



Team-Building, Diversity & Resilience Manual

Strengthening team cohesion,
intercultural understanding, and
resilience in organisations supporting
refugees and migrants



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This toolkit was developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ project Caring to Include (2024–2027), co-funded by the European Union.

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1. Introduction

Caring to Include (2024–2027) is an Erasmus+ project designed to support organisations working with refugees, migrants, and culturally diverse communities. It focuses on strengthening staff wellbeing, intercultural competence, inclusion practices, and quality of team collaboration.

This toolkit compiles a set of practical, participatory exercises that enhance team cohesion, emotional resilience, intercultural sensitivity, and structured peer support. It aims to give teams simple, adaptable methods they can use in their regular work.

The toolkit is designed for:

- NGOs working in migration, asylum, and humanitarian settings
- Social workers, psychologists, legal aid teams, educators
- Volunteer coordinators and team leaders
- Trainers and facilitators working with mixed or diverse teams

The toolkit is divided into two main parts:

- Team-Building & Resilience Exercises – to build trust, reflection, cohesion, and emotional balance.
- Diversity & Interculturality Exercises – to deepen understanding of identity, cultural dynamics, and adaptive teamwork.

Each activity includes purpose, instructions, materials, and tips. Facilitators may select activities based on goals, time, and group size.

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2. Team-Building & Resilience Exercises

2.1 Empowered Together

Empowerment & Team Building Exercise

Suggested Format:

Duration: 30–40 min

Group size: 15

Facilitation: 1 facilitator

Purpose

Help team members recognize personal and peer strengths to foster self-awareness, confidence, collaboration, and team building.

Why It Works

- Encourages self-reflection
- Builds confidence through peer recognition
- Enhances team cohesion

Materials

- Chairs
- White paper
- Markers

Setting

Circle seating, quiet room, relaxed environment.

How to (Steps)

1. Opening (5 min)

The facilitator explains the purpose of the exercise, emphasizing respect and focusing on individual and collective strengths and talents.

2. Individual Reflection (5–10 min)

Each participant draws an outline of their body on a piece of paper and write their name inside. Within the outline, they write what they believe are their personal strengths and talents — both generally as individuals and specifically in their work.

3. Peer Input (15–20 min)

Once everyone is ready, participants pass their paper to each group member. Each colleague writes on the paper what they see as that person's strengths and talents.

4. Presentation (15–20 min)

Each participant presents their paper to the group and shares how they feel about the input they received.

5. Group Discussion (20 min)

As a group, participants reflect on how it felt to receive feedback and discuss

how they can consciously use their strengths and talents in their work and teamwork.

Tips

- Ensure a safe and non-judgmental space.
- Encourage constructive and positive feedback.
- Remind participants to take time to acknowledge and appreciate their own and their peers' strengths — both as individuals and as a team.

2.2 Stories That Connect Us

Storytelling for Team Solidarity & Resilience

Suggested Format:

Duration: 1.5–2 hours

Group size: 6–15

Facilitation: 1–2 facilitators

Purpose

- Strengthen trust, empathy, and shared meaning through storytelling.
- Why Storytelling Works
- Builds human connection
- Helps teams make sense of challenges
- Supports emotional recovery
- Breaks hierarchy

Materials

Chairs in a circle, flipchart, markers, sticky notes.

Setting

Open circle, relaxed, quiet room.

How to (Steps)

1. Opening (10 min)

The facilitator guides a short grounding exercise (e.g., breathing, or a short mindfulness prompt).

Explain the purpose: safe space, sharing with listening, not therapy, etc.

2. Prompt & Reflection (10–15 min)

The facilitator presents one or more prompts (e.g., “A moment when I felt supported by the team.” or “A time I rediscovered why I do this work.”)

Participants spend 2–3 minutes writing or thinking about the prompt.

3. Story Sharing (45–60 min)

Participants take turns (3–5 minutes each) sharing their story.

Others listen silently — no interruption, no advice. After each story, allow a few seconds of silence.

4. Group Reflection (15–20 min)

The facilitator asks: “What stood out for you?” “What do our stories say about who we are as a team?” “What strengths or values did you hear in others’ stories?”

Optionally use sticky notes for participants to write key values/themes and post on flipchart.

5. Closing (5 min)

Appreciation round: each person says one word or short phrase about how they feel leaving the session.

Optionally a symbolic gesture (e.g., placing a post-it on a shared board, or a group photo).

6. Documentation (after session)

Facilitator compiles key themes (without identifying individuals) and shares (internally) to feed into team-well-being/learning.

Tips

- Emphasise confidentiality and respect at the start.
- Encourage a mixture of light and meaningful stories so that the session isn’t too heavy.
- Make sure participants know this is not therapy, the facilitator is not a counsellor/therapist (unless they are).
- After the session, reflect on how the themes can inform future team practices.

