLUSION

This method is very accessible and can engage adult learners from all kinds of backgrounds. It can also inspire developing other stories that bring in different dimensions around migration. If you adjust this activity, kindly keep in mind that the stories should be open-ended to encourage the discussion of different scenarios and possibilities. Intervene as necessary to steer the conversation towards a rights-based one that strengthens the agency of persons, recognises intersectional discrimination, encourages dismantling stereotypes and oppressive regimes and prioritises labor rights, including social security ideas.

SAMPLE STORIES:

Migrant stories in the context of climate change, drafted by Daniela Paredes Grijalva based on research. Spoken by 3 voice actors that remain anonymous.

(Print out the text, read aloud in groups, or listen in groups to the audio recorded in the link)

Story 1: Africa

[Sahra, Horn of Africa](#) (click to download audio file)

I am Sahra, 13 years old and the oldest sister. My family and I have been cattle herders in this village in the Horn of Africa for generations. The cattle need green grass to feed so we would go to where the grass was. But lately there is less and less grass and more difficulties in moving. My father started selling the animals while others died, just skin and bones. A couple of months ago we definitely had to move because it all dried out. There was no more water even for us. Plus, there are some groups fighting each other. Now we live in a camp and I take care of my younger siblings when I come back from school, when school is open. This is similar to my life in our village, although now we have less family and friends to help out. I have learned to cook from my mother and to take care of the household. I like going to school but I am afraid soon, when I get my period, I will be married and not allowed to go anymore. I have heard of cousins who ran away to faraway places because of this. I think about this a lot, if it is my only way out too. Here in the camp many girls who used to go to school have been married. If I leave, I can never return. I will never see or count on my family again. I heard the city is very big and there are many dangerous people. What would I do there? If I leave, I think I might go to another village, but far, far away, where we have no relatives. I like the countryside, the plants and animals. Maybe I can become an engineer like the lady that visited us from an international organisation. She cares for the animals and plants, so they are healthy.

Story 2: Americas

[Kante, Central America](#) (click to download audio file)

My name is Kante and I am 45 years old. My wife and I know how to work the land and have a plot in rural Central America where we grow food for us and some to sell. At the beginning we were doing well, sometimes the crops got ill or were not so many. Normal, we thought. But more and more we see periods with no rain so the plants die. We used to always have corn from our fields for us and our families. Corn feeds our bellies and souls. Now we sometimes need to buy it. Money is getting tighter and tighter. Last rainy season a strong storm destroyed most of our home. I thought we were going to die. We could not live there anymore. That was the final straw for us. We moved to live with relatives. Some neighbours have already started a long journey. I have decided to leave and go to the North and look for work there so I can send money back for my wife, children and other relatives. I don't know if I will make it across the borders for many reasons, but also because I have limited mobility in one of my legs. First, I need to make some money in the city to prepare for the trip's expenses. It can be tricky to know who you can and cannot trust to cross the border. I am afraid of the criminal gangs along the way because I know the ones at home already. I am also afraid of what waits for me on the other side. My friends say you have to hide from immigration and be ready to take whatever job you find. But I will do it, I do not see another way and so many others have made it already. I hear they work in construction, farming and factories. As a man, I think I can do these jobs too. I wonder how it will be and if we can plant again in our land back home.

Story 3: Asia

[Thi, Southeast Asia](#) (click to download audio file)

I'm Thi and I am 23 years old. I was born in a small fishing village in Southeast Asia, the last of several children. My father wanted to teach me to fish but I was happier doing other kinds of things. At school I liked learning new things, but I did not fit in well. People made fun of me because I was different to their expectations of what a boy or a girl should be like. My grandmother told me "just be you". Being me in the village was not simple for many reasons. So, I moved to the city and settled under a bridge along a river. I could cook, pick plastic, and sell well. At night I spent hours on my phone, I like technology. My friends say I am good at it. Other people living around me all had little things, they knew every time the river grew, they had to leave. I saw several floods myself. One time I had saved so much plastic to sell, I knew I could buy a better phone with it. It was more than I could carry in one go. That time we did not hear warnings of the flood on time. I was working in a kitchen, when I got back, I had lost the little I had saved. A friend told me his cousin in the village has a contact to go to work to Europe to pick berries during their summer. You have to pay a fee to the recruiter and have to work very long hours but you make so much money. It's all legal. Could this be something for me? I hear in Europe there are more people like me. Maybe I can even stay and learn more about technology.

