



Activity: Circle of trust

This activity was introduced for the EWC at the Thorvald Stoltenberg Seminar at Utøya in 2019, where trainer Dariusz Grzemny used it as part of a longer session focusing on stereotypes, prejudice and hate speech. For the Thorvald Stoltenberg Seminar in 2020, the activity was adapted for online use, and was part of a session on managing controversial issues online.

Aims:

- To explore different factors that make issues controversial, and how these can be heavily dependent on context
- To explore how our background and circle of trust might influence how we meet others and how we meet controversial issues.

How diverse is the group of people you trust? How does this influence how you meet controversial issues?

Time: 45 minutes

Number of participants: 15 – 30

Tools and materials:

- All participants need a blank paper and a pen, or a blank word-document in their device.
- Use a platform that allows you to share your screen, and that allows participants to discuss in breakout rooms/smaller groups, for example Zoom.

Instructions:

1. Ask participants to find a blank piece of paper (or open a blank document on the computer). Vertically, they should write down the names of 4-5 people they trust the most that are not family members. Emphasize that they do not at any point have to share this with anyone.
2. You can share your screen showing how the paper should look like:

Name

Person 1
Person 2
Person 3
Person 4
Person 5

- When the participants have completed their list of names, the read out the following characteristics one by one: gender, age, level of education, nationality, ethnicity or skin colour, disability, sexual orientation. Ask the participants to write them one top of the paper, so that it looks like this in the end:

Name	Gender	Age	level of education	Nationality	Skin color	Ethnic background	Sexual orientation	Disability

- Emphasize once more that participants do not have to show their list to anyone, and that the purpose of this activity is not to “arrest” anyone. Introduce the term “affinity bias” or “similarity bias”: the tendency people have to connect with others who resemble themselves.
- Explain participants that they will now go into groups of 4-5 persons. Questions for group reflection:
 - How diverse is the group of people you trust?
 - Why do we have the tendency to trust people that resemble us?
 - How is this similarity bias connected to stereotypes?
 - What are the possible implications? For individuals and for societies?
- Gather the whole group for a final debrief, ask every group to share some highlights from the group reflection. Question for reflection:
 - How does our circle of trust influence how we meet controversial issues?

Tip for online facilitation

Participants might find it difficult to start the conversation and to organize themselves in the group reflection. If you are enough trainers, you could consider whether one trainer should join each group. If not, make sure that the participants note the questions for the group reflection and that they are ready to share highlights in plenary afterwards.