



EMPOWER



Steps for Social Entrepreneurship and Intercultural Dialogue

A Good Practice Handbook for Youth Workers

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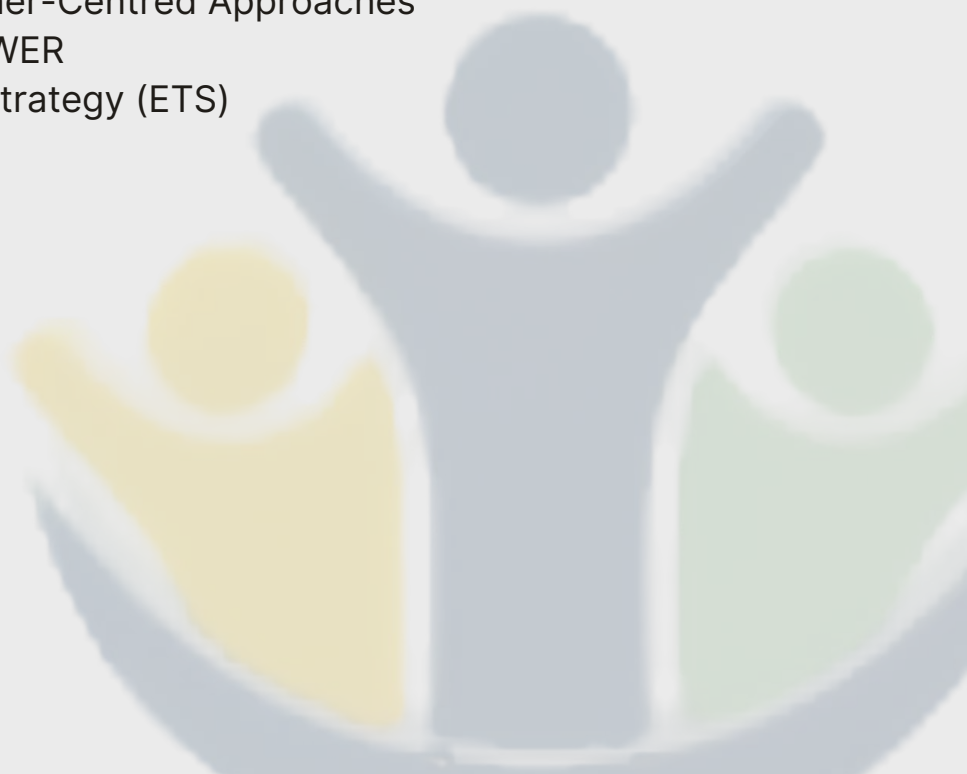


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1. Introduction



1.1 Purpose of This Handbook

This handbook is a practical resource produced as part of the EMPOWER project - Entrepreneurship for Migrant Participation, Opportunity, and Well-being through Educational Resources. It is designed for youth workers, trainers, youth leaders and organisations that work with young people who face barriers to social and economic participation.

The handbook brings together the key learning outcomes, methodologies, practical tools and good practices gathered across both EMPOWER activities: the seminar in Kastoria, Greece and the training course in Korçë, Albania. It is not a textbook. It is a working companion - something you can pick up, open at any chapter, and use directly in your practice.

Social entrepreneurship and intercultural dialogue are at the heart of this handbook. We believe that when youth workers are equipped with both the mindset and the practical tools to use these approaches, they become more effective advocates and mentors for the young people they work with - especially those who are most at risk of being left behind. The activities, tools and reflections gathered here have all been developed and tested in real settings, with real groups. They work and they can be adapted to work in your context too.



1.2 Who This Handbook Is For

This handbook is written primarily for:

- Youth workers and trainers who support young people in community, NGO or institutional settings
- Youth leaders and group facilitators working in non-formal education
- Organisations and NGOs whose work touches on migration, social exclusion, unemployment or disability
- Professionals interested in integrating social entrepreneurship into their existing youth work practice
- Anyone who participated in EMPOWER and wants a structured record of what was developed during the project

This handbook will also be useful for:

- Decision-makers and funders interested in evidence-based approaches to youth work
- University students and researchers studying non-formal education, social entrepreneurship or migration
- Volunteers and community members who support youth groups informally





1.3 How to Use This Handbook

Each chapter stands independently. You do not need to read this handbook from beginning to end. Use the table of contents to find what is most relevant to your current work, your next session, or your current questions. The activities in Chapter 6 include everything a facilitator needs to run each session independently.

If you want to...

- Understand social entrepreneurship
- Run intercultural activities
- Find ready-to-use session plans
- Learn from project experience
- Plan your next steps

Go to...

- Chapter 3
- Chapters 4 & 6
- Chapter 6
- Chapters 7 & 8
- Chapter 8 + Action Plan template



Key symbols used in this handbook:



Key concept or definition



Practical tip or suggestion for facilitators



Activity or tool ready to use



Good practice or example from the field - Participant quote or voice from EMPOWER

2. Overview of the EMPOWER Project



2.1 Background and Context

Europe is home to millions of migrants and refugees. Countries along the main migration routes - including Greece and the Western Balkan states - face significant challenges in integrating newcomers into social and economic life. According to UNHCR data, Greece alone hosts over 121,000 refugees and asylum seekers, while Türkiye hosts approximately 4 million migrants, the majority from Syria. In Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, large numbers of migrants continue to face economic exclusion and social isolation despite the best efforts of governments and civil society organisations.

Youth workers are often on the front line of this work - supporting young people through language barriers, bureaucratic obstacles, cultural adjustment and the search for employment. Yet youth workers themselves frequently lack the specialist training needed to address these complex realities effectively. The EMPOWER project was designed to close this gap. It was built on the recognition that when youth workers are better equipped, the young people they work with are better served.



EMPOWER was conceived as a response to six clearly identified needs across the partner countries:

1. The need to improve youth workers' skills in social entrepreneurship as a practical tool for addressing migration-related challenges
2. The need to deepen understanding of non-formal education and its possibilities for lifelong learning
3. The need to build a sustainable, cross-border network of youth workers focused on inclusion
4. The need to generate innovative project ideas applicable under Erasmus+ and similar programmes
5. The need to facilitate the exchange of good practices among those working with marginalised and migrant youth
6. The need to address the gap left by formal education systems in developing soft skills, intercultural competencies and collaborative working practices



2.2 Main Objectives

The EMPOWER project set out to achieve the following specific objectives, each of which is reflected in the content of this handbook:

- Strengthen youth workers' capacity to use social entrepreneurship as a practical tool for promoting social inclusion in their communities
- Develop intercultural communication skills and increase participants' awareness of, and respect for, diversity and difference
- Introduce and advance high-quality Non-Formal Education (NFE) methods in youth work practice across EU and non-EU partner countries
- Empower active citizenship through social entrepreneurship and meaningful community engagement
- Support the co-creation of practical European Training Strategy (ETS) tools that participants can adapt and apply in their local contexts
- Build a lasting network of empowered youth workers committed to inclusion, entrepreneurship and cross-border cooperation



2.3 Activities Implemented

EMPOWER comprised two Professional Development Activities (PDA), designed as a connected learning journey. The first activity built conceptual foundations; the second deepened practical skills and produced concrete, reusable tools. Both were held in communities directly affected by migration and social exclusion - a deliberate design choice that grounded all learning in real context.

EMPOWER Seminar

Kastoria, Greece

The seminar introduced the core concepts of social entrepreneurship, social inclusion and the European Training Strategy. Participants used interactive presentations, case studies, team-building exercises and daily reflection sessions to explore how social entrepreneurship can empower marginalised young people. The Youthpass credential was introduced from day one, helping participants begin identifying and articulating their learning immediately

EMPOWER Training Course

Korçëe, Albania

Building on the seminar, the training course equipped participants with practical, hands-on skills through role-playing, storytelling workshops, outdoor activities and group exercises. Participants co-created ETS tools, practised empathy exercises and developed concrete plans for social entrepreneurship initiatives in their home communities. The training culminated in a showcase of completed ETS tools and an individual Youthpass certification ceremony.



2.4 Partner Organisations

EMPOWER brought together six complementary organisations. Each partner was selected because of their specific expertise relevant to the project's goals and because they work directly with young people who face barriers to inclusion. The diversity of the partnership - in terms of organisational type, geographic location and thematic focus - was itself a key resource for the project.

YOUTHABILITY | Greece | Coordinator

A non-governmental organisation based in Maniakoi Kastorias, in the Dytiki Makedonia region of Greece. YOUTHABILITY specialises in youth empowerment, social inclusion and entrepreneurship training. As project coordinator, YOUTHABILITY led the overall design and implementation of EMPOWER.

Spirit of Youth Croatia (SOY) | Croatia | Partner

A youth group based in Split, dedicated to promoting European values, entrepreneurship and non-formal education among young people. SOY brings expertise in innovation management, leadership training and sustainable development, as well as strong connections to local media, startup communities and entrepreneurial networks.

Asociatia de Studii Socio-Economice (ASSE) | Romania | Partner

A non-profit association founded in 2011 in Craiova, focusing on educational support, vocational training and career guidance for young people. ASSE has extensive experience with Erasmus+ projects across a range of action types and works closely with schools, local authorities and employers in the Sud-Vest Oltenia region.

Manisa Zihinsel Engellileri Eğitim ve Koruma Derneği (Manisa ZEEKD) | Türkiye | Partner

An organisation based in Manisa that works with young people with intellectual disabilities, their parents and teachers across eight special education schools in the region. Manisa ZEEKD brings unique expertise in inclusive education, art therapy, disability rights, supported employment and the transition of young people with disabilities into the labour market.

Economic Intelligence Center (EIC) | Albania | Partner

An NGO based in Korçë, focused on the democratic and economic development of Albania through research, capacity building and community activism. EIC has experience in EU-funded projects and works with youth on digital skills, entrepreneurship, European integration and civic participation.

