

Carnegie Council Activity on Migration (30-45 minutes)

Overview

This interactive classroom activity provides students with the opportunity to simulate how government officials create policies in response to migration. It offers three different scenarios that highlight different types of migration policies a government needs to address.

Learning Outcomes:

As a result of engaging in this activity, students will:

- Develop an understanding of the trade-offs a government faces when deciding on migration policies.
- Understand the complexities that are involved in fulfilling humanitarian obligations.
- Better understand the importance of government communication in democratic politics.

Carnegie Council principles that the activity addresses:

- **The commitment to international cooperation** is a moral proposition because it goes to the essence of ethics—recognizing what is common for all, while managing the intrinsic and inevitable differences between and among people.
- **The defense of democracy in the U.S. and globally** requires confronting autocrats who discriminate based on ethnicity, gender, and religion, and who deny basic freedoms to their citizens.
- **Fidelity** means honesty, integrity, and a good-faith effort at serving the truth. Rhetoric certainly matters, and in an age of disinformation, leaders must fight against lies, willful deception, and deliberate misrepresentation of facts.

Pre-Activity and Set-up:

Divide the students into three groups (if there are too many students for each scenario, then assign two groups to each of the scenarios). Each of the three groups will be assigned a scenario in which they must formulate a migration policy in response to a specific group of migrants.

Scenario 1

A fictional country called “A” has a large territory and is a relatively wealthy democracy with a population of 100 million. It is the only neighboring country to country “B,” a small peninsula nation of 45,000 that is at sea level. Country B is also a democracy and its residents speak the same language as A, but it is less developed economically. B has experienced a massive hurricane that has displaced 15,000 of its residents who are now seeking refuge in A.

Scenario 2

A fictional country called “C” is small, with a declining and aging population of 200,000. Country C is a democracy and is not a rich country, but it is not poor either. C shares historical ties with country “D,” whose residents also speak the same language as C, though the two countries are very far away. D is a larger but poorer country, with many of its residents having living standards well below the level of C’s citizens. C’s government is trying to negotiate an agreement with D to establish a guest worker program with D.

Scenario 3

A fictional country called “E” is one of many democratic countries on a continent that border a country called “F,” which has just erupted into a civil war. Country E is a middle-income country numbering 50 million that has a medium-sized territory but faces limited housing opportunities. Country F is a very populous country—over 100 million—and approximately 20 million people of its citizens are displaced by this conflict, which will be of an unknown duration.

1. Small-Group Activity (20 minutes)

In your group, your job is to take on the roles of government officials who are tasked with not only designing a policy for this situation, but also formulating a brief explanation to be presented that summarizes their position to the public—remember, each of your countries is a democracy. The following are questions you should consider:

- What are the needs of the other country's migrants?
- What are your country's needs, if any?
- What would happen to the migrants if your country does not accept them?
- Are there any reasons why your country, and not any other, should help them?
- Are there ways to work alongside other countries in the region?
- What would be the effect on your country of admitting migrants?
- What policies should you implement to help these migrants adjust to their new lives?
- What policies should you implement to help mitigate any difficulties for your population that new arrivals may cause?
- Should you take all of the possible migrants or only just some of them? Under what criteria would you choose?
- How long will the migrants remain in your country? Does the length affect whether you would consider them on a path toward citizenship, if desired by the migrants? Would you grant them any political rights in the meantime?
- How does the need to explain your position influence what policy you might choose?

2. Discussion (10 minutes)

After each group has formulated their position, students will discuss as a class the ethical considerations and challenges from this activity. They will discuss the challenges of balancing the needs of the possible migrants with obligations they have to their own population. They will also discuss the way that being an official in a democracy informs how they decided on their policies and thoughts about presenting them.

Additional Resources

- [Model International Mobility Convention \(MIMC\)](#), Carnegie Council, last updated 2025