Parents 4 all

Parents for All

KA2 Strategic Partnership for Innovation in Adult Education

Training material for the development
of intercultural skills by parents

Unit 1: Basic intercultural skills

For migrant and refugee parents in Lithuania – shortened version

Contents

Training material for the development
of intercultural skills by parents

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Parents4All training material!

As a parent, you want your children to succeed and make the most of their lives. This is what all parents want, independently of their origin. However, you may have sometimes wondered what the best way to deal with the increasing cultural diversity within European societies is. Will your children suffer damage from being exposed to values, cultures and practices different from that of your family? Is diversity good for your children or could it pose a threat to them? Many parents are concerned about these issues.

In the Parents4All partnership we believe that the only way to help *your* children prosper and succeed is to help *all* children in your environment do so. This training material explains how this is possible – how you can collaborate with other parents and with school staff to achieve intercultural understanding in school, combat racism and prejudice, and reap the rewards for you and your children. This training material is designed to make you more aware, to empower you, to inspire you, to provide you with the tools you need.

The material is structured in 2 units. Unit 1, *Basic Intercultural Skills*, helps parents to become more self-aware in cultural issues, develop more tolerance and acquire basic intercultural communication skills. Unit 2, *Empowering MR/ECM Parents for Social Inclusion*, provides parents with practical information that will help them to cultivate positive

attitudes towards integration and obtain a better understanding on how to support the integration process of their children.

More specifically, this document presents Unit 1. Chapter 1, *Self-perception and perception of the other,* explains key concepts related to the personal identity. Parents will understand the impact of culture and social context on self-perception and perception of the other and they will learn how to recognize and challenge their own stereotypes. Simple self-awareness raising techniques are introduced to help parents reflect on their own values, attitudes and behaviours.

In Chapter 2, *Core values of the host society,* you will learn about important historical facts of your host country that shape its national identity. You will also learn about values related to education, success, courtesy, communication and many others. All this will enable you to prevent conflicts and misunderstandings by taking into account the core values of the host society.

Chapter 3, *Intercultural communication principles,* introduces parents to the interaction between culture, language and communication. In this chapter, parents learn about different communication patterns across cultures and basic rules for effective intercultural communication.

Each chapter of the training material begins with the *main points* to be presented and explains the *importance* of the content to follow. Training content is delivered through *a variety of training activities,* which help the learners to get motivated, obtain knowledge and understanding, reflect more profoundly on certain issues, apply newly gained insights in everyday life and interact with their diverse environment. We strongly encourage you to do your best to do the exercises that require interaction with real people and not simply in your mind. This will help you realise the importance and utility of what you are learning. At chapter end *a*

review is provided. The Parents4All training material is intended as a *self-study course* and all activities are addressed to the learner.

You will see many times the terms *host society parents* (HSP) and *migrant, refugee or ethnic-cultural minority parents* (MR/ECMP). HSP refers mainly to local parents but it can also refer to parents of migrant origin who have completely integrated into the host society due to living many years there or are second or third generation migrants. MR/ECMP refers to a broad spectrum of parents of diverse origin who are not well acquainted with the cultural norms, the language and the everyday practices of the host societies. The terms migrant-refugee parents (MRP), ECM parents or MR/ECMP are used interchangeably within the training material, reflecting the different social contexts in the Parents4All partnership countries.

We sincerely hope that you enjoy this training and you find it useful for thriving in diversity, better supporting your children and strengthening social cohesion!

EXPLANATION OF SYMBOLS

You can distinguish between the different activities in this document looking at the icons next to them:

Theory – information

Think about it

Additional external sources of information

Related video/s

Reflection exercises

Apply what you have learned

CHAPTER 1: SELF-PERCEPTION AND PERCEPTION OF THE OTHER

What will I learn?

Key aspects of personal identity

How stereotypes work and how to recognize them in relation to social perceptions

The importance of culture in self-perception and social perception

Why is it important?

In order to get along well with others, it is important to know who we are. Who or what we are depends on our own concepts, ideas, values and beliefs, but also on our social and cultural context, the relationships we have. This self-awareness is essential to understand each other and to be able to live together in harmony.

In this topic you will gain some insight about the complex and diverse factors that shape human behaviour. This will help you to better understand not only yourself, but also the processes of integration your sons and daughters are going through. You will be in a better position to support them in a constructive way.

Personal identity and self-perception

"Who are you?" Although it seems a simple question, it is one of the trickiest you could ever be asked! What others tell you or think about you may be very different from how you would describe yourself. Although it seems strange, being aware of who you are is a difficult thing. However, it is important: the way you identify yourself (personal identity) is related to the way you perceive yourself (self-perception or self-concept), the way you present yourself to others, your behaviour and so on. Once you become aware of how complex it is to analyse yourself it will be easier for you to accept that other people may not be always what they seem to be at a first glance and that it takes time to really get to know them. You will also realise how many different factors affect the development of your children.

We all are who we are as a result of the combined influence of three things: a) our social context (which includes any outward influence such as culture, family, education etc.), b) our unique personal traits (mostly inherited), and c) our personal decisions/attitudes towards ourselves, life and other people. We cannot do many things to change our inherited characteristics. However, we can do a lot to understand the impact of our social context and to become more conscious or aware of how we process all what is taking place in and around us.

Before going on to read, ask yourself:

1) *What is one of your characteristics that you owe to your social context?*

2) *What is one of your characteristics that you owe to your genes?*

3) *What is one of your characteristics that you owe to your personal decisions/attitudes?*

Now think of your parents or some close friends: Can you identify some of their characteristics that are clearly a result of one of these factors?

The power of social context

Would you like to travel in time? Just imagine you could travel to any period and place of the human history – ancient Egypt, the Aztec empire, the Chinese empire of the 5th century BCE or whatever you like. Let's suppose you could understand the language of the people. Still, would you easily feel part of these societies or would you rather feel as an alien? Most probably the second. Practices and behaviours considered normal by these societies might be appalling to your and things taken for granted by you might be unthinkable or stupid for them.

This simple example illustrates that the historical epoch, the society and culture we live in influence greatly who we are: our values, patterns of thought, attitudes and behaviours. In fact, culture is all around us, shaping our brain and behaviour. Consequently, people from various cultures will process the world differently. While some cultural aspects are very obvious (such as technology or resources) other aspects influence us in a more subtle and perhaps unconscious way. This is often referred to as the cultural iceberg.

Cultural Iceberg

Formal (Overt) Aspects

The way we say we get things done

Goals
Technology
Structure
Policies and procedures
Services/Products
Financial resources

The way we really get things done

Beliefs and Assumptions, Perceptions Attitudes Feelings (anger, fear, liking, despair, etc.) } about the formal and informal systems

Informal (Covert) Aspects

Values
Informal interactions
Group norms

Created by Stanley N. Herman. TRW Systems Group, 1970

For example: You see a Muslim woman wearing a head-cover (hijab). What is the tip of the cultural iceberg and what is its unseen mass?

Social context includes also family, education, the neighbourhood and socialisation practices. Stop for a moment and think what makes you different from other people just because of your family. It's a lot, isn't it?

Now reflect for a while on the culture in which you have grown up:

- *How are politics viewed? How important is the role they play in everyday life?*

- *How is religion viewed? Is there any prevalent religion? Is there real religious freedom?*

- *How does this culture view and treat the elderly people?*

- *What role is attributed to parents? What does the ideal parent look like?*

- *What is the role of women?*

- *Is there any consciousness of environmental issues? How strong?*

Now compare your answers with your own attitudes, values and behaviours in these issues. How strong is the influence?

Components of self-concept

Now let's discuss about our personal attitudes towards ourselves. We are going to speak about self-concept (or self-perception), i.e. the representation we have of ourselves or the attitudes we hold towards ourselves (McLeod, 2008). Self-concept is affected by multiple dimensions, most of which are related to the social context discussed before. Moral /spiritual, emotional and biological dimensions also play a role. It can be said that self-concept is learned rather than inherent.
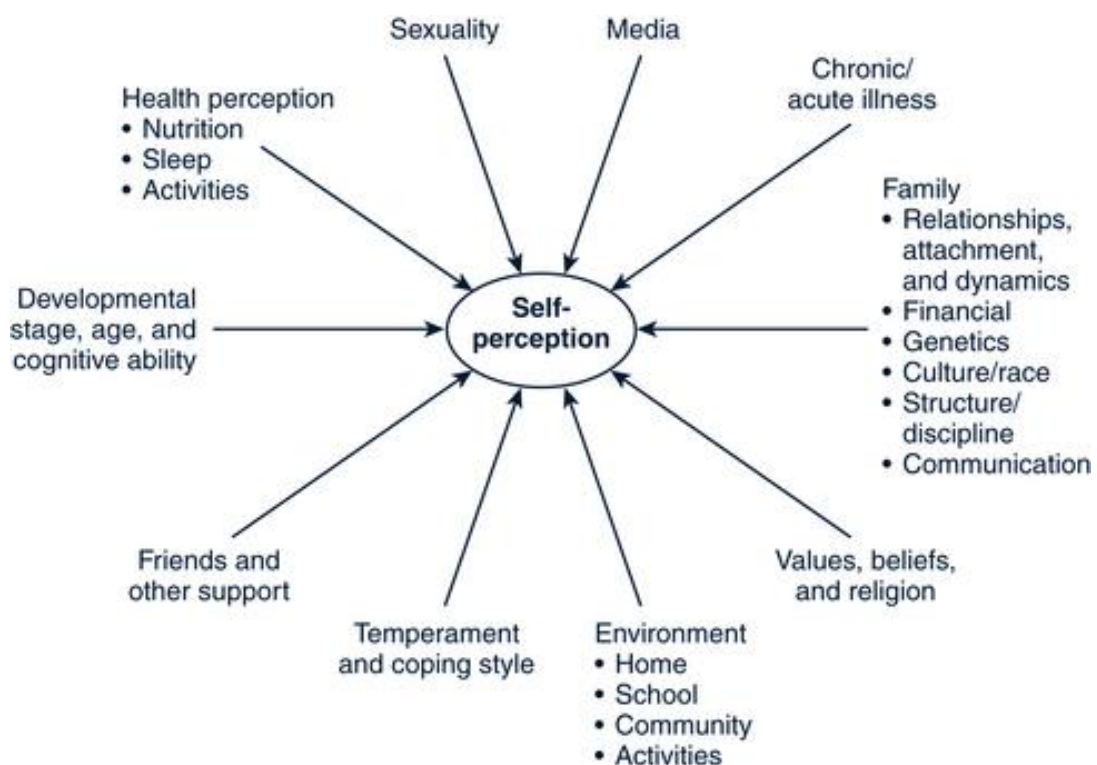
The two main components of self-concept are self-image (how we see ourselves) and self-esteem (the extent to which we value ourselves).