Video resources

A few concrete exercises to develop better connection within your team members through storytelling [here](#).

2.3 Group Intervention – The Balint Method

Suggested Format:

Duration: 60–90 minutes

Group size: 4–12

Facilitation: rotating

Purpose

A structured space for reflection on challenging cases, offering emotional support and peer learning.

Why It Works

- Encourages reflective practice
- Provides emotional support
- Promotes peer learning
- Ensures a safe environment

Setting

Participants sit in a circle.

How to (Steps)

1. Opening / Check-in (5–10 min)

Participants share how they are feeling and what challenging cases they have on their minds. They can either decide to choose the focus person and the facilitator of the session at this moment, or they have already decided at the last meeting who will bring a case and who will be the facilitator at the next meeting.

2. Case Presentation (10–15 min)

The focus person shares a challenging case. The case should be related to their work and should be one which is challenging emotionally or professionally for the focus person. The role of the facilitator is to make sure others only ask clarifying questions about facts and that they do not ask leading questions or share their opinions or suggestions.

3. Group Reflection (20–40 min)

Participants discuss relevance to their own experience and they use free association. The role of the facilitator is to make sure participants do not give advice to the focus person. The group can decide whether the focus person sits outside of the circle during this part (this is the original way) or stays in the circle.

4. Focus Person Feedback (5–10 min)

The focus person shares insights about which ideas and experiences of the others were most relevant to them and shares emotional support gained.

5. Closing / Check-out (5–10 min)

Final reflections of all the participants; selecting next focus person and next facilitator (or alternatively the group decides about the focus person at the beginning of the next session - based on the present needs of the participants).

Tips

- Facilitators rotate; no psychologist needed.
- Emphasize listening, empathy, and reflection.
- Practice regularly to build trust and mastery.

Resources

You can read more about Balint groups and the method [here](#).

3. Diversity & Interculturality Exercises

3.1 Circles of Identity – Strengthening Diversity

Suggested Format:

Duration: 15–20 minutes

Group size: 5–15

Facilitation: 1 facilitator

Purpose

An introductory activity to explore shared and unique identity elements and affirm diversity.

Why It Works

- Builds self and peer awareness
- Recognizes visible & invisible diversity
- Affirms minority/underrepresented identities

Setting

Standing circle.

How to (Steps)

1. Opening - Circles of Identity (5-7 min):

Invite participants to stand in a circle, tell them you're going to start to get to know each other.

A person thinks of something true for them that they think could also be true for others standing in the circle, goes to the centre of the circle and proposes the statement, e.g.: "I speak at least three languages." All the participants for whom the statement is true, move towards the person in the centre, to the extent that the statement is true or alternatively they could also all just take a step towards the person standing in the middle.

Propose a couple of statements, then let participants propose their own statements.

2. Welcoming Diversity (5-7 min)

Once we have found common elements in our group, we will try to look for elements of our identity that makes us unique. Try to propose statements that you think are true for only you in the room.

Once a couple of statements have been made, ask participants to say statements connected to interculturality, still only statements that are true for them.

Thank participants for sharing.

Take a moment to welcome the diversity in the group, with a sentence such as "to close the sharing, I'd like to take a moment to welcome all the diversity represented in the group."

List the elements of identities that you have explored through the circle,

paying attention to cover the possible diversity on the dimensions you mention. For example: "I'd like to welcome participants who were born in the country where they live and those who were born elsewhere participants who have a religion, those who do not have one, men, women, those who do not identify as either, and those who sometimes identify with one and the other etc.

After listing some dimensions, ask participants to add what diversity we should welcome.

3. Closing (2-3 min)

Point out that a conclusion from the activity is that we all have multiple identities, and that some of them connect us to other people, and depending on the context some of them make us unique individuals.

Acknowledge that all this diversity will make the training/workplace richer and more interesting, but that occasionally it may also trigger challenges. Invite participants to take care of this diversity so that it can be a stimulating force.

Tips

- Point out that a conclusion from the activity is that we all have multiple identities, and that some of them connect us to other people, and depending on the context some of them make us unique individuals.
- Acknowledge that all this diversity will make the training/workplace richer and more interesting, but that occasionally it may also trigger challenges. Invite participants to take care of this diversity so that it can be a stimulating force.

Resources

This exercise was taken from the [PODER Toolkit](#), which includes many other exciting exercises on creating brave and transformative learning spaces.

3.2 Game of Adaptability

Team Strength Cards

Suggested Format:

Duration: 20 minutes

Group size: 4-20

Facilitation: 1 facilitator

Purpose

Explore adaptability and diversity through playful card-based challenges.

Why It Works

- Playfulness builds engagement
- Rule changes mirror real-life dynamics
- Highlights varied reactions
- Encourages intercultural awareness

Materials

Cards, timer, flipchart, sticky notes.

