

## **Expert Workshop**

**“Crossing Borders. Migration and  
Citizenship Education in Europe”**

# Key Assumptions Check

NECE-2016 Expert Workshop  
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## Key Assumptions

### Definition

- Something that is taken for granted or is accepted as true or certain to happen
- A view or assertion often described as the common wisdom that underpins the analysis

### Examples

- Donald Trump is so far outside the mainstream that he could never win the US presidency.
- For economic reasons the UK will never leave the European Union.

## Key Assumptions Check

### **Definition**

A systematic effort to make explicit and question the assumptions that guide an analyst's interpretation of evidence and the reasoning underlying any particular judgment or conclusion.

### Examples

- Ignoring anthropologic causes of climate change
- Criminal investigations

## Common Cognitive Biases and Intuitive Traps

### Examples of Cognitive Biases

- Availability heuristic
- Mirror imaging
- Anchoring
- Premature closure

### Examples of Intuitive Traps

- Causality vs. correlation
- Lacking sufficient bins
- Over-emphasizing small samples
- Projecting past experiences

## When to Use

- At the beginning of a project, to record how analysts believe things “work” or happen in a given situation
- Near the end of a project, to assess whether the assumptions underpinning the conclusions are still valid
- Before delivering your final analysis or product, so that recipients understand the basis for your judgments

## Key Assumption Check Method

- 1. Identify all the key assumptions that an analyst or group holds about a situation, group, or topic. Record on whiteboard or on a simple template.**
- 2. Examine each assumption by asking:**
  - Why is this assumption correct?
  - How confident am I that this assumption is still valid?
  - What could invalidate this assumption?
  - Could it have been true in the past but false now?
  - If the assumption turns out to be invalid, how might it affect my analytic judgment?
- 3. Assign each assumption to one of the following categories:**
  - Basically supported or “solid.”
  - Supported but with some caveats.
  - Unsupported or questionable.

## Potential Pitfalls

- The exercise may not capture all assumptions, particularly if group members have similar backgrounds, experiences, and expertise. Therefore, assumptions may be unrecognized
- All assumptions must be critiqued thoroughly to avoid Groupthink or “false rigor” in the process
- A facilitator can help manage the dynamics of the group and avoid sloppiness or the tendency to give short shrift to the exercise or to specific ideas



## Key Assumption Check Exercise

### **Question:**

What are your key assumptions on how migration might change the British society ?

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