Self-image does not necessarily relate to reality. Have a look at the following pictures of unrealistic self-image:
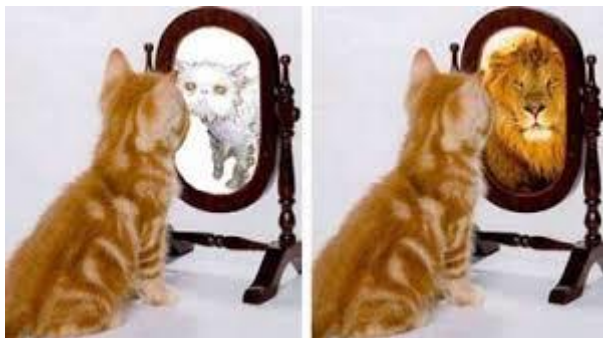
Now think about the following:

- *How will distorted self-image most probably affect behaviour in these cases?*

- *How can beauty ideals affect the way we see our own body?*

- *How is the self-image in these cases opposed to what other people see? How might this affect relationships with others?*

Self-esteem

Self-esteem or self-value refers to the emotional dimension of your self-concept. It represents how much value you place on yourself, how much you believe in yourself and your capabilities, and that you deserve happiness in your life (Branden, 1995).

In essence, we compare ourselves against an ideal standard, and depending on the image we have of ourselves, how close we are to that standard, we may feel positively or negatively about ourselves. Once again, this does not necessary relate to reality. Two people with similar circumstances and characteristics may differ a lot in how they evaluate and feel about themselves. They may be equally intelligent, have the same income and profession, look equally good etc. but one feels a zero while the other feels a success or is very content with him/herself.

People with low self-esteem tend to feel more helpless, not be content with their performance (no matter how good it is), not adapt well to stressful events and generally behave in more problematic ways. People with high self-esteem have usually the opposite experiences, but excessive self-esteem isn't that positive either, as it can lead to arrogance or violence.
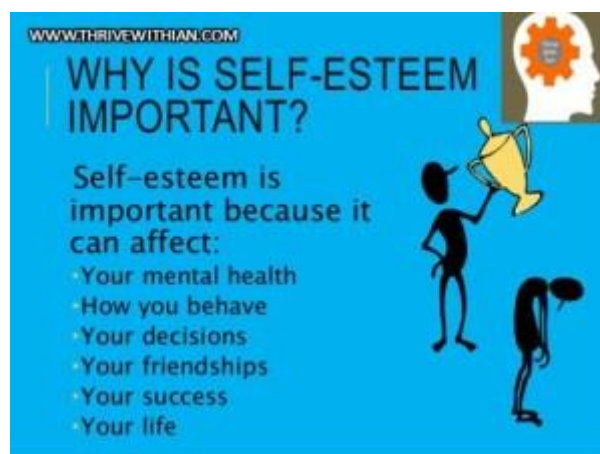
Learn more about self-concept and self-esteem by doing the following exercises!

Me, myself, I — self-concept and self-esteem

Learn more about self-awareness in this video:

Self-Awareness Exercises

The identity circle

This activity helps you to identify what you consider to be the most important dimensions of your identity.

First, write your name in the central circle. Then you should fill in each satellite circle with a dimension of your identity you consider to be among the most important in defining yourself (e.g. female, athlete, Jewish, brother, educator, Asian, middle class, etc.).
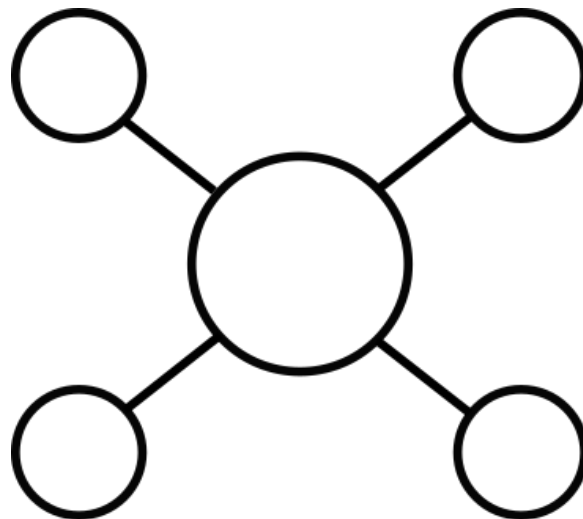
Then ask yourself these questions:

- How do the dimensions of your identity that you chose as important differ from the dimensions other people use to make judgments or have opinions about you?

- When I look in the mirror each morning I see…

- Who are my people? What do they see in the mirror?

- If I had to describe myself in four words I would say that I am: (4 words)

- One experience that I have had that helped me to form this description of myself was…

- One thing about being a (answers to question above) that makes me feel good or proud is…

- Name a stereotype associated with one of the groups with which you identify that is not consistent with who you are. Fill in the following sentence:

  I am (a/an) _____ but I am NOT (a/an) _____.

My personal identity tree

Let's draw our own identity tree! For this we first draw the tree as we want, then write or draw in each of the parts the following:

• roots = your life influences and beliefs

• trunk = life structure and particularly aspects that are quite firm and fixed

• branches = relationships and connections, directions, interests, how you spend time

• leaves = information and knowledge - and sources

• buds = your ideas and hopes for the future, and your potential

• fruit = achievements

• flowers = what makes you special, strengths

• thorns = challenges, threats and difficulties

Where is culture?
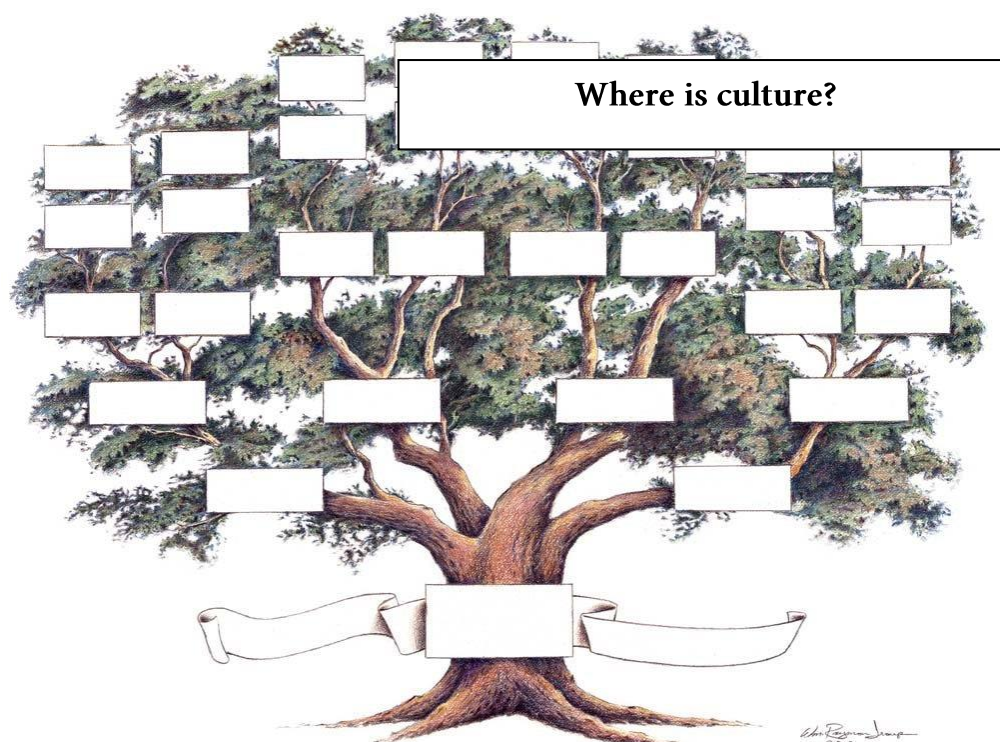
Social perception

Social perception is the process we use in order to create impressions about others or/and to make judgments about individuals or groups. In simple words, social perception is about how we perceive other people and how we interpret their behaviour.