Sveučilište Hercegovina (SVEUCILISTE HERCEGOVINA) | Bosnia and Herzegovina | Partner

The first independent higher education institution established in Herzegovina, based in Mostar. Herzog University brings academic expertise in social sciences, lifelong learning, sociological research and the development of educational programmes - providing EMPOWER with a strong evidence base and research capacity.

3. Social Entrepreneurship as a Tool for Inclusion

3.1 What Is Social Entrepreneurship?

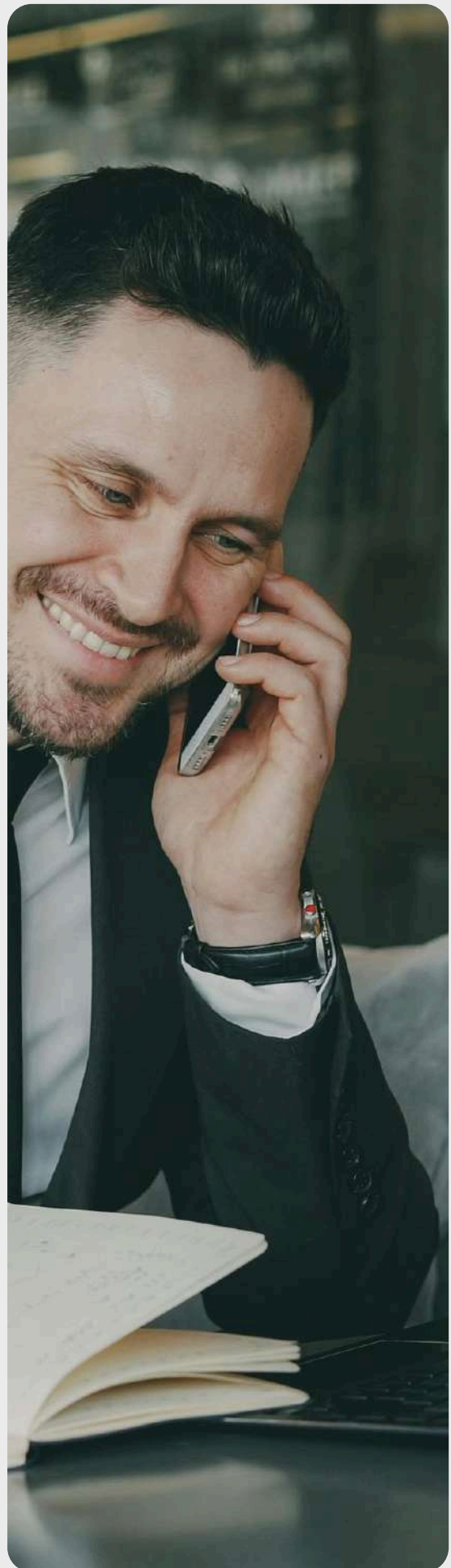


Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is the process of identifying a social problem and using entrepreneurial principles - innovation, resourcefulness, sustainability and initiative - to create a solution that generates positive social value. Unlike conventional business, where the primary measure of success is profit, social enterprises measure success primarily by their impact on people and communities. Financial sustainability is important, but it serves the mission rather than driving it.

Social entrepreneurship is not a single, fixed model. It takes many forms depending on context, scale and community need. What all social enterprises share is a commitment to solving a social problem in a sustainable way. Some key characteristics include:

- A clear social mission that guides every decision
- An innovative approach - doing something differently from what already exists
- A model for generating income or resources to sustain the work over time
- Accountability to the community served, not only to funders or investors
- A belief that ordinary people - not just experts or politicians - can drive meaningful change



Social entrepreneurship ranges from small community cooperatives to large-scale organisations operating across countries. What matters is not the size - it is the orientation. A youth worker who helps three young refugees set up a translation service for new arrivals is practising social entrepreneurship just as surely as someone who founds a national social enterprise.

It is important to actively challenge the idea that social entrepreneurship is only for people with business training or significant capital. The most powerful examples of social entrepreneurship often come from people who simply refused to accept that a problem could not be solved - and who started with what they had.



3.2 Why Social Entrepreneurship Matters in Youth Work

Many of the young people that youth workers support face an accumulation of disadvantages: unemployment, limited access to education, language barriers, discrimination, social isolation and the psychological effects of displacement or poverty. These young people do not need charity - they need opportunity, agency and the recognition that they have something valuable to contribute.

Social entrepreneurship is a powerful response to this need because it does not start from what young people lack. It starts from what they can do. When youth workers use social entrepreneurship as a framework, it shifts the conversation from 'how do we help these young people?' to 'how do we support these young people to help themselves and their communities?' This shift is not merely semantic - it produces fundamentally different outcomes.

Research and practice across Europe consistently show that participation in social entrepreneurship initiatives can:

- Significantly improve young people's self-confidence and sense of personal agency
- Build practical, transferable skills in planning, communication, financial management and leadership
- Create a genuine sense of belonging and meaningful connection to community
- Generate real economic activity and measurable social value
- Provide a pathway to employment and financial independence that does not depend on formal credentials
- Help young people build the social networks and professional contacts that open further opportunities
- Provide documented evidence of competence that supports future education and employment applications



Facilitator Tip: When introducing social entrepreneurship to young people for the first time, avoid leading with the word 'entrepreneurship' - it can feel distant or intimidating, particularly for young people from marginalised backgrounds who may associate it with privilege or privilege. Instead, begin with a concrete problem they care about: 'What is one thing in your neighbourhood or community that you wish was different - and that you think shouldn't be this way?' The social enterprise grows from their answer.



3.3 Supporting Migrants, Refugees and Marginalised Young People

Migrants and refugees often arrive with rich human capital - professional expertise, multilingualism, resilience, cross-cultural knowledge and skills developed in contexts very different from where they now live. Formal employment and education systems frequently fail to recognise this capital, creating the paradox of highly capable people who are officially 'unqualified'. Social entrepreneurship provides an alternative pathway.

For youth workers supporting these groups specifically, social entrepreneurship offers several concrete advantages:

What Social Entrepreneurship Offers

It values skills and knowledge that formal credentials do not capture - cooking, craftsmanship, multilingualism, community leadership, traditional knowledge.

It creates a context for social connection - working towards a shared goal builds authentic relationships across cultural and language differences.

It builds a positive social identity - contributing to community well-being actively counters narratives of dependency or burden.

It generates documentation of real competence - a project, product or service provides tangible evidence that formal systems often deny.

It creates economic activity without requiring work permits or formal employment contracts in the initial stages.

What Youth Workers Need to Do

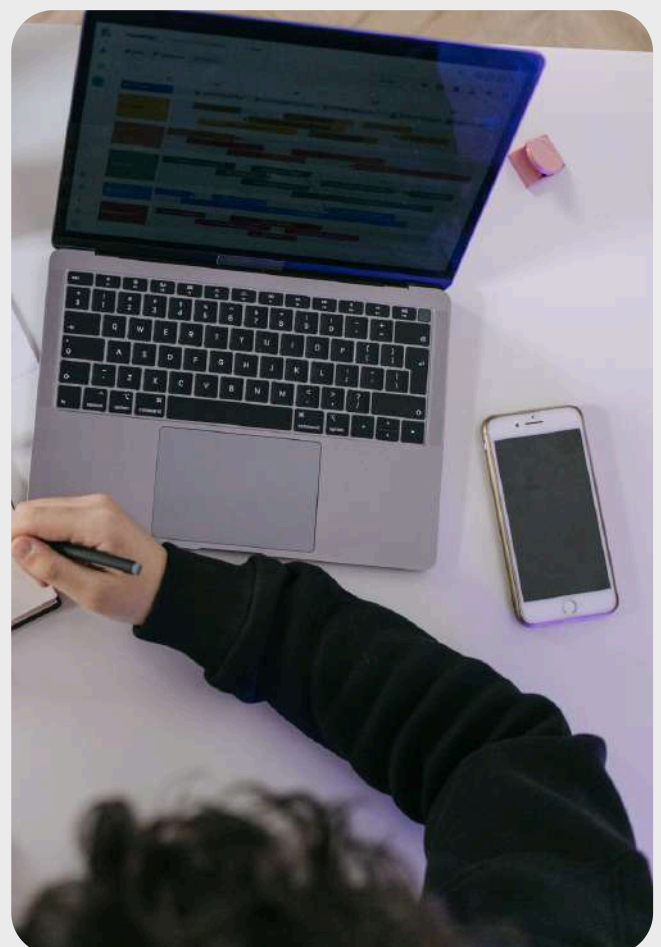
Begin with asset mapping - identify what skills, knowledge, networks and cultural resources participants already bring. Ask before assuming.

Connect participants to local partners - municipalities, businesses, schools and associations can all play a role. Make introductions early.

Be realistic about timescales - building a sustainable social enterprise takes months or years. Support the process, not just the outcome.

Address legal and practical barriers proactively - work status, banking access, language support and documentation all need consideration.

Celebrate every step publicly - recognition at each stage maintains motivation and builds the confidence needed for the next.





3.4 The Social Entrepreneurship Canvas

One of the practical outputs of the EMPOWER activities is the Social Entrepreneurship Canvas - a structured framework that guides youth workers and young people through developing a social enterprise idea from scratch. Adapted from widely-used business model frameworks but oriented specifically toward social mission and community impact, the canvas uses eight guiding questions that move from problem to sustainability.

The canvas can be printed on A3 paper, drawn on a flip chart sheet, or used digitally. It works best in small groups of 3–5 people over 60–90 minutes, with a youth worker or facilitator available to prompt deeper thinking and challenge assumptions.

