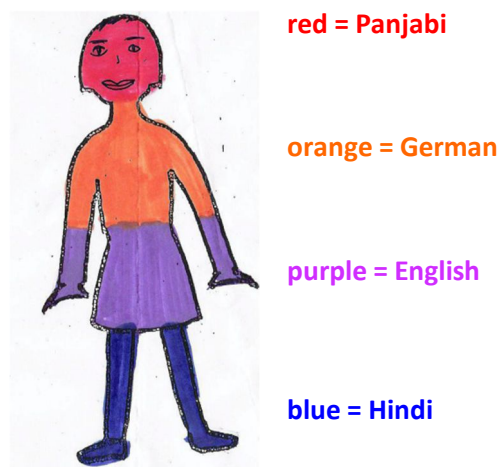


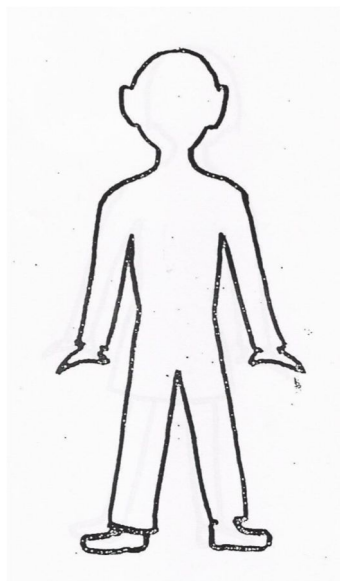
16 - Plurilingual portrait: a reflective task for volunteers

Aim: To help volunteers to reflect on the languages they know, how they use them, and what they mean to them.

The concept “[language repertoire](#)” refers to the fact that all individuals are potentially or actually plurilingual, capable of communicating in more than one language. A language portrait is one way of making a person’s language repertoire visible. The woman who created the example below has used the colours red, orange, purple and blue to show the languages she is able to use.



Each time we acquire a new language we have to reorganise our language repertoire, finding a place for the new language depending on the situations in which we use it and the people we use it with.



Task for volunteers

Draw a figure like the one on the previous page and create your own language portrait, bearing the following points in mind:

- This is a spontaneous, intuitive activity, which you should finish as quickly as you can. The time for reflection is after you have created your language portrait.
- Include all linguistic varieties: dialects are as important as standard languages.
- Competence levels are not important. If you know just one word in a language it is worth making it visible.
- If you prefer, you can write the names of your languages on the figure instead of colouring it in.

When you have completed your language portrait, consider the following questions, perhaps discussing them with a colleague:

- In which contexts do you use your different languages (in the family, with friends, at work, etc.)?
- Which of your languages are broadly respected in your community?
- Do you speak a language or dialect which doesn't receive the same kind of respect?
- Why do you think some languages have a higher status than others?
- How is it possible that some people from African countries speak seven languages fluently but count as uneducated, whereas people who speak two or three European languages fluently are valued as highly educated?
- Are there situations where you mix languages when you communicate with other people?

Task for refugees

This activity has often been used with refugees. It has proved to be a good way of helping them to become aware of the "linguistic capital" they already possess, which enhances their self-esteem, especially in circumstances where they seem to be defined by the languages they don't know rather than the languages they know.

When they have produced a language portrait many refugees are keen to compare their repertoire and experience with those of other refugees – to talk about the languages they know, where they learnt them, and with whom they use them. Language portraits are a good way of getting refugees to talk and think about languages from the perspective of their own experience. See also Tool 38 [Plurilingual portrait: a reflective task for refugees](#).

Source of the plurilingual portrait: H.-J. Krumm (Hgg. H.-J. Krumm/E.M. Jenkins): *Kinder und ihre Sprachen – lebendige Mehrsprachigkeit*. Vienna 2001