Although the concept of social perception applies more to the initial impressions made about people, it does often culminate into firm opinions formed gradually about other people. There are three main aspects that help us form impressions about other people:

–   Our **own self** (familiarity with the person, attitudes, mood, self-concept)

–   The **situation** surrounding the person (context of the interaction, situational circumstances)

–   Observed **behaviour** of the person and other attributes (physical appearance, verbal communication, body language, assumed intentions)

The so called "first impression error" refers to the tendency to form lasting opinions about an individual based on initial impressions.

Think of the following situation:

You meet for the first time your daughter's teacher. You were stuck in morning traffic and arrived very stressed. The teacher is 15 minutes late and mumbles an apology. You have to go to work after the meeting and your time is limited. The teacher is a tall young man and his clothing discloses a liberal lifestyle.

– *How may your mood and limited time affect your impression?*

– *How may the physical appearance of the teacher affect your impression depending on your own lifestyle?*

– *How does the fact that this is the first meeting with the teacher affect your expectations?*

Besides forming impressions, we also **attribute** to peoples certain motives or intentions, according to their behaviour. That is, we interpret their behaviour, making assumptions about their personalities. For example, we may think somebody is a kind person because he/she is smiling. Children may think a teacher is a bad person because he/she insists on discipline (PsycholoGenie.com, nd). Interestingly, it has been observed that people usually think about others that it is their personality that makes them behave the way they behave (he was rude with me because he is racist), while when it comes to themselves they usually attribute their behaviour to situational causes (I was rude because I was so tired and stressed) (eNotes, 2016).

Our social perception can also be influenced or even distorted by how well we know another person, our culture, stereotypes, prejudice etc. Learn more about stereotypes and prejudice in the next section.

Check out these **activities** *for exploring your cultural awareness.*

Stereotypes and prejudice

A **stereotype** is a generalised, oversimplified belief about groups of people, cultures, places and so on. It is an assumption that we make automatically when we hear about someone or something; we classify these persons or things in specific categories. These generalised classifications may be positive, negative or even neutral. Consider these examples: "Irish people have red hair and freckles", "black people are good at sports", "old people are wise", "China is dirty and polluted", "Muslims are fanatic".

Stereotypes exist all over the world and start in our mind automatically. We cannot get completely rid of them because they derive from the human need to understand the world. Making categories and classifications of people and things we can process information quicker and we avoid the time-consuming, strenuous analysis of numerous and diverse factors. It can be said that stereotypes are more or less as a "shortcut" in the cognitive process. However, due to their nature, stereotypes give an incomplete and largely erroneous picture of reality.

Prejudice refers to emotionally laden attitudes that have been formed "toward a particular social group of people before having enough information on which to form a knowledgeable opinion" (Encyclopedia.com). When prejudice is negative it produces hostility, when it is positive it produces unduly favourable feelings.

Our stereotypes and prejudices are problematic because they may lead to the development of discrimination—unjustified negative reactions toward people belonging to a certain group, simply based on their group membership. For example, when a person reacts negatively when he sees a woman parking badly, or when a person grabs his bag with force so that they do not steal it when a person of colour enters the subway. Obviously,

both beliefs are erroneous, stereotyped, and negative prejudices (Stangor, 2011).

Reflection exercises on stereotypes

Compare the two lists with gender stereotypes and answer the following questions:

a. Which of these stereotypes exist in your culture of origin?
b. Which are prevalent in the country you live in?
c. Which do you personally adopt?
d. Can you think of examples proving these stereotypes wrong?
e. How can these stereotypes (or their absence) influence school activities and teachers' behaviour?

Males	Females
All men enjoy working on cars	Women are nurses, not doctors
Men do not do housework and they are not responsible for taking care of children	Women are responsible for raising children
Men play video games	Women are supposed to cook and do housework
Men enjoy outdoor activities such as camping, fishing, and hiking	Women are supposed to have "clean jobs" such as secretaries, teachers, and librarians
Men are good at math	Women are supposed to look pretty and be looked at
It is always men who work in science, engineering, and other technical fields	Women do not have technical skills and are not good at "hands on" projects such as car repairs
Men are in charge; they are always at the top	Women are meant to be the damsel in distress; never the hero
As husbands, men tell their wives what to do	Women are supposed to be submissive and do as they are told

From [List of Gender Stereotypes](#).

Read the news extracts below and highlight how stereotypes and prejudice lead to discrimination.

a. Sky Sports presenters Andy Gray and Richard Keys have been accused of sexism after making several comments about a female referee, called Sian Massey. They commented on her understanding of the offside rule during a Premier League match. The commentators believed their microphones were switched off but were actually recorded making remarks such as: 'Somebody better get down there and explain offside to her.'

'Can you believe that? A female linesman. Women don't know the offside rule.'

b. James Parke, 22, was on a night out which ended in him fighting for his life. James, who is a trainee police officer, was having fun with friends (they are homosexual) when up to 20 boys, some as young as 14, started shouting homophobic abuse at them. James was repeatedly punched and kicked in his face and body by the boys and he was left with several skull and facial fractures.

Ways to eliminate stereotypes and prejudices

Stereotypes and prejudice are not easy to change. However, if we become conscious of our own stereotypes and try to adopt a more realistic view of the people around us, this will help us greatly to have better relationships and enjoy, rather than resent, diversity around us.

Here are some tips that can help to eliminate stereotypes and prejudice:

- Developing empathy: putting oneself in the other's shoes, asking oneself questions like: Why will others act that way? How will they feel being discriminated?

- Imagining the victim in a different role: e.g. the increased participation of black actors in comedy series has favoured their inclusion; television series that show female characters of great strength combat gender stereotypes etc.

- Increased communication with other parents, teachers, the education community and between groups reduces prejudice/discrimination

- Promote friendship with people from other groups, for example with parents from different cultures.

- Education based on acceptance and tolerance. From infancy, values and attitudes that exalt human dignity must be taught.

All That We Share. *A thought-provoking video!*
First Impressions

Combatting stereotypes:
 How to talk to your children
Talking to kids about racial stereotypes

Review of Chapter 1

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Perception of the          Self-perception and          Self-concept
self and the other         self-awareness
                                                        Self-esteem          VALUES
                           Social perception                                 /BELIEFS
                                                        Self-image
                           Stereotypes and
                           prejudices
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CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT
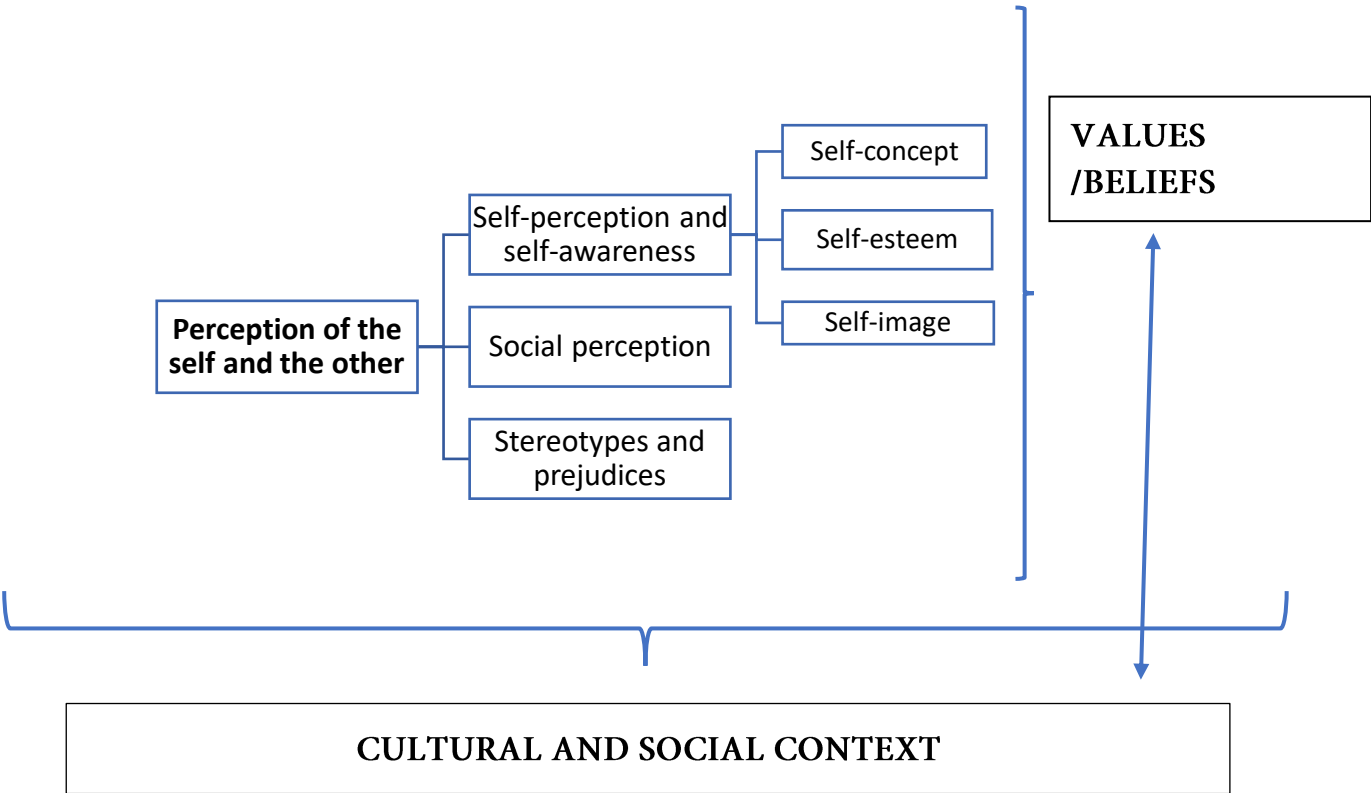
CHAPTER 2: CORE VALUES OF THE LITHUANIAN SOCIETY

What will I learn?