1. What social problem are we solving? Be specific. What exactly is the problem, and for whom? Avoid generalities. The more precisely you define the problem, the more clearly you can define the solution.	2. Who will benefit from our solution? Define the primary beneficiaries in detail. What do they need? What are the specific barriers they face? Have you asked them what they want?
3. What is our proposed solution? Describe the product, service, programme or platform you will create. What makes it different from what already exists? What is the core value it offers?	4. What resources do we need? List human resources (skills, time, knowledge), physical resources (space, equipment, materials) and financial resources. Crucially: what do you already have?
5. Who are our partners and allies? Which organisations, businesses, institutions or individuals can support, collaborate with or amplify this initiative? Who already cares about this problem?	6. How will we generate income or funding? List possible revenue streams - sales, services, grants, donations, local authority contracts, membership fees. Which are most realistic in your context?
7. How will we measure our impact? Define 3–5 concrete indicators that will tell you whether the initiative is achieving its mission. Combine numbers (how many people reached) with stories (how lives have changed).	8. How will this continue and grow? What does the enterprise look like in one year? In three years? What needs to be in place to make it financially and socially sustainable without depending entirely on grants?



Facilitator Tip: Run the canvas in two distinct phases. In the first 25 minutes, encourage ambitious, creative thinking - nothing is too big or unrealistic at this stage. In the second 25 minutes, facilitate a structured reality check where the group tests each element: 'Is this achievable with the resources we actually have? Have we spoken to the people who will benefit? What is the first concrete step we could take this week?' Both phases are equally important. Groups that skip the second phase produce inspiring but unimplemented ideas.

4. Intercultural Dialogue in Youth Work



4.1 What Is Intercultural Dialogue?



Intercultural Dialogue

Intercultural dialogue is an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds - based on mutual understanding and respect. It goes beyond mere tolerance of difference. It involves genuine curiosity about other ways of seeing and making sense of the world, active and disciplined listening, and the willingness to be genuinely changed by what you hear. The Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008) describes it as essential to managing diversity in democratic societies.



4.2 Why Intercultural Dialogue Matters in Diverse Communities

The communities where EMPOWER partners work are highly diverse. Youth workers regularly encounter young people from many different national, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds - often alongside host-country peers who have had little real exposure to other cultures or perspectives. Without deliberate, structured efforts to build understanding, this diversity can become a source of tension rather than strength.

Research consistently shows that unstructured contact between different groups does not automatically reduce prejudice or build understanding. The 'contact hypothesis' in social psychology specifies important conditions: for contact to improve attitudes, it must be equal-status, cooperative (working toward a shared goal), supported by institutional or social authority, and sustained over time. This is exactly the kind of structured contact that skilled youth workers can design and facilitate.



Challenge	Opportunity for the Youth Worker
Language barriers - participants may not share a fluent common language, making even basic communication effortful	Use visual, physical and creative communication alongside verbal. Design for multiple expression modes from the start. Show explicitly that all voices matter, not just the most verbally fluent.
Unconscious bias - every facilitator and participant carries cultural assumptions they are often unaware of	Name bias explicitly and create exercises that surface it gently (see Activity 4). Make awareness-raising a continuous thread, not a one-off session.
Power imbalances - some groups feel more entitled or permitted to speak and take up space than others	Design activities that actively equalise. Small groups, anonymous input methods and structured turn-taking all help. Be alert to who is consistently quiet.
Fear of saying the wrong thing - especially on sensitive topics such as race, religion, conflict or politics	Model openness yourself. Celebrate genuine questions. Reframe mistakes as learning moments, not failures. Distinguish clearly between intent and impact.
Trauma and difficult past experiences - some participants carry histories that affect how they engage with certain themes	Set a careful, unhurried pace. Never force sharing. Have a clear support plan ready. Consult trauma-informed colleagues in programme design when working with groups who may have experienced violence or displacement.
Different cultural expectations about participation - in some contexts, questioning authority or speaking in a large group is unusual	Explain the non-formal education approach explicitly at the start. Offer multiple modes of participation. Give individual preparation time before group activities. Be patient with initial quietness.



4.4 Creating Inclusive and Respectful Spaces

Creating an environment where intercultural dialogue is genuinely possible - rather than merely claimed as a goal - is the most important skill a facilitator can develop. The following principles are drawn directly from EMPOWER's experience and from research in intercultural education. They are practical, not theoretical.

Start with the person, not the culture

It is tempting to treat cultural background as a ready explanation for behaviour: 'In culture X, people tend to do Y.' This approach, even when well-intentioned, reinforces stereotyping and treats individuals as representatives of a monolithic group rather than as complex people. A more effective and respectful approach is to begin with individual stories and experiences, allowing participants to articulate for themselves what their cultural background means to them - and what it does not mean. Culture shapes us, but it does not determine us.

Build group agreements collaboratively

At the start of any intercultural encounter - even a single session - invest time in co-creating a set of group agreements about how participants will treat each other and the space. Common elements include: active listening (giving full attention to whoever is speaking), respect for different perspectives (assuming good intent even when you disagree), permission to make mistakes (treating errors as learning, not failure), confidentiality (what is shared here stays here), and the right to pass (no one must share more than they are comfortable sharing). When participants create the agreements themselves, they invest in upholding them.

Value diverse modes of expression

Not everyone expresses themselves most powerfully through spoken words in a second or third language. Drawing, movement, music, photography, storytelling and physical objects are all legitimate and potentially more powerful forms of expression for many participants. Designing sessions to include multiple modes of expression - not as accommodations but as the default - ensures that linguistic fluency does not become a proxy for intelligence or depth of insight.

Facilitate, do not adjudicate

Your role as a facilitator in an intercultural space is not to determine who is right, whose culture is more advanced, or what the 'correct' conclusions are. It is to create the conditions in which genuine dialogue is possible. When tensions arise - and in any honest intercultural dialogue, they will - your job is to slow the conversation down, make space for all views to be heard without judgment, and help the group find its own way through the complexity. Resist the urge to resolve ambiguity prematurely. Sitting with not-knowing is often where the deepest learning happens.

Name what is happening in the room

When difficult dynamics emerge - prolonged silence, visible conflict, confusion, palpable discomfort - naming them explicitly, without judgment, can defuse tension and transform the moment into a learning opportunity. 'I notice it's got very quiet. What's happening for people right now?' is often more effective than either pressing on with the agenda or abruptly changing the subject. The ability to observe group dynamics and name them clearly is one of the most valuable facilitation skills to develop.



Intercultural dialogue, when facilitated well, can:

- Reduce fear and mistrust by replacing abstract stereotypes with the reality of specific, individual people and their stories
- Develop empathy - the practised capacity to see, feel and understand the world from a radically different perspective
- Strengthen social cohesion by creating shared experiences, memories and references across cultural lines
- Prepare young people for life, education and work in an increasingly interconnected and diverse world
- Create a foundation of genuine trust that makes cooperation on shared goals possible and sustainable
- Challenge and extend youth workers' own assumptions, expanding their professional capacity



4.3 Challenges and Opportunities

Working across cultures is not straightforward, and youth workers who are honest about this will be significantly more effective than those who assume good intentions are sufficient. The following table maps the most common challenges encountered in intercultural youth work alongside the concrete opportunities each challenge creates for skilled practitioners.

Use intercultural evenings and shared activities intentionally

Intercultural evenings - where participants share food, music, photographs, objects or stories from their home country or culture - are one of the most effective relationship-building tools in a youth worker's repertoire. They work because they are informal, sensory and concrete. A shared meal lowers barriers in ways that a structured discussion rarely achieves. However, intercultural evenings achieve their full potential only when they are followed by explicit, structured reflection: 'What did you discover this evening? What surprised you? What question do you leave with?' Without this reflection, the experience remains pleasant but superficial.



Facilitator Tip: Before any activity involving personal sharing across cultural difference, run a short, playful warm-up activity that is non-threatening and invites light participation. Activities as simple as 'two truths and a lie', 'speed-friending' or 'find someone who...' can transform the group atmosphere and signal clearly that making mistakes is acceptable and that the space is genuinely safe. Five minutes of effective warm-up saves thirty minutes of reluctant engagement later.



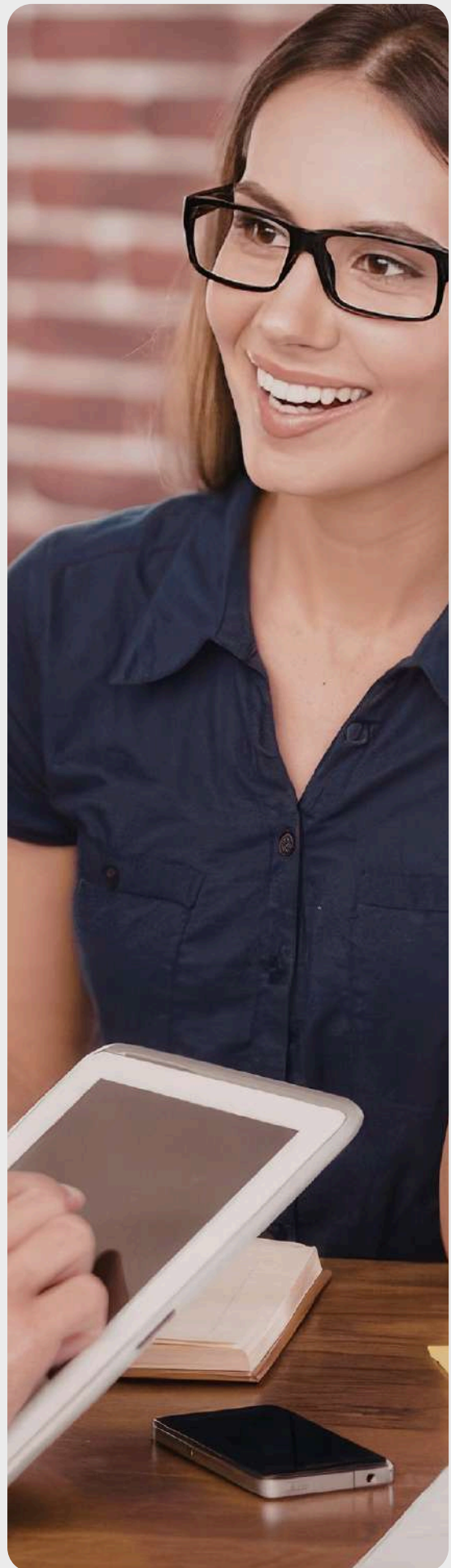
5. Non-Formal Education Methods

5.1 What Is Non-Formal Education?

🔑 Non-Formal Education (NFE)

Non-Formal Education is organised, intentional learning that takes place outside of formal education institutions - schools, universities, training colleges. It is characterised by flexibility, voluntary participation, a focus on the learner's real needs, and the recognition that learning happens through doing, reflecting and interacting with others, not only through instruction. NFE is not the same as informal learning (which is incidental, everyday learning that happens without design). NFE is structured and purposeful - it just operates without formal qualifications or fixed curricula.