Setting

Small tables for pairs/groups.

How to (Steps)

1. Opening (2-3 min)

The facilitator introduces the metaphor: "We'll use a simple card game to explore how our team adapts to change, especially unexpected changes."

Clarify: this is playful, not about winning or losing.

2. Game Play (10-15 min)

Participants pair up or form small teams (depending on total number).

They play normal rounds of the chosen card game (could be simple like "Go Fish", "War", or a basic Casino card game).

After a few rounds (e.g., 2-3 rounds), the facilitator announces a rule change: e.g., "Now you must play with your non-dominant hand", "Reverse the order of play", "Speak in another language", "Switch seats after every round".

Participants adapt and continue playing under the new rule. Introduce 2-3 different rule changes during the 10-15 minutes to keep adaptation dynamic.

3. Debrief (5 min)

-Facilitate reflection with questions:

How did you react to the sudden rule changes?

What helped you adapt (or hindered you)?

What did you notice about your partner/team's reactions?

How does this relate to working in an intercultural team or dynamic context?

-Use a flipchart to capture keywords: adaptability, frustration, creativity, reliance on rules, etc.

4. Optional Extension

If time allows: ask participants to design their own rule change (in pairs) and play one more round incorporating their rule; then share which design came easiest/hardest.

Followed by very short additional reflection.

Tips

- Emphasize fun and "learning through play" rather than competition.
- Watch for team dynamics: how quickly groups adapt, how they respond to frustration or confusion.
- Use the debrief to connect game experience to real work situations (especially where rules change, cultural norms shift, or team composition/disciplines adapt).
- Avoid complex card games: keep it simple to allow focus on adaptation, not on mastering game mechanics.

Video resources

This [video](#) shows a playful card-based team building game, which gives ideas for rule-change dynamics and team adaptation.

3.3 Barnga – The Intercultural Card Game

Suggested Format:

Duration: 60–90 minutes

Group size: 9–20

Facilitation: 1–2 facilitators

Purpose

Experience intercultural misunderstandings through silent card game play.

Why It Works

- Builds perspective-taking
- Highlights diverse reactions to unfamiliar rules
- Shows individuals, not cultures, drive behavior

Materials

3–4 card decks, printed rules, tables/chairs.

First table

This is a game of chance. You win if you have good cards. Everyone gets 10 cards. In each round, you must discard one card at a time. The player with the highest card wins, no matter what suit the cards have. If two or more players have the same card, you discard again to decide who wins the round. Set aside the cards played in that round and start a new round.

The winner of the round can draw a line on their scorecard.

If you want to say something to your teammates, you can only communicate with them by drawing or using hand gestures. You are not allowed to speak or write.

Second table

This is a game of chance. You will win if you have good cards. Everyone gets 10 cards. In each round, you must discard one card. The player with the highest card of a given suit/suit wins. The first player can start with any suit (spades, clubs, hearts, or diamonds). The next player must discard the same suit, but with a higher card. If they do not have the same suit, they can discard another suit, but they cannot win.

The player who wins the round can draw a line on their own scorecard.

If you want to say anything to your teammates, you can only communicate with them by drawing or using hand gestures. You are not allowed to say anything or write anything.

Third table

This is a game of chance. You will win if you have good cards. Everyone gets 10 cards.

In each round, you must discard one card. The player who plays the highest spade card wins. Spades also win if the number of spades played is lower than another suit, but the number of cards on the table is higher (for example, the 9 of spades wins against the 10 of hearts). If there are two spades, the higher spade wins. The winner of the round can draw a line on their own scorecard. If you want to say anything to your teammates, you can only communicate with them by drawing or using hand gestures. You are not allowed to say anything or write anything.

How to (Steps)

1. Opening (5 min) – Explaining the card game.

Tell the participants that they will be playing an intercultural card game in silence.

Divide the group into subgroups of 4 (and/or 3 if there are too few participants; if there are 8 or fewer participants, you can play with 2 groups, but this is not preferable).

You can choose to encourage the participants to win.

Tell them that they are not allowed to talk during the exercise from the start! Only at the beginning, if something is really unclear in the rules, they may whisper to you.

2. Game Play (45–60 min)

Distribute the rules of the game to the groups. Depending on the number of groups, you will have three or four different sets of rules. Each group starts with the same rules, which therefore differ per table. Allow the participants to read the rules in silence and practice with them for a few minutes until they have mastered them sufficiently.

Then have them put the rules aside and continue playing for a while, after which you remove them completely.

Let them play again for a while, then have one participant from each group rotate clockwise to another group.

Let them play a few more rounds. Observe what happens in the new group composition.

After a few rounds, have them rotate clockwise again.

Continue rotating participants until everyone has moved to the next table and the original groups are complete again.