Main facts and events that have shaped Lithuanian history and culture

Core values, religious customs, taboos, and courtesy rules of the Lithuanian society

Values related to education and family life

Why is it important?

Even when travelling and visiting a foreign country for a short time, it is a good idea to research about the destination in order to avoid misunderstandings and be well prepared for any possible situations. This is even more true when moving to a new country, especially relocating with the whole family.

We commend you, as a parent representing ethnic and cultural minority, for taking interest and educating yourself about your new host country, Lithuania. We believe that the only way for people representing multiple cultures to live and prosper together is through integration. And in order to successfully integrate into society is by having an open mind, learning about it, and practicing tolerance and understanding.

Milestones in the history of the host society shaping its national identity

Main facts about Lithuania

Population: ~3 000 000

Area: 65 300 sq. m

Population density: 46 inhabitants / sq. m

Altitude: Between -4 m and +294 m

Bordering countries: Russia (Southwest), Poland (South), Belarus (East), Latvia (North), Baltic Sea (West).

Ethnicities: Lithuanians 85,08%, Poles 6,65%, Russians 5,88%, Others 2,39%

Religions: Roman Catholic 85,9%, Russian Orthodox 4,6%, Other Christians 2,3%, religious non-Christians 0,7%, Irreligious 6,8%

Native languages: Lithuanian (official) 85%, Russian 8,2%, Polish 5,8%, Others 1%

Languages spoken: Lithuanian (official) 96%, Russian 70%, English 30%, Polish 14%, German 8%

Historical periods: Grand Duchy of Lithuania until 1569, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth 1562-1795, Russian Empire 1775-1915, Republic of Lithuania 1918-1940, Soviet occupation 1940-1990, Republic of Lithuania 1990-

National holidays: January 1st, February 16th, March 11th, Easter Sunday and Monday, May 1st, June 24th, July 6th, August 15th, November 1st, December 24th, December 25th and 26th.

Lithuanian history

Lithuania, as any other country, has a long history, impossible to summarise in just one page. Nevertheless, below you will find a short bullet list of the most important Lithuanian history milestones.

– The first inhabitants in Lithuania appeared in the final ice age, 10 000 BC. The farmers were replaced by the hunter-gatherers. The forefathers of Lithuanians, the Baltic tribes, are among the oldest European ethnicities who settled in approximately the current area around 2500 BC.

– The majority of these Baltic peoples, who traded amber with Romans and later fought Vikings, was taken up by a tribe called Lithuanians. This process of Lithuanians becoming a majority speeded up under Mindaugas who became a Christian and was crowned as the first and only king in 1253. After his death, people of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania went back to their pagan ways.

– Eventually the Lithuanian people adopted Christianity under Grand Duke Jogaila (1387). Lithuanians created a long-lasting alliance with Poland. Under the rule of Grand Duke Vytautas Lithuania became the largest country in Europe in the 15th century, stretching from Baltic to the Black sea.

Battle of Žalgiris (Grunewald) by Jan Matejko

– There was a new threat from Moscow, so responding to it Lithuania and Poland formed a Commonwealth in 1569. At first it was successful in keeping the enemies away, however, there was a gradual Polonization of the Lithuanian noble class as Lithuanians of the time considered Polish culture to be superior to the Lithuanian one.

– By the 17th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth became weak. The country lost several wars that destroyed its great position of power. In 1772-1795 the country was split up into part and annexed by Prussia, Austria, and Russia with the main Lithuanian lands being ruled by Russia.

– During the Russian rule Lithuanian language was banned and Catholic religion was suppressed. In 1831 and 1863 there were two unsuccessful rebellions to restore Poland-Lithuania but finally a goal for Lithuanian independence of both Russia and Poland was established. The restoration of independence became possible after the collapse of Russian Empire and the surrender of Germany in World War I.

– In late 19th century there was a limited industrial revolution and urbanization, but the newly independent Lithuania was still mostly an agricultural society. Lithuanian independence did not last for a long time – it was cut short by the World War II (1940). Lithuania was occupied by the Nazi Germany and by the Soviet Union. The Soviet occupation ended in 1990, having lasted 45 years. During this time of occupation, hundreds of thousands of people were murdered, tortured or exiled to Siberia. This period of history has left deep economical and psychological scars among the Lithuanian people.

– In 1988 a massive Sąjūdis independence movement was established. On 11 March, 1990 Lithuania became the first country to restore its independence of the Soviet Union. This led to the complete collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991.

– In the 1990s Lithuania's economy started to grow, building modern skyscrapers, department stores, and private homes. Due to many years spent in the Soviet Union, Lithuanian economy was still behind other Western countries. Because of this a lot of Lithuanians emigrated. Emigration rose even more when Lithuania joined the European Union in 2004 – up to 20% of its people left the country, mostly to go work in other European countries.

The Baltic Way, 1989 August 23rd

Video footage and official song of the 1989 August 23rd "The Baltic Way"

A short **introduction to Lithuania**

What is life really like in Lithuania?

– Can you think of a similar event as "The Baltic Way" in your country's history?
– Can you find any similarities in history between Lithuania and your country?

*One of the most important dates for Lithuanians is **August 23, 1989,** when they joined hands in a peaceful protest with Latvians and Estonians. The Baltic Way stretched for 600 km (about 370 miles) and included roughly 2 million people.*

*More on **Lithuanian history***

Key legal principles of Lithuania

Law of Lithuania

Almost all Lithuanian laws were established after 1990 as the country became independent from the Soviet Union. The legal system was created similar to various laws of Western European countries. The Constitution was adopted by a referendum in 1992.

After Lithuania joined the European Union in 2004, it had to take on European Union regulations. If the EU regulations are in conflict with the Lithuanian laws, usually the EU regulations are applied.

Lithuanian Laws on Important Issues

- **Recreational drugs** are illegal, **alcohol**, smoking, and pork are legal. The legal age for buying alcohol is 20 and for buying cigarettes – 18 years old.
- **Prostitution** and **pornography** are illegal, **homosexual** relations and **divorce** are legal. Age of consent is 14, but if the partner is

over 18, then it is 16 years old. Marriage is allowed from 18 years old.

- **Non-automatic guns** are legal to have for self-defence. But they have to be concealed and need a local permit.

- **Gambling** is legal but limited. Legal age for gambling is 21. **Lotteries** are legal.

- **Euthanasia** is illegal. **Abortion** is legal. **Capital punishment** is not practiced. **Torturing** is banned. **Corporal punishment of children** banned.

- **Practicing any religion** and wearing religious clothing is free.

- **Official language** is Lithuanian. Other languages are permitted.

- **Freedom of speech** is respected.

- **Political system is democratic**, but the Communist and National socialist parties are not allowed to be established.

- **Voting is not mandatory**.

- **Private enterprise** is legal. Some forms of business require a license.

- **Labour strikes** are permitted.

- **Discrimination** (sexual, racial, ethnic, religious, social, etc.) is banned.

- **Free education** is available to all Lithuanian citizens until the age of 18.

- **Free healthcare** is available to almost all Lithuanian citizens for the more serious diseases and health checks.

- **Dual citizenship (nationality)** is not permitted.

- **Speed limits** are 50 km/h (in towns), 70 km/h (dirt/gravel roads), 90 km/h (most roads), 110/120 km/h (lower class motorways, winter/summer), 110/130 km/h (upper class motorways,

winter/summer). **Car lights** must be on day and night. **Maximum alcohol quotient** is 0,04% for car drivers, 0% for bus, truck, motorcycle drivers and those having a license for under 2 years. **Driver's license** may be acquired at 18 for most cars.

Introduction to the Lithuanian Legal System

– Which laws are different and which ones are the same in your country?
– Are traffic rules and speed limits strictly reinforced in your country?

LithuaniaLaw.com website helps to find answers to the common legal issues faced by foreigners in Lithuania.

Lithuanian society's perception of family life

Lithuanian society

There are approximately 3 million people in Lithuanian and there are no significant conflicts within the society. Its culture is influenced by both the Western and the Eastern cultures.

Lithuanians do not like to speak much to people that they don't know. They value family and their home is very important to them, since it is there that they can freely speak their mind.

Lithuanian values, ethics, and morale have been influenced by Christian, Soviet and Western ideas.

Lithuanian families and personal relations

Family is very important to Lithuanians – it is the basis of the nation. A typical family consists of two parents and two children. Unmarried couples also often live together. In the past due to the shortage of housing, several generations used to share the same flat. This has changed now – children move out of their parents' house, but sometimes are still supported by them financially.

In the family husband and wife usually share their finances, giving a small allowance to their children. Sometimes they support other family members, as well. It is considered to be dishonourable to put one's parents into an elderly home.

How Lithuanian people raise their children differs from family to family, but any suggestions of the state are generally not welcomed.

Sex in the Lithuanian society is considered to be an important commitment and being faithful to one's partner is valued. STD rates, teen pregnancies, and abortion rates in Lithuania are lower than in other Baltic states.