Non-formal education has a long history in youth work, community education, scouting and adult learning. In the European context, it gained particular visibility and recognition through the Erasmus+ programme's explicit acknowledgement of youth work as a sector that produces real, valuable, transferable learning - learning that is now documented through tools such as the Youthpass certificate and the Europass.



The argument for NFE in the context of marginalised young people is particularly compelling. Formal education frequently fails these young people - whether because of language barriers, previous educational trauma, cultural mismatch, economic necessity or the sheer pace of formal curricula. NFE, by contrast, starts where learners are. It adapts to them rather than requiring them to adapt to it. This is not a concession - it is sound pedagogy.



5.2 NFE Principles and Learner-Centred Approaches

The following principles underpin all non-formal education practice. Each has direct, practical implications for how you design and facilitate sessions. Understanding them is not merely academic - it changes what you do and how you do it.

Voluntary Participation

Participants choose to be present and choose to engage. This creates the possibility of intrinsic motivation - a qualitatively different kind of engagement from compliance-driven attendance. But it also creates a responsibility: you must earn engagement continuously. Activities that are irrelevant, condescending or that ignore participants' reality will lose the room quickly. This is not a failure of the participants - it is feedback to the facilitator.

Learner-Centredness

The learner's needs, questions, prior experience and current context are the starting point for all design and facilitation decisions - not the facilitator's expertise, not the funder's requirements, not the curriculum document. In practice, this requires ongoing, honest diagnosis of where participants are, genuine flexibility to adapt when the plan is not working, and the humility to recognise that participants often know things the facilitator does not.

Experience-Based Learning

Learning in NFE happens primarily through direct experience, followed by structured reflection. The experiential learning cycle described by theorist David Kolb - experience, reflection, conceptualisation, application - underpins almost every effective NFE activity. The most common failure in inexperienced facilitation is to run excellent activities but to cut the reflection short when time runs out. This inverts the priorities. The reflection is not the ending formality - it is where the learning is consolidated. Protect it.

Participation and Co-Creation

Participants in NFE are not an audience for the facilitator's expertise - they are co-creators of the learning. They bring their own knowledge, lived experience and perspective, which is frequently richer, more contextually accurate and more relevant than anything a facilitator could provide from outside. Designing activities that actively draw on participants' expertise - through peer teaching, case studies from their experience, storytelling and group problem-solving - produces better learning and more respectful relationships.

Non-Competitive Learning Environment

NFE works best when comparison, grading and the fear of being wrong in front of others are minimised. This does not mean avoiding challenge - good NFE challenges participants significantly. It means that mistakes are explicitly reframed as information and learning opportunities rather than failures that carry social cost. This reframing is particularly important when working with young people who have had negative experiences in formal education.

Recognition and Validation

NFE takes seriously the proposition that learning outside formal systems is real, valuable and deserving of recognition. The Youthpass certificate is the primary European mechanism for recognising and documenting NFE competences gained through Erasmus+ activities. Using Youthpass well - as an ongoing reflective tool throughout a project, not just a certificate issued at the end - dramatically increases its value to participants.



5.3 Methods Used in EMPOWER

The following NFE methods were used across both EMPOWER activities. Each method is described here with a practical account of what it involves, what it achieves and how to use it well. Detailed activity plans for each method are in Chapter 6.

Group Work and Team Challenges

Small groups work together to complete a task, solve a problem, or create something within a defined timeframe. Group work is foundational in NFE because it mirrors the collaborative reality of community life and social entrepreneurship, and because it allows quieter participants to contribute without the pressure of whole-group visibility. Effective group work requires: a task with a concrete, visible output; groups that are deliberately mixed (different nationalities, backgrounds, roles and gender); a timeframe that creates gentle productive pressure; and a structured debrief immediately after.

Storytelling

Storytelling is one of the oldest and most effective educational tools available. In EMPOWER, storytelling was used in two distinct ways: personal storytelling (participants sharing experiences from their own lives related to the session's theme) and facilitated storytelling (the facilitator using a narrative to introduce a theme, dilemma or scenario). Personal storytelling builds empathy, gives voice to experience that is otherwise invisible, creates authentic connection, and treats participants' lives as the primary text. It is most effective when: participants are given a specific prompt rather than an open-ended invitation; sharing is explicitly voluntary; the facilitator models openness by sharing something personal first; and there is always time to de-brief carefully after.

Role-Playing and Simulations

In role-play, participants take on a character or perspective different from their own and act out a scenario. This is one of the most powerful NFE methods for developing empathy, perspective-taking and insight into how systems affect individuals. It is also one of the most demanding to facilitate well. Key principles that should never be omitted: always de-role participants after the exercise with a clear physical and verbal signal to 'step back out' of the character; debrief carefully and generously; ensure no participant is asked to play a role that could be humiliating, tokenising or that risks retraumatising; and maintain a light, creative atmosphere around the activity even when the content is serious.

Case Studies

Case studies present a real or fictional scenario related to the session's theme. Participants analyse the situation, identify the key issues and dynamics at play, consider different options and their consequences, and arrive at a recommendation or response. Case studies are particularly effective for practising critical thinking, applying conceptual frameworks to specific situations, and exploring the genuine complexity and ambiguity of social problems. For EMPOWER themes, the most effective case studies were those drawn from the actual communities where participants work - situations they could recognise, care about and bring real experience to.

Peer Learning and Mutual Teaching

In peer learning, participants share knowledge, skills or experience with each other rather than relying entirely on a facilitator. This approach actively equalises the power dynamic in the learning space, recognises that expertise is distributed rather than concentrated, and creates richer engagement from those who teach as well as those who learn - because teaching something requires understanding it at a deeper level. Peer learning works particularly powerfully in intercultural groups, because it foregrounds the reality that different people carry different knowledge, and that no single culture or professional background has all the answers.

Outdoor and Experiential Activities

Learning that takes place in outdoor or physically unusual environments tends to be remembered more vividly, engages participants who find seated verbal activities more difficult, and connects the learning to a concrete spatial experience. During EMPOWER, outdoor activities were used for energisers, team-building and to apply ETS tools being developed in a different context - giving participants a qualitatively different perspective on the material they were working with.



Reflection Sessions and Personal Diaries

Structured reflection is not an optional add-on to NFE practice - it is the mechanism by which experience converts to durable learning. In EMPOWER, every day ended with a group reflection session in which participants discussed the day's learning, and participants were asked to write in their personal diaries during this time. Effective reflection questions go well beyond 'what did we do today?' They ask: What surprised you? What are you still uncertain about? What is one thing you want to do differently as a result of today? How does this connect specifically to your work at home? The diaries participants kept during EMPOWER became the primary source material for this handbook.



5.4 The European Training Strategy (ETS)

EMPOWER used the European Training Strategy (ETS) - a framework developed through collaboration between the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the SALTO-YOUTH network - as the quality framework for all its educational activities. The ETS supports the professional development of youth trainers across Europe and provides a common language, shared tools and a set of methodological principles that can be adapted to different national and organisational contexts.

Within EMPOWER, the ETS shaped the project in three key ways. First, it provided a framework for designing learning that is genuinely responsive to the group - the ETS explicitly encourages facilitators to treat participant feedback not as a courtesy but as essential design data, and to adapt activities in real time based on what they observe. Second, it structured the co-creation of practical ETS tools during both activities - participants developed instruments they could take home and use with their own groups, grounded in what they had learned and tested during EMPOWER. Third, it connected EMPOWER's practice to a broader European ecosystem of youth trainers, giving participants a shared professional language and access to a wider community of practice beyond the immediate project.



6. Practical Activities and Tools

The activities that follow are practical tools for youth workers, facilitators and organisations working with young people in diverse and inclusive learning environments. They are inspired by non-formal education methods and can be used to support social entrepreneurship, intercultural dialogue, participation and community-based action.

Each activity description includes the basic elements needed for implementation: aim, duration, group size, materials, step-by-step process, debriefing questions and facilitator tips. The activities are designed to be adapted according to the context, needs and experience of the group. Facilitators are encouraged to adjust the timing, group size, materials, examples and reflection questions depending on the participants, local realities and available resources.

