



Activity 2 – Zooming in: how people cross borders

This activity invites you to critically reflect on the varied experiences of border crossing encountered by people around the world today. The activity also stimulates reflection about the social relations involved in crossing the border, as various people come into contact with one another as they make their way from one state to another.

As we move through each of the four parts of the exercise, you will be invited to jot down lists of words associated with various types of border crossings, so have a paper and pen ready.

Part 1: Recollecting your own experiences at the border

Have you ever had to cross a border? If so, **write down the words that come to your mind when you remember this experience.**

As you formulate your list of words, try answering the following questions to stimulate your memory:

Where were you headed and why?

What kind of transportation did you use?

What did you have with you?

Who did you come into contact with during this process?

What were you feeling?

Now we will examine two different types of border crossings.

Part 2: Commuting every day for work across the US-Mexico border

Cristian Mireles is 28. He lives in Mexico, and he recently got a new job in Texas. Now he gets up every day at 6 AM to make the commute, and he says it takes him just 30 minutes to cross the border into the USA. Earning a salary in US dollars has allowed Cristian to significantly increase his quality of life in the Mexican border town where he resides, where groceries and rent are up to 214 percent cheaper than they are on the American side of the border.



The border between the USA and Mexico

Read this article in *CityLab* about other people like Cristian, whose lives span two countries and involve daily encounters with state borders:

<https://www.univision.com/univision-news/united-states/on-the-border-it-pays-to-earn-dollars-and-spend-pesos>

Now **write down the words that come to your mind when you think of Cristian, Rodrigo, and Rodolfo crossing the US-Mexico border.**

Part 3:

Arriving as an asylum seeker at a German border transit camp

Under international law, no one can be sent to a country or place where they face a risk of being seriously harmed, even if they have crossed a border without legal permission. People who are fleeing natural disasters, persecution, or war and who are recognized to be in harm's way are called "refugees." A person who is recognized as a "refugee" and given official refugee status receives "asylum" in another country. "Asylum" is legal permission to stay as a refugee in the country of arrival and the right to receive certain rights and benefits. Thus, someone who is fleeing for safety or who has just applied for asylum, but has not been officially recognized as a refugee is called an "asylum seeker." Someone who has already been granted asylum is recognized as a "refugee" officially (see the "Glossary" section of this module for further clarification).

It often takes a long time to obtain refugee status and to be granted asylum. This road is a difficult one, fraught with danger and many bureaucratic hurdles. Many asylum seekers,



especially those coming to the EU from Syria, wish to make it to Germany because they have a higher chance of being granted asylum there than in many other EU states. To read about the perils of such a journey, have a look at this essay by journalist Wolfgang Bauer who took the trip along with Syrian asylum seekers across Italy and Austria:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/wolfgang-bauer/syrian-refugees-europe_b_6374260.html

If an asylum seeker makes it to the EU and finds a way to travel to Germany, the asylum seeker can apply for asylum in Germany. This involves submitting application forms, justifying the asylum seeker's departure from the country they have fled, being interviewed by officials about their experiences of persecution, and having all the documents considered by officials. All of this is most often done in special camps for asylum seekers, located all across Germany. There are many ways to end up at such a camp. For example, an asylum seeker can be brought there by smugglers, can be sent there by police, or can come there themselves in order to apply for asylum.

Asylum seekers live at the camps, apply for asylum at the camps, and wait for the decision to be made about their status at the camps. If they are recognized as refugees, they can go on to be placed in special housing across Germany and receive certain rights and social benefits for a limited period of time, after which they must reapply to be considered for this status again. If they are not recognized as refugees, they can be deported from Germany.



Border transit camp Friedland in Germany



Take a look at this photo essay about a border transit camp in Germany. The essay tells the history of the camp and gives you a chance to see how the camp is organized and what daily life can look like for an asylum seeker who lives there:

<https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2016/03/symbolic-borders>

Now **write down the words that come to your mind when you think of people crossing the border at border transit camp Friedland.**

Part 4: Concluding the exercise

At the end of this exercise, you have several lists of words associated with different types of border crossings. Bearing in mind the border-crossing experiences covered in this activity, **make a final list of words naming all the agents you can think of who are involved in border-crossing.** These can be people who cross borders and people who regulate or enforce borders (keep this list as you go on to Activity 3 of this module).

At this very moment, thousands of people worldwide are experiencing each of these types of movements across borders and interacting with one another. Compare your lists and imagine these movements happening simultaneously all around the world, all part of the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of human cross-border mobility.

Sociologists of mobility, migration sociologists, sociologists of displacement, and political sociologists all address how the agents involved form, uphold, or challenge state borders; how various people interact with one another at borders; how these experiences shape the behaviours and biographies of those involved in cross-border mobility.