In cities people keep cats and dogs as pets and treat them as family members. In villages, however, they are considered to be more like farm animals, dogs protecting the house and cats catching mice.

When not being with family, Lithuanian people choose to spend their time with friends. These are usually relatives, work colleagues, former class mates.

Younger Lithuanians treat older people with respect and use honorific language, whereas the older ones treat younger members of society less formally. Female friends express their friendship with hugs and kisses, but male friends usually limit their contact to handshakes. Boss-employee friendships are not common. It is also very uncommon for Lithuanian people to talk openly to strangers. They usually keep a high level of formality.

In Lithuanian villages everyone knows everyone else – all neighbours know each other. However, in cities the situation is completely different – it is not uncommon for neighbours living in the same apartment building to not even say "hello". On the other hand, since Lithuania became a member of the EU and many people emigrated to Western Europe, people have kept in touch with their friends and relatives abroad. Those who left Lithuania, assimilated to the foreign cultures and are not planning to come back are regarded as traitors, who put their personal gain before the needs of a nation.

Lithuanian values and daily life

In terms of business and work ethics, main values in Lithuanian society include:

- hard work
- caring about and saving money for the future
- owning a home and having a family
- loyalty to the employer
- having a prestigious job

As to the daily routine, here are some main characteristics:

- Most Lithuanian people work from 8:00 to 17:00 or 9:00 to 18:00 Monday to Friday, with a break for lunch at 12:00-13:00.

- The commute from home to the work place is short for most people as they live and work in the same city, so a typical day would begin at 06:30 or 07:00, then breakfast and a drive to work (public transportation is also very popular).

- Lithuanians come home after work around 18:00 and spend their free time in front of the TV, working in the house or meeting friends.

- Dinner is usually prepared by the wife, and repairs around the house are expected to be done by the husband.

- Kids are taken to school by car in the morning, but usually they are enrolled into the public school that is nearest to the family's home.

- School lessons start at 8:00 and end between 12:00 to 15:30 depending on the children's age.
- Children are usually home before their parents. Then they have to do homework.
- Younger children usually spend the whole day at kindergartens unless they have grandparents who look after them.
- Saturdays and Sundays are free for most people.

- *Compare the daily routine of people in your home country and the one in Lithuania.*
- *Has your family's daily routine changed after moving to Lithuania?*
- *Do you have the same work-related values in your home country as do Lithuanian people?*

Children learning about Lithuanian traditions at a "Family Centre"

Lithuanian ethics, virtues, and morale
Lithuanian etiquette
Lithuanian daily and annual routine

Education and success: definition and associated values in the Lithuanian society

Education is very important to Lithuanian people, it is greatly valued. That is why most of the education is public, funded by taxpayer money, and mandatory, from the age of 6 or 7 to 16. Most people graduate from high school and acquire university education, 99,8% of Lithuanians are literate.

According to the Law on Education of 1991 (last amended in 2006), education is an activity intended to provide an individual with a basis for a worthy independent life and to assist them in the continuous cultivation of abilities. The value of education was very accurately described in the 7th edition of the World Data on Education: "Education protects and creates national identity. It guarantees continuity of the values that make a person's life meaningful, that grant social life coherence and solidarity, and that promote development and security of the State. Education serves its purpose best when its advancement leads the overall development of society. Therefore, education is a priority area of societal development that receives State support."

The amended Law on Education set these main goals for education:

- to develop a young person's values enabling them to become an honest, knowledge-seeking, independent, responsible and patriotically-minded person;
- to identify a young person's creative abilities and upon this basis to help them acquire a vocational qualification and competence conforming to contemporary culture and technology;
- to reinforce the capability of society to ensure sustainable development of the country's resources;

- to convey to each person the basics of national and ethnic culture, the traditions and values of the humanistic culture of Europe and of the world, to foster the maturation of each person's national identity, moral, aesthetic and scientific culture and personal outlook;
- to convey to each person the basics of national and ethnic culture, the traditions and values of the humanistic culture of Europe and of the world, to foster the maturation of each person's national identity, moral, aesthetic and scientific culture and personal outlook.

In terms of higher education, there are several universities that are considered to be prestigious, those are Vilnius University, Mykolas Romeris University, the Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences in medical sciences, and some others. However, other public universities are considered second-choice by most of the society – for those students who couldn't get into the best ones. Some private universities are even less respected, rumoured to accept rich but uncapable students. Technical colleges are regarded as even less prestigious.

When it comes to jobs, prestigious jobs are those that provide either a good salary or society's admiration. Professions such as doctors, teachers, public servants, are admired and valued. However, the independence and new economic opportunities have changed the way the younger generation thinks and what it values. One of most popular majors at universities and colleges has become Business Management. Students started breaking the old rules of minimalism and internalised guilt of owning more things than necessary and started seeking well-paid jobs in search for an economically better life.

Success in the Lithuanian society is now considered having a well-paying job, rather than having a meaningful job. Other signs of success include

having a good education (at one of the top Lithuanian universities, or, better yet, a university abroad), owning a house (rather than an apartment), a car, having a family, and time for some hobbies.

Lithuanian education system

What are the definitions of success in your culture? Are they similar to the ones in Lithuania?

Detailed information about **Lithuanian education system**

Wikipedia article about education system in Lithuania

Hospitality and courtesy rules in the Lithuanian society

Hospitality

Lithuanians may seem more reserved at first glance, but they tend to open up the more you know them. Many Lithuanians, although they live in apartments in urban areas, have summer vacation houses in the countryside where they frequently spend weekends and holidays. These homes, or dachas, usually are near a body of water, and have a sauna as well as a garden. It is common for Lithuanians to have good friends come to stay for the weekend at places such as these.

Meeting and greeting

Most Lithuanians greet each other with a smile along with a handshake and direct eye contact. Once a relationship has been formed, it is acceptable to hug upon greeting a friend. However, it's important to allow your Lithuanian friends to decide when your friendship is close enough to indicate this level of intimacy. People are called by their formal titles (Ms, Mrs, or Mr) followed by their family name. You should not use someone's first name until invited to do so.

Gift giving

If welcomed to a Lithuanian home, you should remember to bring flowers, wine, or candy to give to the hostess. You should give an even number of flowers and remember not to give chrysanthemums. They are

used for funerals. Also, white flowers are a no-no- as they are used for weddings. Presents are often opened as soon as they are received.

Dining

There are usually not strict rules about how to behave at the Lithuanian table. You should wait to be seated. You should hold your fork in your left hand and your knife in your right. Hands should be kept visible.

Your first portions of food should be small, as you may always accept seconds. You should try everything placed on the table. Hosts offer the first toast, although this is done primarily with hard liquor. It is acceptable for you to make your own toast later in the mealtime.

Protocol related to business

In business transactions and relationships, one should exercise formality and err on the side of conservative protocol. There are generational differences between how younger entrepreneurs and older professionals interact. Younger professionals deal more directly in less of a hierarchical structure and do what is necessary to make a deal, whereas there is a formal structure and rules inherent to doing business with the older and more traditional generation.

Communication and relationship building

Lithuanians work hard at building friendships out of business relationships and seek to build mutual understanding primarily through getting together face-to-face. This is a sign of hospitality and you are expected to accept such offers and reciprocate in kind, to show sincerity and true friendship. Lithuanians are only open to conducting business once a relationship has been established. Initial contacts should be made with people in positions of authority with the ability to make a decision, as Lithuania remains somewhat of a hierarchical culture, and you should

remember to convey respect to those in positions of responsibility and authority.

Many Lithuanians are known for being hard-working, although they seldom brag about their work, as that would show arrogance. However, Lithuanians are still impressed by status and are thus interested in titles and advanced university education, so this should be communicated to indicate the degree of respect you should be accorded within your company.

Lithuanians are not highly passionate or emotional speakers. They speak quietly and keep their hands to themselves when speaking, often coming off as aloof or distant upon first meeting.

As in many other countries, you will encounter bureaucracy in Lithuania. One mustn't show anger or lose patience when dealing with this, and it is considered very impolite to interrupt others in conversation or negotiations.

Hierarchies still exist in Lithuanian business, and usually people only speak with others of the same level or rank. For this reason, it is seen as improper for a junior staff member to address a senior member directly.

Lithuanian etiquette rules

Simple DOS and DON'S in Lithuania

Lithuanian lifestyle: culture, music, sports, cuisine, and more

- *What similarities and what differences have you noticed in courtesy rules in Lithuania and your native country?*
- *Were you shocked by anything during your first interaction with Lithuanian people?*
- *How do you eat pizza in your home country? Would you be shocked to see Lithuanians eating pizza with ketchup and / or mayonnaise sauce?*
- *When you first arrived in Lithuania, did you notice people smiling? Do you think people in Lithuania generally smile or look angry / sad?*
- *It is interesting that American visitors usually immediately notice that Lithuanian people look gloomy and unhappy, whereas one Turkish businessman pointed out the opposite – he said people always smile here!*

Main religious customs and taboos in the Lithuanian society

Religion in Lithuania (2011)[1]

- Catholic (77.2%)
- Orthodox (4.1%)
- Orthodox (Old Believers) (0.8%)
- Other religions (1.67%)
- Non-religious (6.1%)
- Undeclared (10.1%)
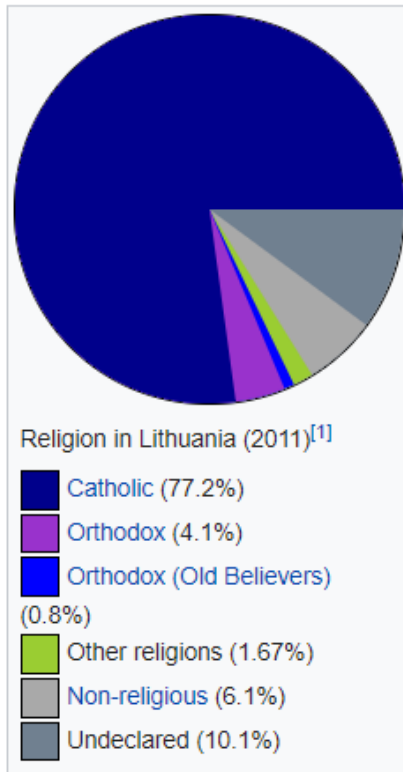
The primarily religion in Lithuania is Christianity, of which the largest denomination is Roman Catholicism. Following that is the Eastern Orthodox religion (4.1%), more specifically the Russian Orthodox church attended by ethnic Russians.