 Activity 1: Three Things	
Aim	To help participants introduce themselves in a way that moves beyond names and job titles, and to begin exploring cultural identity in a relaxed, non-threatening way. Sets the tone for open dialogue throughout the programme.
Duration	25–35 minutes
Group Size	10–30. Works in any size - use pairs for larger groups, open circle for smaller ones.
Materials	Open space or chairs in a circle. No materials required. Optional: sticky notes for written responses in larger groups.
Steps	1. Ask participants to think silently for 3 minutes about three things: (a) one thing they love or are proud of about where they come from; (b) one thing they find difficult or frustrating about where they come from; (c) one thing they wish people from other countries knew or understood about their culture or background. 2. In pairs or trios, participants share their three things (8–10 min). 3. Open to the whole group: invite volunteers to share one item - especially anything that surprised their conversation partner. 4. Facilitate a 5-minute whole-group debrief using the questions below.
Debrief Questions	What surprised you in what you heard? Were there unexpected similarities between different backgrounds? Did anything challenge an assumption you held? What does this exercise suggest about the gap between what we assume and what is actually true about other cultures?
Facilitator Tips	Go first yourself - your willingness to be open and slightly vulnerable models the level of sharing you are inviting from the group. Accept all contributions with genuine interest. For large or noisy groups, use sticky notes: each person writes one 'thing' on a note and places it on a wall display; participants do a gallery walk to read each other's contributions before discussing. Be attentive to any participant who may find the question about their home context emotionally difficult - some participants may have fled situations of conflict, persecution or profound loss.

Activity 2: Community Needs Mapping

Aim	To help youth workers identify and articulate social needs in their local communities that could be addressed through social entrepreneurship. Develops systems thinking and grounds all subsequent idea-generation work in real local context.
Duration	50–65 minutes
Group Size	12–24, in groups of 4–6
Materials	Large sheets of paper (A2 or flip chart - one per group), markers in at least two colours, sticky notes in two colours, blu-tack or tape.
Steps	1. Give each group a large sheet of paper. Ask them to draw a rough map of their local community - not accurate, just recognisable. Key landmarks, streets, institutions. (5 min)2. Using sticky notes (colour 1), participants mark locations on the map where they see unmet social needs - places where people are struggling or where gaps are visible. (10 min)3. Using sticky notes (colour 2), they mark existing community strengths and assets - places or people already making a positive difference. (8 min)4. Groups discuss: which two or three needs feel most significant? Which feel most connected to existing strengths? (10 min)5. Groups identify the ONE need most amenable to a social enterprise approach and explain why. (5 min)6. Groups present their maps. (10–15 min)7. Whole-group debrief.
Debrief Questions	Were there needs appearing on every group's map? What does this suggest about shared challenges? What surprised you in the 'strengths' section - what resources existed that you hadn't fully seen? Which identified need feels most urgent? Which feels most feasible? How do we decide where to focus limited energy?
Facilitator Tips	Encourage participants to think from the perspective of community members who are most marginalised - not only from their own experience as youth workers. If participants are from different countries, ask each group to include needs from multiple national contexts to generate rich cross-country comparison. Post the maps visibly throughout the rest of the programme - they provide a useful anchor for all subsequent activities and remind participants of the real-world stakes of the work.

Activity 3: Social Entrepreneurship Idea Canvas

Aim	To guide participants through developing a basic social enterprise concept grounded in real community needs. Practises structured thinking, creative problem-solving and collaborative decision-making. Produces a concrete output participants can take forward.
Duration	70–90 minutes
Group Size	12–24, in groups of 3–5
Materials	Printed Idea Canvas worksheets (based on the 8 questions in Chapter 3) or draw the canvas on a large sheet. Pens and markers. Sticky notes for the pitch debrief.
Steps	1. Introduce the canvas briefly - it is a structured thinking tool, not a business plan. The goal is to explore an idea rigorously, not to produce a finished product. (5 min)2. Groups choose one social need - from the Needs Mapping exercise or a new one they care about. (3 min)3. Groups work through the canvas, spending approximately 5–8 minutes per question. Facilitator circulates, asking deepening questions rather than providing answers. (40–50 min)4. Groups prepare a 3-minute pitch covering: the problem, the solution, who benefits, and how it will be sustained. (8 min)5. Pitch carousel: each group pitches to the others. Observers give structured feedback: one thing they found compelling, one question they have. (15 min)6. Whole-group debrief.
Debrief Questions	Which canvas questions were most difficult and why? What assumptions did your group make that you'd want to test before moving forward? What resources does your idea depend on that you don't currently have? What would a realistic first step look like this week - not in six months?
Facilitator Tips	Run explicitly in two phases: creative phase (anything goes, think big) then critical phase (test assumptions, identify gaps). Signal the shift between phases explicitly. Avoid the common trap where groups spend all their time on the 'problem' and rush through 'sustainability' - sustainability is where most social enterprise ideas fail. Encourage simplicity: the first version of a social enterprise idea should be achievable, not ambitious. Complexity and ambition can grow once momentum is established.

Activity 4: The Waiting Room

Aim	To help participants experience and reflect on how bureaucratic exclusion and systemic indifference feel from the inside. Develops empathy for young people navigating institutions not designed with them in mind - and builds motivation to change professional practice.
Duration	45–55 minutes
Group Size	10–20 participants
Materials	Role cards prepared in advance by the facilitator (see Facilitator Tips), chairs in waiting-room configuration, a desk for the 'receptionist'.
Steps	1. Brief participants: they will take part in a short role-play set in a local job centre or social services office. Distribute role cards - each describes a character: background, situation and one specific challenge (e.g. 'You are 23 years old, recently arrived. Your local language is limited and you are missing one required document. You have been waiting for two hours'). Allow 2 minutes to read. (3 min)2. Participants step into their characters and enter the waiting room. The facilitator plays a bureaucratic receptionist - polite and professional, but bound by rules that create constant, minor, realistic obstacles. (10–12 min)3. Stop the scene with a clear signal. Ask participants to physically 'step out of their character' - stand up, shake their hands, say their own name aloud. (2 min)4. Lead the debrief immediately, giving it at least 20 minutes.
Debrief Questions	How did you feel during the role-play? Was there a specific moment when you wanted to give up or leave? What did the system - not the individual receptionist - do that made participation most difficult? What would have changed your experience? How does this connect directly to young people you work with? What will you do differently in your own practice as a result of this?
Facilitator Tips	Write role cards with dignity - no character should be a caricature or reduced to a single dimension. Each character should have at least one strength or resource, not only challenges. Never omit the de-roling step - leaving participants in character after emotionally demanding role-play can cause real distress. Have a clear plan for supporting any participant who becomes visibly upset. The debrief is where the most powerful learning from this exercise happens - it needs time, care and a genuinely open facilitation approach. Do not run this exercise on the first day of any programme.

Activity 5: The Journey

Aim	To develop empathy through the sharing of personal journeys. To create authentic connection between participants from different backgrounds, and to help youth workers understand the importance of listening to lived experience rather than assuming they already know it.
Duration	55–70 minutes
Group Size	8–20 participants
Materials	Blank A4 paper (two sheets per person), pens, drawing materials. Optional: gentle background music during the drawing phase.
Steps	1. Ask each participant to draw a 'journey line' on their paper - a line representing their personal journey to this point in their life. Peaks = positive moments or turning points; dips = difficult or challenging periods. Key people, places or events can be labelled. Give 8–10 minutes in silence. (10 min)2. In pairs, each participant shares their journey line, walking their partner through 2–3 key moments. The partner listens without interrupting - their role is to understand, not to advise or compare. (15 min)3. Pairs join to form groups of four. Each person introduces their partner's journey (not their own) in 2 minutes. The partner can clarify or add, but the introducer leads. (16 min)4. Groups identify one shared experience, emotion or turning point that appears across all four journeys. (5 min)5. Whole-group sharing and debrief. (10 min)
Debrief Questions	What did it feel like to have someone else tell your story? What did the introducer understand particularly well? What did they miss or reinterpret? Were there discoveries in what you heard from people with very different backgrounds? What does this tell us about listening directly rather than relying on assumptions? How can we apply this to our work with young people?
Facilitator Tips	Make participation fully voluntary at every stage - participants decide what to draw, what to share and how much. Some participants may have experienced significant trauma. Frame the exercise around the journey as a whole rather than dwelling on difficult moments. The drawing step is important: it gives participants private reflection time before sharing, and the visual object makes sharing easier and more concrete. This exercise builds unusually strong bonds between participants - use it mid-programme once the group has some existing trust.

Activity 6: Empathy Circle

Aim	To practise empathic, active listening - a skill foundational to both good youth work and effective social entrepreneurship. To distinguish between listening in order to understand and listening in order to respond, and to help participants experience the difference from both sides.
Duration	35–45 minutes
Group Size	10–24 participants, in groups of 4
Materials	Chairs in groups of four. No other materials required. Optional: a small object as a 'talking piece'.
Steps	1. Introduce empathic listening: the goal is to listen so fully that you can reflect back what the speaker said - their feeling and experience, not just the facts. Distinguish clearly from advice-giving, problem-solving or relating the speaker's story to your own experience. (5 min)2. In groups of four, assign roles: Speaker, Empathic Listener, Observer 1, Observer 2. These roles rotate.3. The Speaker talks for 3 minutes on a prompt related to the programme theme (e.g. 'Tell me about a moment when a young person you worked with overcame a significant barrier').4. The Listener responds for 2 minutes - without judgment, without advice, reflecting back what they understood about the speaker's experience and feeling.5. Observer 1 notes what the Listener did particularly well. Observer 2 notes one thing that could have deepened the empathy further.6. Short feedback round (2 min), then roles rotate. Continue until everyone has been the Speaker.7. Whole-group debrief.
Debrief Questions	What was difficult about listening without preparing your response? What did you notice about how it felt to be genuinely, fully listened to? In our daily work, where do we tend to give advice or relate to our own experience when listening would be more valuable? How can empathic listening specifically help us support marginalised young people more effectively?
Facilitator Tips	Model the exercise first with a co-facilitator before participants attempt it. The most common failure is that 'listeners' slide into offering advice or relating the story to their own experience. Gently and clearly redirect when this happens during practice rounds - name it as feedback for everyone, not criticism of the individual. Keep the atmosphere warm and supportive: this exercise can feel exposing, and people need to feel safe to try and make mistakes.