3. Debrief (15–20 min) – Discuss feelings, reactions, and connections to intercultural experiences.

First, let the participants vent their feelings to each other. Then discuss the questions below with everyone:

What was going on? (Each group had different rules).

For those who rotated first and ended up in a 'strange' group, how was that?

Those who rotated afterwards, what was your experience?

If you are in the majority, what happens to the rules?

When you returned to your original group, what rules were applied?

Those who stayed in the first round, how did you feel when someone who

didn't know the rules joined?

What did you do?

How was it when more people from the 'old group' joined? What connection do you see with the situation and position of refugees?

Did your own values and norms play a role in how you played/experienced this exercise?

4. Conclusion (5 min) – Highlight that individuals, not cultures, drive responses.

Share the message that people communicate with an individual, not with a culture. Here they have seen that each individual reacts differently. Refugees will also react in such diverse ways, and so will local people towards refugees. This is not necessarily related to culture, but often mainly to individual characters.

Tips

- Maintain psychological safety.
- Encourage open discussion during debrief.

Video resources

We would recommend watching this [video](#) before facilitating this exercise.

3.4 Supporting Intercultural Communication

Intercultural Reflection in Practice

Suggested Format:

Duration: 30–45 minutes

Group size: 4–15

Facilitation: 1 facilitator

Purpose

Analyze real-life intercultural misunderstandings through structured reflection.

Why It Works

- Encourages analytical rather than emotional reactions
- Promotes perspective-taking
- Builds awareness of cultural & personal factors
- Strengthens empathy and communication strategies

Materials

Chairs, flipchart, sticky notes.

How to (Steps)

This reflective exercise works best with a real example from participants' professional experience. It allows the group to explore assumptions and perspectives before rushing to interpretation or solutions.

1. Step 1: Introduce the Exercise (5 min)

Facilitator explains that the goal is to understand — not to solve — a real intercultural misunderstanding or puzzling situation. Emphasize psychological safety: no judgment, no evaluation, only curiosity.

2. Step 2: Case Sharing (3 min)

One participant volunteers (or is selected) to share a specific intercultural situation — e.g., a misunderstanding with a refugee, client, or colleague. The story should be short (around 3 minutes), factual, and unresolved or unclear to the speaker.

Others listen silently, taking brief notes if needed.

3. Step 3: Clarifying Questions (5–7 min)

Group members ask only clarifying questions to better understand the context (“Where did this take place?”, “What exactly was said?”, “What happened before that?”).

No interpretations, advice, or opinions at this stage.

Facilitator ensures focus on facts.

4. Step 4: Writing Assumptions (5 min)

After the question round, participants individually write down their assumptions about what might have caused the misunderstanding.

Examples:

“Maybe cultural norms about hierarchy were different.”

“The client might have misunderstood the authority of the organization.”

“Language tone may have sounded too direct.”

Encourage each person to focus on possible explanations, not judgments.

5. Step 5: Sharing Assumptions (10 min)

Each participant shares their written assumption(s) aloud, one by one.

No discussion or debate yet — only sharing.

The facilitator may note key patterns on the flipchart (e.g., communication style, power dynamics, emotional cues).

6. Step 6: Reflection by the Storyteller (5 min)

The original storyteller reflects:

Which assumptions felt relevant or surprising?

What new insight or clarity emerged?

Others listen silently, without interrupting.

7. Step 7: Group Discussion & Strategies (10–15 min)

Now open the space for discussion.

Facilitator asks:

–“What could we learn from this experience?”

–“How might we handle a similar situation differently next time?”

–“What helped shift the confusion toward clarity?”

Together, summarize 2–3 practical strategies or principles that could help in future intercultural interactions.

8. Step 8: Closing (5 min)

Quick round: each person says one word about what they’re taking away (“Insight”, “Curiosity”, “Patience”, “Listening”).

Thank the storyteller for sharing their real experience.

The facilitator may close by summarizing: "Misunderstandings are not failures they are opportunities to learn about ourselves and others."

Tips

- Always ensure confidentiality: no identifying details about clients or colleagues should be recorded or shared outside the group.
- Use this method regularly (e.g. monthly) to build team reflection culture.
- If strong emotions arise, take a short pause — allow space for empathy and regulation before continuing.
- The facilitator's main task is to protect the process, not to interpret the case.

Video resources

Simpleshow explains: How to Avoid Cultural Misunderstandings [video](#).

The exercise is from the diversity training material of the Dutch Council for Refugees.

4. Summary/ Key Takeways

This toolkit highlights four essential principles for effective and inclusive teamwork:

1. **Connection** – Teams function best when people feel seen, valued, and safe.
2. **Reflection** – Structured peer spaces reduce emotional load and improve practice.
3. **Diversity Awareness** – Understanding individual differences strengthens collaboration.
4. **Adaptability** – Managing change is key in humanitarian and migration work.

Use these exercises regularly to sustain healthy, resilient, and inclusive teams.