Christian Lithuania celebrates many traditional Roman Catholic holidays, including Easter, Christmas, and Christmas Eve (for the older generation). There is a Lithuanian version of the Mexican holiday Day of the Dead, known as the Day of the Souls. These holidays are celebrated as family days and are celebrated irrespective of religion.

Christmas Eve (December 24th)

Christmas Eve is more important, especially among the older generation, than Christmas itself. People don't have to work and the family gathers together in the evening to share a special vegetarian (fish permitted) meal with at least 12 dishes. It is customary to try all the dishes presented. People traditionally pray before the meal. The first thing eaten is similar to a Communion wafer (Kalėdaitis). This wafer is inscribed with Christian symbols. Everyone has a different wafer which they break apart and exchange to others. Once all pieces have been eaten, then you may proceed on to the next dish.

Children get presents on Christmas day. Kalėdų senelis (Santa Claus or more specifically the Christmas Grandfather), comes overnight before Christmas Day and leaves gifts under the tree. Adults exchange gifts with family members on Christmas Eve and at another time with colleagues and friends.

Christmas (December 25th and 26th)

On Christmas, the family unites for dinner. The day after Christmas (December 26th) is also a holiday. Nearly all Lithuanian homes are decorated with Christmas trees adorned with garland and lights. Every family has a different tradition for how they decorate their family tree. Many go to church on Christmas, whether or not they are religious. The end of the Christmas holiday is known as Epiphany which occurs on January 6th and commemorates the visit of the three kings who visited baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

Easter

After Christmas, Easter is the next most popular holiday in Lithuania. Lithuanians honour Christ's passion by going to church on numerous days throughout Holy Week starting on Palm Sunday and culminating on Easter Sunday.

On Palm Sunday, churchgoers bring their own homemade palms to church to be blessed. Holy Thursday is a day for cleaning to guarantee ensure a year of bounty and health. Everything is washed and scrubbed in anticipation of Good Friday. Holy Saturday is spent decorating Easter eggs (margučiai) and preparing the traditional Easter Sunday dinner. Easter eggs are stained with natural colors taken from soaking plants, fruit, and vegetables in vinegar. The **Easter Granny (Velykų Bobutė)**

brings Easter eggs and candies to children. Homemade Easter egg baskets are prepared by the children and left outside their homes for the Granny to place her eggs. Children are very excited to wake up on Easter, as they get to go out and look for the magical treasures left behind by her.

All Saints Day, November 1st **and Day of the Souls (Vėlinės)** on November the 2nd

Lithuanians visit cemeteries where deceased relatives reside and place candles on their graves (and also place candles other uncared for graves). One should visit cemetaries on this holiday, as these places are transformed into spectacles in the evening, as most graves are covered with candles. Many believed that souls would return to earth on this day and for this reason, favorite meals are sometimes left behind for deceased family members as well.

Užgavėnės, or Shrove Tuesday (similar to Fat Tuesday or Mardi Gras in the West)

This day is a Lithuanian version of Halloween. Lithuanians make scary masks, and dance around in public. Children visit homes and ask for pancakes or money. This holiday is celebrated by the ritual burning of Morė (a woman who represents winter) and the ritual struggle between Lašininis and Kanapinis. Lašininis represents meat-eaters, and therefore he is always beaten by Kanapinis, who represents vegetarians, to herald the start of the Lenten fasting season.

Religious customs and celebrations in Lithuania
Lithuanian Easter egg decorations
Lithuanian superstitions and taboos
Shrove Tuesday celebration

Do you have same or similar holidays in your home country? Were you shocked by any of Lithuanian traditions?

A funny article about strange Lithuanian superstitions
Unique Lithuanian traditions
Lithuanian customs

Application of cultural knowledge in daily life

Read the following questions and think about what you would do.

Case 1

You have been living with your family in a flat in a Lithuanian city surrounded by neighbours, many of whom you have not even met before. One day you hear the news that a man from your building has died in an accident and his funeral is going to be held tomorrow.

Do you go to the funeral? Do you bring anything? If you decide to bring something to the family, what would it be – food, flowers, money?

Case 2

You have been living with your family in a small village in Lithuania. One day you hear the news that the former head teacher of the local school has died of old age. You had seen her many times, and although you had never spoken to her at length, you had met her before.

Do you go to the funeral? Do you bring anything? If you decide to bring something to the family, what would it be – food, flowers, money?

Hint: Nowadays, Lithuanians are not very open about death. Viewings are held at funeral parlours. People don't bring candles or food. They bring flowers or money. Prayers and music are still included, often performed by professional musicians. Modern services are more personalized, and people often wear black. People gather for a reception afterwards to share food and memories of their dearly departed.

Review of Chapter 2

History. Lithuania is the largest of the three Soviet Baltic republics. Unlike its sister states Latvia and Estonia, Lithuania has had a long history of independence. In the 13th century Lithuanian territory expanded from the Baltic to the Black Sea. In 1990 Lithuania was the first one of the Soviet states to declare its independence. Lithuania joined the EU in May 2004.

Ethnicity. To many Lithuanian people their ethnic identity is very important and serves as the main source of their national traditions.

Language. The Lithuanian language is believed to be one of the oldest in the world and is probably what defines the Lithuanian people.

Religion. Lithuanian people are mostly Catholic but have always been tolerant to other faiths.

Holidays. Lithuania has a lot of holidays, both local and international, Catholic as well as originating in the pagan traditions.

CHAPTER 3: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

What will I learn?

The relation between culture, language, and communication

Different communication patterns across cultures, including non-verbal communication

Basic rules of intercultural communication

Why is it important?

Having good intercultural communication skills allows us to deal across cultures. Intercultural communication skills are tremendously important when communicating with people from our children's multicultural school environment, be it other parents, teachers, or school staff.

Being able to deal with cultural differences not only peacefully, but also creatively and innovatively, is becoming a very important skill that allows us to thrive in a global world, as citizens, community members, and parents. Speaking English or the country's local language and getting acquainted with different customs isn't enough, we have to understand non-verbal communication that happens across cultures. After all:

"The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said." – Peter Drucker

Relation between language, culture, and communication

It is commonly accepted that language is a part of culture, and that it plays a very important role in it. Some social scientists consider that without language, culture would not be possible. Language reflects culture, and at the same time is influenced and shaped by it. Brown (2008:171) describes the two as follows: "A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture." In a word, culture and language are inseparable.

Communication is like transportation: language is the vehicle and culture is the traffic light. Language makes communication easier and faster; culture regulates, sometimes promotes and sometimes hinders communication.
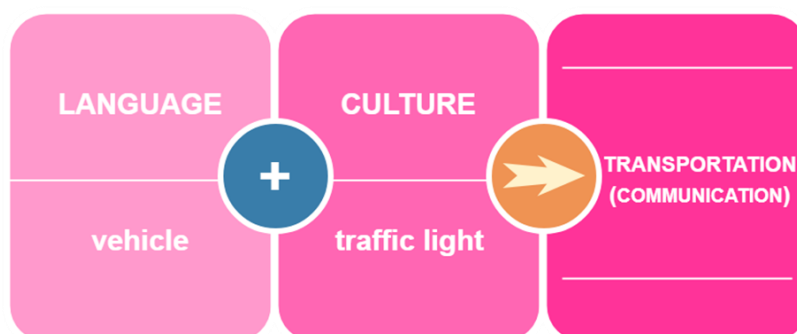
This is a video explaining how language shapes the way we think. *Does language shape how we think?*

Can you think of some characteristic expressions in your language that bear a strong cultural meaning? How easy is it to translate them into another language?

Basic notions of verbal communication

Verbal communication, i.e. words that we say and hear, helps us express ourselves and understand others. We use it to ask questions that give us information. We also use verbal communication to describe things, people, and ideas. Words help us inform, persuade, and entertain others. Our personal relationships are formed through our verbal expressions. Language is expressive. Verbal expressions help us communicate our observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs.

There are three important factors that we need to take into account in verbal communication:

Formulation: Is my message expressed in a *clear*, *coherent* and *complete* way? Is all important information explicitly included?

The **medium**: It is important to check for: clear and correct *pronunciation* and *articulation*; correct *grammar* and *syntax* and *fluent* expression.

The **receiver**: Is the message *complexity* and *courtesy* level appropriate for the particular receiver in the given context? Is there consideration for the receiver's *viewpoints*, *background* and *mind-set*?