Activity 7: Youthpass Reflection

Aim	To help participants identify and clearly articulate the competences they have developed or strengthened through the project, and to prepare them to complete their Youthpass certificate. Practises the metacognitive skill of thinking carefully and specifically about how and what we learn.
Duration	35–45 minutes, then ongoing throughout the programme
Group Size	Any number, working individually then in pairs
Materials	Printed reference sheet listing the 8 Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, pens, blank paper or Youthpass diary sheets.
Steps	1. Introduce the 8 Key Competences briefly: communication in mother tongue; multilingual; mathematical, science and technology; digital; learning to learn; social and civic; entrepreneurship; cultural awareness and expression. (5 min)2. Participants individually rate themselves on each competence: Where were you at the start of this project? Where are you now? (Scale of 1–5.) (8 min)3. Each participant identifies two or three competences where they feel most growth, and writes one specific example of a moment or activity that contributed to that growth. (8 min)4. In pairs, each participant shares their examples. The partner listens, then asks one follow-up question to help deepen and clarify the articulation. (8 min)5. Participants draft their Youthpass learning description using the prompt: 'During EMPOWER, I developed [competence] by [specific activity], which means I can now [specific capability].' (10 min)6. Optional: share two or three examples with the whole group.
Debrief Questions	Was it easy or difficult to identify and name your own learning? What helped you notice growth? What do you still want to develop beyond this project? How will you use these competences in your work when you return home? How will you help the young people you work with identify and articulate their own non-formal learning?
Facilitator Tips	Direct participants to the official Youthpass guidance at youthpass.eu for the full description of each competence. This activity significantly deepens in value when participants have been keeping a daily diary throughout the project, because they can refer back to specific moments and activities. Be patient - many participants are not accustomed to articulating their non-formal learning formally. The language takes practice. The exercise is most powerful at the end of a programme, but works best when the Youthpass has been introduced on day one and woven into daily reflection throughout.

Tool: Local Action Plan Template

Use this template at the end of a training or seminar to help participants plan specific, concrete steps they will take when they return to their organisations and communities. The template is intentionally simple - the goal is commitment and specificity, not comprehensiveness

Name: _____ Organisation: _____ Date of completion: _____

What will I do?(Specific action)	With whom and by when?	How will I know it worked?(Evidence of impact)

My biggest takeaway from this project:

One thing I will share with my colleagues or team:

Support or resources I will need:

7. Good Practices and Reflections



7.1 Good Practices

The following good practices are inspired by approaches discussed and explored during the EMPOWER project. They are presented as practical examples that youth workers and organisations can adapt to their own local realities. They are not meant to be copied exactly, but used as sources of inspiration for designing inclusive, participatory and community-based youth work activities.

Good Practice 1: Story Maps – Making Personal Journeys Visible

Description

Story Maps are a creative method that helps young people reflect on important moments, places, people and emotions that shaped their personal journey. Participants create a visual map of their experience, not only in a geographical sense, but also emotionally and socially. The maps can then be shared in small, facilitated groups, where participants listen to each other and explore common experiences, challenges and strengths. This method is especially useful in intercultural groups, where participants may have different backgrounds, languages and life experiences. It allows young people to express themselves visually before speaking, which can reduce pressure and make sharing easier.

Why it works

The method combines drawing, reflection and dialogue. It supports empathy, active listening and mutual understanding. It also helps participants see identity and migration as complex human experiences, rather than abstract topics.

Adaptable for

Youth groups, intercultural workshops, activities with migrants or refugees, community dialogue sessions and inclusion-focused training activities.

Facilitator tip

Participation should always be voluntary. Participants should not be asked to share personal or sensitive experiences unless they feel comfortable doing so.

Good Practice 2: The Social Idea Market

Description

The Social Idea Market is an interactive activity where young people present ideas for small social initiatives in a simple and informal way. Instead of a formal presentation, each group creates a “market stall” using posters, drawings or a simple idea canvas. Other participants, youth workers or invited community members visit each stall, ask questions and give feedback.

The activity helps young people practise presenting ideas, receiving constructive feedback and thinking about how their ideas could respond to real community needs.

Why it works

The market format makes pitching more accessible and less stressful. It creates a dynamic environment where participants can learn from each other, improve their ideas and feel that their voices are taken seriously.

Adaptable for

Social entrepreneurship workshops, youth participation activities, local community events, employability sessions and project idea development.

Facilitator tip

Keep the format simple. The aim is not to create a perfect business plan, but to help young people move from an idea to a first practical step.





Good Practice 3: Research-Based Youth Work

Description

Research-based youth work encourages participants to begin with real evidence before designing an activity or initiative. Young people can explore local needs by interviewing community members, speaking with local organisations, observing community spaces or reviewing available information about the issue they want to address.

After collecting information, participants present their findings and use them to design more relevant and realistic activities.

Why it works

When participants investigate the issue themselves, they understand the community better and feel stronger ownership of the solution. This approach also develops useful skills such as interviewing, observation, analysis, teamwork and presentation.

Adaptable for

Community needs analysis, social entrepreneurship projects, youth-led initiatives, local action planning and civic participation activities.

Facilitator tip

The research process does not need to be complex. Even a few interviews or a short community observation can help participants design more meaningful activities.



Good Practice 4: Inclusive Workshop Enterprise

Description

An inclusive workshop enterprise is a practical activity where young people create real products or services with social value. This can include handmade items, community gardening, repair workshops, recycling initiatives, creative products, food-related activities or other small-scale initiatives connected to local needs.

The focus is not only on production, but also on learning, cooperation, responsibility and inclusion. Young people can take different roles according to their strengths, such as planning, creating, communicating, organising or presenting the initiative.

Why it works

Real tasks create confidence and dignity. When young people produce something useful or meaningful, they can see the value of their contribution. This is especially important for young people who may have experienced exclusion, low confidence or limited access to opportunities.

Adaptable for

Youth centres, vocational activities, inclusion programmes, social entrepreneurship workshops and community-based initiatives.

Facilitator tip

Start small. It is better to begin with one simple product, one clear target group or one local partner than to create an initiative that is too complex to maintain.

Good Practice 5: Digital Skills as a Bridge to Social Entrepreneurship

Description

Digital skills can be used as a bridge to social entrepreneurship when they are connected to a real purpose. Instead of teaching digital tools in an abstract way, participants can use them to develop a simple online presence for a social idea. This could include creating a social media page, preparing a short campaign, designing a poster, writing online content or planning digital communication for a local initiative.

Each digital skill is immediately connected to a practical entrepreneurial or community-based task.

Why it works

Young people are more motivated to learn digital skills when they understand how those skills can help them promote something meaningful. The approach also connects digital literacy with creativity, communication, entrepreneurship and active participation.

Adaptable for

Digital youth work, social entrepreneurship activities, communication workshops, employability sessions and local awareness campaigns.

Facilitator tip

Use tools that participants can access easily, such as smartphones, free design platforms or simple social media formats. The aim is accessibility, not technical perfection.



Good Practice 6: Research-to-Practice Exchange

Description

Research-to-practice exchange brings together youth workers, educators, community actors or researchers to discuss a specific issue affecting young people. The aim is to connect practical experience with evidence, reflection and shared learning.

A session can begin with a short input on a topic, such as inclusion, migration, youth unemployment, discrimination or participation. Participants then work in groups to discuss what this information means for their own youth work practice and what actions could be implemented locally.

Why it works

Youth work often benefits when practice and evidence are connected. Practitioners bring real experience from the field, while research or structured knowledge can help them better understand patterns, challenges and possible solutions.

Adaptable for

Youth work seminars, training courses, local stakeholder meetings, organisational learning sessions and community development initiatives.

Facilitator tip

Keep the language accessible. The aim is not academic discussion, but practical learning that youth workers and organisations can use.





7.2 Participant Reflections

The following reflections were gathered from EMPOWER participants' daily diaries and end-of-activity evaluations. They are presented here - anonymised and lightly edited for readability - because they capture dimensions of the learning experience that project reports and evaluations rarely reach: the human experience of being changed by an encounter with difference.

'I arrived thinking I knew quite a lot about social entrepreneurship - I have been running youth projects for eight years. By the end of day one, I realised I had been thinking about it from entirely the wrong direction. I was thinking about what we could create. The project helped me think about who we were creating it for - and how that changes absolutely everything about the design.'

- Youth worker, Romania

'What I will take home is not a method or a framework. It is a question I had never really asked before: what do the young people I work with actually need, rather than what I think they need? I have been guessing - sometimes correctly, often not. This week helped me see the difference, and it humbled me.'

- Youth leader, Croatia

'The moment that stays with me: a participant from a country I had barely thought about before this week told my story back to me - the loneliness, the determination, the moments of wanting to give up and deciding not to. She got so much of it right. I realised that borders are constructions. The deepest things are shared.'

- Youth worker, Greece

'As a youth worker, I have taken part in several international learning activities, but EMPOWER stood out because of the quality and consistency of the reflection process. Every evening, while writing in my learning diary, I realised something new - something I had not noticed during the busy flow of the day. This experience will influence the way I design my own youth work activities, especially by giving more space to reflection, personal learning and meaningful dialogue.'

- Youth worker, Bosnia and Herzegovina

'I arrived with a vague idea for a social enterprise that I had been turning over for two years without making progress. I leave with a completed canvas, a plan for a first customer conversation next week, and three colleagues across three countries who want to collaborate on the next stage. That feels extraordinary - but actually it is what happens when you put the right people together with enough time and the right structured support.'

- Youth worker, Albania

'What shifted for me: I have always known intellectually that the young people I work with have strengths. But this week I saw it from the outside. The creativity, the resilience, the refusal to accept that things cannot be different - these are exactly the qualities that social entrepreneurship needs. I just needed to be in a room where those qualities were visible and valued.'

- Youth worker, Türkiye



7.3 Lessons Learned from the Project

Following both activities, all six partner organisations participated in a structured joint reflection to identify the project's key lessons - what worked, what could have been done better, and what they would do differently in a future project. These lessons are offered honestly, as starting points for continued improvement rather than as claims of definitive success.

1. Context is content. The choice to hold the seminar in Kastoria - a Greek city directly affected by migration flows - and the training course in Korçë, Albania - a country navigating its own European integration - was deliberately pedagogical. Participants had direct access to the realities they were discussing. Future projects should treat location as a core design decision, not a logistical one.
2. Trust is the prerequisite, not an outcome. In intercultural groups with diverse histories and experiences, trust does not come automatically and cannot be assumed. Every programme, regardless of its stated objectives, should treat the first day as almost entirely devoted to relationship-building. Content delivered before trust exists rarely reaches the people it is intended for.
3. Reflection is not optional - it is the mechanism. Participants who engaged consistently and seriously with daily diary writing and group reflection sessions reported significantly richer and more durable learning at the end of the project. Reflection time should be protected as vigorously as session time. When programmes run short, reflection is frequently the first thing cut - and the most expensive cut to make in terms of learning outcomes.
4. Heterogeneity is not a challenge to be managed - it is the resource. The most productive and generative moments in both EMPOWER activities came from the collision of genuinely different perspectives, professional experiences, cultural assumptions and personal histories. Deliberately diverse groups, well-facilitated, consistently outperform homogeneous ones in the quality of thinking they produce.
5. Follow-up determines real impact. Skills and tools developed during a week-long mobility activity only become real community impact when participants implement them at home, and only when that implementation is supported. Future EMPOWER-type projects should build in structured follow-up mechanisms - peer accountability pairs, online check-ins, a follow-up reporting obligation - as core programme elements rather than afterthoughts.
6. Small and informal are underrated. Several of the most significant learning moments across both activities were unplanned: a conversation over dinner, a late-evening exchange between two participants from very different countries, a moment of unexpected empathy in a quiet corridor. Programme design should explicitly protect informal time and resist the pressure to fill every hour with structured content.

8.

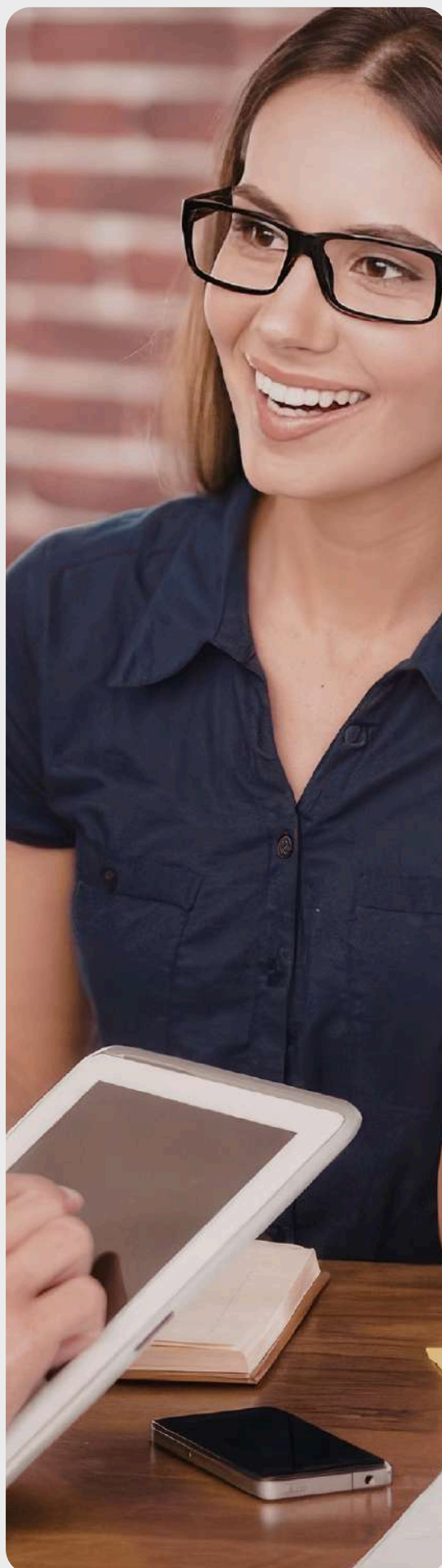
Recommendations for Youth Workers

The recommendations that follow emerge directly from EMPOWER's experience across six countries, two intensive activities and the collective reflection of 48 youth workers and their supporting organisations. They are written for practitioners - people who work with young people in real communities, with real constraints, real resources and real relationships. We have tried to make them concrete, honest about difficulty and complexity, and genuinely applicable to the daily realities of youth work.

How to Support Marginalised Young People Effectively

Start from assets, not deficits

The dominant framing in most policy documents, funding applications and even well-intentioned youth work programmes positions marginalised young people - especially migrants and refugees - primarily in terms of what they lack: language, documentation, qualifications, local networks. This deficit framing, even when genuinely motivated by care, consistently undermines the very confidence, agency and identity that social inclusion requires. It also means that youth workers frequently miss the most valuable resource in the room: the participants themselves.



Begin every new relationship and every new programme with an explicit asset-mapping exercise. What does this person know? What can they do? What languages do they speak - and what worlds does that open? What have they survived, and what does that say about their resilience? What do they care deeply about? The answers will almost always be richer and more surprising than any needs assessment would suggest. And they provide the actual foundation for everything that follows.

Address practical barriers proactively - and systematically

Transport costs, childcare responsibilities, language barriers, shift-working hours, irregular documentation status, lack of digital access, social anxiety in new environments- these are not secondary concerns to be dealt with once the 'real' programme is designed. For many marginalised young people, they are the primary reason for non-participation. Youth workers who consistently reach the hardest-to-reach groups treat logistics with the same rigour and creativity they apply to pedagogy.

Before designing any programme, map the specific practical barriers that your particular target group faces - through conversation with them, not through assumption - and build concrete solutions into the programme design from the start. This may mean providing transport subsidies, running sessions at non-standard times, offering on-site childcare, providing translated materials, working through community intermediaries who already hold participants' trust, or starting with one-to-one relationship-building before group activities.

Build trust through consistency, care and radical transparency

Young people who have experienced discrimination, institutional failure, repeated disappointment or displacement do not extend trust quickly or easily. This is not a character flaw or a lack of motivation - it is the entirely rational consequence of repeated experiences where trust was extended and broken. Youth workers sometimes misinterpret this careful, protective caution as disengagement or passivity. It is neither.

Trust is built through very specific, repeatable behaviours. It is built through consistency - doing precisely what you said you would do, every single time. It is built through small, genuine acts of attention and care - remembering something personal, following up on something mentioned in passing. It is built through radical transparency - explaining the real purpose of activities and decisions, not the version that 'sounds good'. And it is built through time. There is no shortcut. Design your programmes to include it explicitly.

Create genuine agency - not tokenistic participation

One of the most pervasive and damaging forms of exclusion is the systematic removal of meaningful choice. Young people who have experienced the asylum process, the social welfare system or remedial education frequently describe a shared experience: being processed by people and institutions that claimed to know what was best for them, without ever genuinely asking. Everything was decided for them. The decisions were framed as help.

NFE works - when it works - because it restores real choice. But this is only true when the choice on offer is genuine rather than tokenistic. Offering participants a choice between two pre-determined options in a pre-determined curriculum is not participation. Genuine participation means offering participants real decisions about what is explored, how activities are structured, what success looks like and how the group works together. When young people sense that their input actually shapes what happens, the quality of their engagement transforms.

Celebrate small wins publicly and consistently

For young people whose contributions have been systematically undervalued, ignored or explicitly denied, public recognition of even small achievements can be disproportionately powerful. The transformation this produces is not because young people are so easily pleased - it is because recognition addresses a deep and legitimate hunger for acknowledgement as a capable, contributing person.

This does not require formal ceremonies or expensive recognition events. It requires attention: noticing specifically when someone does something well, naming it specifically and publicly, and creating regular structured opportunities for participants to share their progress and be witnessed by others. Building this practice into every session - not as an afterthought but as a designed element - maintains momentum and reinforces a narrative of capability that many participants urgently need.



How to Integrate Social Entrepreneurship into Local Youth Work

Start with a real problem - not with entrepreneurship

The single most effective way to introduce social entrepreneurship to young people who have never encountered the concept is not to introduce it at all - at least not initially. Instead, start with a problem. A concrete, specific problem in the community that at least some participants genuinely care about and find intolerable. 'What is one thing in your neighbourhood or community that you wish was different - and that you think shouldn't be this way?' From that conversation, the social enterprise emerges as the tool, not the objective. This sequence produces genuine motivation that abstract introductions to 'social entrepreneurship' rarely create.

Make the first step genuinely small

One of the most consistent failure patterns in social entrepreneurship education is the gap between the ambition of an idea developed in a workshop and the resources, time and connections available to implement it. Participants leave workshops inspired and then discover that the distance between 'idea' and 'first action' is much greater than anticipated. This gap kills momentum and can reinforce a narrative of failure. Bridge it deliberately.

End every idea-development session by asking: 'What is the smallest possible first step you could take this week - not in six months - with the resources you actually have right now?' A youth worker who talks to three community members about a problem they identified is more likely to eventually build a functional social enterprise than one who produces an ambitious canvas but takes no action. Momentum is built through doing, not through planning.