Especially when communicating with people from other cultures, it is very easy to be misunderstood, because of the differences in linguistic skills, sense of humour and mind-sets. Therefore, it is especially important to avoid certain negative ways of verbal communication that can destroy interpersonal relationships:

- **Global labels.** Don't label anyone as irresponsible, untrustworthy, selfish, or lazy. Such judgments and generalizations can only make the situation worse.

- **Sarcasm.** "No, you didn't miss anything in class on Wednesday. We just sat here and looked at each other." Although sarcasm is often

expressed as humour, through it people usually communicate negative feelings.

- **Dragging up the past.** People bring up negative past experiences when they don't want to discuss a current situation. It may also mean that they have been holding grudges.

- **Negative comparisons.** Comparing a person to other people can lead to feelings of inferiority and resentment. Parents and teachers may unfairly compare children to their siblings.

- **Threats.** Threatening someone with violence usually signals the end of productive communication. It also shows a person's insecurity.

– *Review the types of unsupportive messages discussed here. Which of them do you think has the potential to separate people the most? Why?*

– *Which one do you have the most difficulty avoiding (directing toward others)? Why?*

For a detailed explanation of the principles of verbal communication and self-assessment exercises, read the following article:

Oral Communication: Some Basic Principles

Basic notions of non-verbal communication

Verbal messages are of course an important part of our communication, but the way we communicate non-verbally is equally, and sometimes more, important. Non-verbal communication includes the following:

- Tone of voice
- Rate and volume of speech
- How we articulate our words
- Rhythm, intonation and stress placed on words
- Facial expression
- The amount of eye contact we make
- Gestures/touch
- Body language and posturing
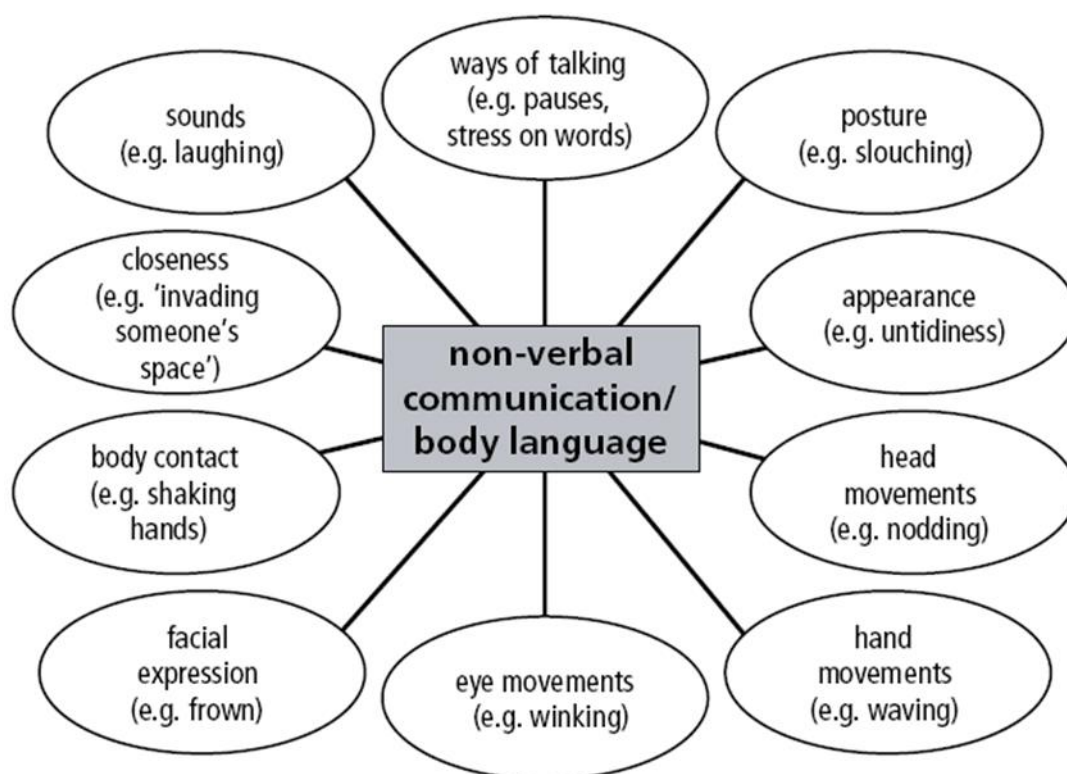
Aspects of non-verbal communication

More than our words, non-verbal messages can often be unintentional and spontaneous, or even beyond voluntary control (like pupil dilation). Therefore, many people tend to rely more on the non-verbal cues than on the spoken word.

- *When someone sends you a mixed message in which the verbal and non-verbal messages contradict each other, which one do you place more meaning on? Why?*

- *Our personal presentation, style of dress, and surroundings such as an apartment, car, or office send non-verbal messages about our identities. Analyse some of the non-verbal signals that your personal presentation or environment send. What do they say about who you are? Do they create the impression that you desire?*

Gestures in different cultures, international etiquette: **Cultural curiosities**

Importance of eye contact in Western cultures: **Non-Verbal Communication: Eye Contact Avoidance**

In this article you can learn how to improve your non-verbal skills: **Reading Body Language and Improving Your Nonverbal Skills**

The impact of non-verbal communication

Read the following study about the impact of positive non-verbal communication.

A study conducted by Hyunwoo Jung and Euichang Chai (2014) observed the non-verbal communication a physical health teacher gave to his class over an eight-month period for two hours every week. The teacher 'Lee' was observed to be a very optimistic individual who had a lot of compassion for his class. Lee's non-verbal communication such as his facial expressions, clothing choices, voice tone, touch and care were all noted over the eight months. After the eight-month period had commenced, the students were interviewed, and an observation diary had been recorded noting physical interactions within the class and changes in behaviour over the eight-month period. From the results the observer had gained in documentation, it had been evident that the students had come to mimic Lee. The students displayed a sense of compassion and respect to one another, encouragement, cooperation and honesty. When the students were interviewed, they generally seemed to have a very positive outlook on the subject and many believed this was because of the way Lee had taught, treated and encouraging them through his positive, optimistic and friendly nature. It became evident after the case study was completed, that Lee's non-verbal communication had aided in developing the students' values and morals. They were taught how to show respect and care for one another through observing Lee and had also developed a confidence in his ability to teach the subject matter effectively through his professional demeanour combined with his thorough knowledge.

Now think about the following:

- Did Lee give the students any verbal lesson about positive non-verbal communication?
- Think now of your own non-verbal communication habits. Do you perhaps imitate somebody unconsciously (a parent, a teacher, somebody else)?
- What impact might your non-verbal communication style have on your children? Is it what you want?
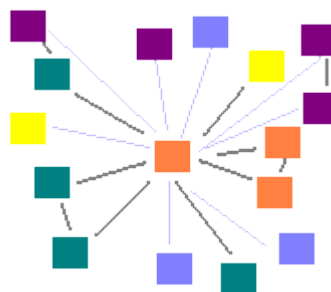
Low vs. high context cultures

According to Wikipedia, **high-context culture** and **low-context culture** are terms used to describe cultures based on how clear and direct the messages communicated by people are and how much the context means in certain situations.

According to the famous anthropologist Edward T. Hall who introduced the concept:

- Messages exchanged in a high-context culture carry indirect meanings with more information than the spoken parts

- In low-context cultures, messages have a clear meaning, with nothing hidden beyond the words used

High context communication   Low context communication

Higher-context cultures include the Afghan, African, Arabic, Brazilian, Chinese, French Canadian, Filipinos, French, Greek, Hawaiian, Hungarian, Indian, Indonesian, Italian, Irish, Japanese, Korean, Latin Americans, Nepali, Pakistani, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Thai, Turkish, Southern United States, Vietnamese, South Slavic, and West Slavic.

Lower-context cultures include the Australian, Dutch, English Canadian, English, Finnish, German, Israeli, New Zealand, Scandinavian, Swiss, and United States.

Entering high and low context situations

Besides the preferred way of communicating within a culture, there are also different communicational settings that may require a different amount of contextual information. For example, high context will be common in situations like family gatherings, a conversation or party with friends, expensive gourmet restaurants etc. independently of the culture one belongs to. The reason is that these groups of people have a lot in common and do not need to explicitly state everything in order to be understood. High contexts can be difficult to enter if you are an outsider.

Low contexts are relatively easy to enter if you are an outsider because the environment contains much of the information you need to participate, and because can you form relationships fairly soon. Examples of low context settings are large airports, a chain supermarket, a cafeteria, sports where rules are clearly laid out etc. where clarity is of great importance and people are not expected to infer or guess the meaning of the messages.

Remember that **every culture and every situation has its high and low aspects**. For instance, a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) is usually a low context situation: any parent can join, the dates of the meetings, who is president, what will be discussed, etc. are all explicitly available information, and it is usually fairly clear how to participate in the

meetings. However, if this is a small town, perhaps the people who run the PTA all know each other very well and have many common interests. They may "agree" on what should be discussed or what should happen without even talking about it, as they may have unconscious, unexpressed values that influence their decisions. Other parents from outside may not understand how decisions are actually being made. So the PTA is still low context, but it has a high context subgroup that is part of a high context small town society.

A short presentation about communication in low and high context cultures:
[What Is The Difference Between a High-Context and Low-Context Culture?](#)

A collection of misunderstandings that may arise between people of Indian and Western cultures:
[Intercultural Communication: Misunderstandings](#)

Relationship vs. task-oriented cultures

Have you ever asked yourself the following questions?

- *Why is it that Americans and British hardly ever answer the question, "How are you doing?"*
- *Why is it that Indians almost never say "No" if you ask them, "Can you do this?"*
- *Why is it that Koreans and Chinese always want to hang out with their colleagues outside of work?*

The answer lies in a major distinction that shapes every culture – **task oriented vs. relationship-oriented view. There are some cultures that**

value getting a task done whereas in some other cultures, long term relationships with people matter more than a task they are handling right now.

Of course, no country falls completely into one extreme or the other. It usually lies somewhere in the middle, some closer to extremes than others. The USA, Canada, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands are examples of task-oriented cultures whereas India, China, Spain, Italy, Greece are examples of relationship-oriented cultures.

What is the difference?

Task oriented cultures view dedication to finishing a task as a way to show respect, professionalism, willingness to be a part of the team. You build relationships by proving that you get things done for the team. Any interruptions in the process are viewed as distractions and the lack of commitment, which keep you away from forming meaningful friendships.

In comparison, relationship-oriented cultures allow interruptions by other people because they do not want to be rude and hurt others by not accommodating needs of those individuals. Chatting about stuff that is totally unrelated to a task at hand is essential for forming relationships beyond work environment. Socializing is a big part of work.

Task-Oriented	Relationship-Oriented
Emphasis on work facilitation	Emphasis on interaction facilitation
Focus on structure, roles and tasks	Focus on relationships, well-being and motivation
Produce desired results is a priority	Foster positive relationships is a priority
Emphasis on goal-setting and a clear plan to achieve goals	Emphasis on team members and communication within
Strict use of schedules and step-by-step plans, and a punishment/incentive system	Communication facilitation, casual interactions and frequent team meetings

Intercultural Communication: Do I Focus On The Task Or The Relationship?

Choosing an appropriate relationship approach: a case study

You have recently moved to a new country because you have found a better job there. As a new member in the Parent School Organization you are going to introduce yourself to the upcoming meeting of the parents. In the new school there are also many children from abroad but none of their parents participate in the Parent Organization. You have many ideas regarding the organization of out-of-school activities and you were also actively involved in school matters in the previous school of your children. Please reflect on the following questions:

- Is the country you moved to task or relationship oriented? Does this differ from the culture you belong to?

- What will be your strategy in order to become accepted by the other parents and school staff? How will the specific context of the society affect your strategy?

- How will you present yourself to the other parents?

- How do you intend to present your ideas and know-how on out-of-school activities to the other parents?

Cultural differences in non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication can take many forms. To communicate effectively with people from other cultures it is very important to not only understand what is said but also what is expressed by their body language. Below are samples of seven forms of non-verbal communication, as well as specific cultural examples.

Eye contact

Eye contact carries strong meaning in all cultures – it is important whether eye contact is made, who makes it, and how long it lasts. In many Asian cultures, avoiding eye contact is seen as a sign of respect. However, those in Latin and North America consider eye contact important for showing equality among people. In Ghana, if a young child looks an adult in the eye, it is considered an act of disobedience.

Touch

Many cultural expressions are achieved through touch. In America, for example, using a firm handshake is considered appropriate to greet a stranger or another business professional. In France, however, it is common to kiss someone you greet on both cheeks. Touching children on the head is fine in North America. Yet in Asia, this is considered highly inappropriate, as the head is considered a sacred part of the body. In the Middle East, the left hand is customarily used to handle bodily hygiene. Therefore, using that hand to accept a gift or shake hands is considered extremely rude.

Gestures

Gestures can convey wildly different meanings. Individuals in the United States use the "OK" sign to convey that something is acceptable. In Japan, the same hand symbol means "money." Argentinians, Belgians, the French and the Portuguese all use the symbol to mean "zero" or "nothing."

Still other countries in Eastern Europe consider that same sign an offensive swear.

POTENTIALLY EMBARRASSING GESTURAL MIXUPS

U.S. Gesture	Other Interpretations
Waving good-bye	Come here (Japan)
Good luck sign	Boyfriend (Japan)
Screw you sign	I don't believe you (Uruguay)
OK sign	Money (Japan) Sex (Mexico) Homosexual (Ethiopia)
Slash across the throat	Lost job (Japan)

Source: From D. Archer, (1997), "Unspoken Diversity: Cultural Differences in Gestures, *Qualitative Sociology*, 20: 81.

Physical space

Countries that are densely populated generally have much less need for personal space than those that are not. The Japanese, for example, are less likely to react strongly to an accidental touch by a stranger than Americans. Less personal space is also needed in areas such as Latin America, and, in the context of one-on-one conversations, the Middle East.

Facial expressions

Winking is a facial expression particularly varied in meaning. In Latin America, for example, the gesture is often considered a romantic or sexual invitation. The Yoruba people in Nigeria wink at their children if they want them to leave the room. And the Chinese consider the gesture rude.

Posture

Posture can convey power structures, attitudes and levels of civility. Slouching in Taiwan is considered disrespectful, while other parts of the world may not think much of it one way or another. In America, standing

with hands on the hips may suggest power or pride, but in Argentina, it may suggest anger or a challenge.

Many cultures also frown upon showing the bottom of the shoe, something that is considered dirty. Therefore, sitting with the foot resting on the opposite knee is strongly discouraged in places such as many Arab countries.

Watch this animated video explaining non-verbal communication with examples: **Non-verbal communication**

An interesting article that includes culture-specific non-verbal communication examples: **Non-verbal communication**

Recognize cultural differences in non-verbal communication

Read the following real-life story about gift-giving. What would be considered an inappropriate gift in your culture? Have you ever made any mistakes in selecting a gift for someone from a different culture?

Giving gifts seems to be a universal way to please someone, if the gift is appropriate. One colleague of mine, Nishehs, once tried to impress our boss, Joe. Nishehs brought a well-wrapped gift to Joe when they first met with each other in person. Joe was indeed pleased as he received the gift from Nishehs, but his smile faded away quickly right after he opened the gift. Joe questioned Nishehs angrily, "Why is it green?" Shocked and speechless, Nishehs murmured, "What's wrong with a green hat?"

The miscommunication resulted from the cultural differences between them. Nishehs is an Indian, whereas Joe is Chinese. For the Chinese, a

green hat means one's wife is having an extramarital affair. (Martin, Nakayama, 2010, p. 279)

Principles of intercultural communication

The writer Anais Nin said, **"we don't see things as they are, we see things as we are."** We don't often realize the filter through which we see the world. Sometimes instead of noticing the behaviour and stopping to think what it could mean, we jump to the conclusion about its meaning and feel offended. Communication with people from other cultures is far more rewarding when we are able to understand each other, prevent conflicts and convey trust and good-will. Though there is no single recipe for effective intercultural communication, below you will find some basic principles.

1. **Focus on understanding**
   - o Ask open-ended questions
   - o Be non-judgmental
   - o Do not express disagreement immediately
   - o Be aware that what is initially presented may not actually be the case
   - o Listen to others and give them time to tell their story in their own way and own words
   - o Others may need to develop a sense of trust before they are willing to share their vulnerabilities

2. **Acknowledge and respect cultural differences rather than minimize them**
   o Inquire about and acknowledge any cultural/ethnic/racial differences
   o If appropriate ask if there is anything about the cultural/ethnic/racial background of your interlocutors which they feel you need to know
   o Ask if there is anything in general they would like to know about your culture to better understand your viewpoint

3. **Focus on similarities**
   o Work
   o Family life
   o Leisure activities

4. **Treat all people with dignity and respect**
   o Keep an open mind
   o Keep it simple
   o Speak in a polite manner
   o Avoid making judgments and assumptions

Which of the principles of effective intercultural communication do you think you are already applying, and which ones need the most work?

Identify how you became so competent at the first one and some ways that you can improve the second one.

Learn about cultural differences in 6 minutes

How Culture Drives Behaviours

An interesting blog article that gives useful tips for effective intercultural communication: **Intercultural Communication Tips**

An interesting approach to motivating people to understand that other cultures approach problems differently: **Who do you save?**

Reflection on effective intercultural communication

What is the appropriate behaviour in your culture when facing the following situations?

1. Answering a phone during a meeting (business, social, formal, informal)

2. Speaking to people differently, based on their gender, age, job title, etc.

3. Voicing opinions during a work meeting or parent meeting

Do you know of other cultures that have different behavioural norms?

Try this: In the next parent meeting ask 2 or 3 parents from other cultures about the norms of their cultures in the situations just described.

Review of Chapter 3

In this chapter "Intercultural communication principles", you have learned about the close relationship between language, culture, and communication. Communication largely depends on the person's native culture, and culture, as we have learned, varies greatly in many different aspects. There are low context vs. high context cultures, as well as relationship-oriented vs. task-oriented cultures. Based on these differences, there are even more culture-specific communication styles. By applying basic intercultural communication principles we can enjoy good relationships with people from other cultures and prevent conflicts.

Link to Unit 2

Continue to *Empowering migrant and refugee parents for social inclusion.* There you will find:

Chapter 1: Integration: What it means and what it does not mean

Chapter 2: Integration: Benefits for the child and the society

Chapter 3: Understanding the educational system and the opportunities it offers

Chapter 4: Support of school activities for the development of interculturalism

References and photo credits

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