Build local partnerships before you need them

Social enterprises do not operate in isolation - they depend on relationships with suppliers, customers, collaborators, advisers, mentors and supporters. Helping participants identify and begin building these relationships early - before they even have a fully formed idea - is one of the highest-value things a youth worker can do. Local businesses, schools, faith organisations, municipal departments, community associations and cultural institutions are all potential partners. Map them before your programme begins, and facilitate introductions deliberately, not ad hoc.

Treat failure as data - and design for it explicitly

The fear of failure is among the most significant barriers to entrepreneurial action for young people who have limited experience of being supported to try, fail and try again safely. This fear is learned - it is the product of educational systems and social contexts that treat failure as evidence of incapacity. Unlearning it requires deliberate practice.

Design your programmes to include safe, structured opportunities to fail small and reflect on what the failure reveals. Share examples of social enterprises that failed initially and then adapted to succeed. Create a culture in which asking 'what didn't work and why?' is as normal and as valued as asking 'what did work?' A programme that normalises failure is one that makes entrepreneurship genuinely accessible.



How to Promote Intercultural Understanding in Practice

Create sustained, structured contact - not one-off events

A single intercultural evening, however thoughtfully designed, produces novelty and warmth but rarely produces lasting change in attitudes, behaviours or relationships. The research is consistent on this point: what produces genuine intercultural understanding is sustained contact over time - contact that is equal-status, cooperative, supported and repeated. If your organisation can only offer single events, design them as beginnings and build in explicit next steps that maintain contact between participants beyond the event itself.

Go deeper than food and festival

Cultural exchange through food, music, costume and celebration is a valuable and effective starting point. It lowers barriers, creates warmth and makes diversity tangible and positive. But it can also stay permanently on the surface, reinforcing a version of multiculturalism that treats culture as a collection of exotic customs - interesting, colourful and ultimately unthreatening - rather than as a complex living reality that shapes how people understand justice, authority, family, time and knowledge.

Build on cultural exchange activities by moving deliberately into deeper territory. After the shared meal: 'What does this food mean in your family - what occasions is it connected to? What does that tell us about what your family values? What would be lost if the next generation didn't make it?' The goal is to move from the object to the meaning, from the custom to the value, from the surface to the depth.

Name discrimination and prejudice directly

Avoiding the topics of discrimination, racism, xenophobia and cultural prejudice because they feel too fraught or divisive is a choice with real consequences. Marginalised young people - and the youth workers who work alongside them - live these realities every day. The consistent, deliberate avoidance of these topics in 'safe' professional spaces sends an implicit message: either the problems are not real, or this space is not safe enough to discuss them. Neither is acceptable.

There are excellent, tested activities for exploring prejudice and discrimination in ways that are simultaneously honest and safe (Activity 4 in this handbook is one). Use them. Prepare them carefully, debrief them thoroughly, and be willing to stay in the discomfort of genuine complexity rather than resolving it prematurely into easy lessons.

How to Adapt Activities for Different Groups

Every group is different, and the activities in Chapter 6 are starting points, not fixed prescriptions. The following principles can guide effective adaptation:

Literacy and Language

Never assume literacy in the working language - or in any language. Build visual, physical and creative alternatives into every activity as the default rather than the exception. Allow drawing, gesture and physical demonstration as alternatives to writing wherever possible. Pair participants strategically so those with stronger working-language skills can support those with less - but monitor this carefully to ensure the same people are not always cast as 'helpers' and the same people as 'needing help'.

Trauma Sensitivity

When working with participants who have experienced significant trauma - war, forced displacement, domestic violence, abuse, profound loss - avoid without professional support any activities that recreate traumatic dynamics, even analogically. Consult with a trauma-informed practitioner before designing programmes for groups where significant trauma histories are likely. Prioritise choice, safety and participant-controlled pacing above all else. Have a clear, communicated plan for supporting any participant who becomes distressed during a session.

Physical Accessibility

Check all venues for full physical accessibility before confirming them for events. Adapt physical and movement-based activities so that participants with mobility limitations, visual impairments, chronic fatigue or other physical considerations can participate fully and equally - not in a modified, lesser version. Ask participants directly and specifically what adaptations they need rather than assuming based on visible characteristics.

Energy and Pacing

Match the type of activity to the group's energy and the time of day. High-energy, physical activities work well in the morning and immediately after lunch. Reflective and emotionally demanding activities are most productive in the late afternoon. Never run the same format - seated discussion, small group work, movement, individual writing - for more than 45 minutes without a deliberate shift. Energisers are not optional extras or time-fillers. They are pedagogical tools that reset the group's capacity to engage.

9. Conclusion

Key Messages

The EMPOWER project has demonstrated, across six countries and two intensive professional development activities, that social entrepreneurship and intercultural dialogue - when delivered through high-quality non-formal education - are genuinely transformative tools for youth work. The transformation happens at multiple levels simultaneously: in individual youth workers who leave with new skills, perspectives and networks; in their organisations, which benefit from enhanced capacity and new approaches; and ultimately in the communities and young people they serve.

The following key messages synthesise what the collaboration, design, implementation, reflection and honest evaluation have taught the EMPOWER partnership.

1. Youth workers are agents of change - not service providers

The framing matters enormously. Youth workers who understand themselves as change agents - rather than deliverers of pre-designed services to passive recipients - approach their work with a fundamentally different orientation. They ask better questions, build different relationships, take more initiative and create more durable outcomes. EMPOWER was designed to reinforce this identity and give it practical content.

2. Social entrepreneurship is accessible to everyone - it begins with a problem

No business degree, no significant capital, no established professional network is required. What social entrepreneurship requires is curiosity, commitment, the capacity to listen carefully to community need, and the willingness to try something, observe what happens and adapt. All of these capacities can be cultivated through good youth work. All of them were present in EMPOWER's participants from day one.

3. Diversity is not a challenge to be managed - it is the project's most valuable resource

The richest and most generative moments in EMPOWER arose from the genuine collision of different perspectives, cultural assumptions, professional experiences and personal histories. Carefully designed diversity - of background, culture, professional role, age and experience - consistently produces better thinking, more creative solutions and more honest reflection than homogeneous groups. This is not an equality principle imposed from outside. It is good pedagogy.

4. Non-formal education works - when it is genuinely non-formal

NFE is not simply less formal, less demanding or less rigorous than formal education. Done well - with skilled facilitation, careful design, genuine responsiveness to the group, and committed investment in reflection - it is more demanding, more adaptable and more likely to produce durable, transferable learning. The condition is that it must actually be learner-centred, not just labelled as such.

5. Networks are as valuable as any formal output

The relationships built between youth workers during EMPOWER will outlast the project by years. They will generate future collaborations, future funding applications, peer learning partnerships, informal support and knowledge exchange across national boundaries. Building in deliberate time and structure for relationship formation is not a soft programme element - it is a core, measurable outcome.

6. Reflection is the engine of learning - not the optional closing ceremony

Experience without structured reflection does not reliably produce learning. It produces experiences. The mechanism by which direct experience converts into insight, and insight into changed practice, is structured, consistent, guided reflection - in personal diaries, in small groups and in the whole group. If one lesson from this handbook reaches practitioners, let it be this: protect reflection time with the same vigour you protect session time. It is not the ending. It is the point.



A Final Word

This handbook began with the diaries of 48 youth workers from six countries - their observations, questions, breakthroughs and honest confusions. It ends with an invitation to those who read it to add to that record: with their own adaptations of the activities, their own discoveries in implementing the approaches, their own questions and their own answers from the field.

Youth work at its best is a continuously learning practice. It is not a set of techniques to be applied mechanically, but a relationship-centred, context-sensitive, intellectually rigorous way of working with people at crucial moments in their lives. The tools and approaches gathered in this handbook are resources for that practice - not substitutes for the professional judgment, genuine care and ongoing reflection that give them life.

The young people who most need youth work at its best - those most at risk of being excluded, forgotten or systematically underestimated - deserve practitioners who are continuously learning, continuously challenged and continuously supported in their development. This is the kind of practice that EMPOWER set out to cultivate. We hope this handbook plays some meaningful part in making it more possible, more widespread and more sustainable.

The work described in this handbook does not end with the EMPOWER project. The partner organisations continue to apply, adapt and build on the approaches developed together. The network EMPOWER built continues to grow. If you are reading this handbook and you are not yet part of that community, we invite you to reach out to any of the partner organisations listed here. The most valuable thing about a network is that it grows when people join it.





How to Continue Your Learning

This handbook is one resource among many. The following are recommended as next steps for practitioners who want to deepen their engagement with the themes explored in EMPOWER:

- The Youthpass guide and competence framework are freely available at youthpass.eu. Using Youthpass seriously - not only as a certificate but as a reflective tool woven into every project day - transforms the depth and quality of learning documentation.
- The SALTO-YOUTH resource centre (salto-youth.net) is the most comprehensive European library of non-formal education tools, activities, training courses and methodological resources. It is free, searchable by theme and target group, and updated regularly.
- The T-Kit series, developed by the Council of Europe, provides in-depth guidance on youth work themes including social entrepreneurship, intercultural learning, project management and educational methods. All T-Kits are freely available online in multiple languages.
- The Compass manual for human rights education with young people (Council of Europe) contains over seventy ready-to-use activities on human rights, discrimination, migration and social justice - rigorously tested and freely available.
- Erasmus+ KA1 Mobility Projects remain the primary European funding mechanism for youth worker professional development. The EMPOWER project itself is a model. Contact your National Agency for guidance on developing your own application.
- Peer learning within organisations is consistently underused. If two or three colleagues in your organisation have participated in international training, a structured monthly sharing session - even sixty minutes - can transfer learning that would otherwise remain with one person. The investment is minimal; the return is substantial.



Further Resources and Useful References

The following organisations and resources were referenced in developing the EMPOWER project and this handbook, and are recommended for practitioners seeking to deepen their knowledge of the topics covered here.

Resource	What it offers and where to find it
Youthpass	The European recognition tool for non-formal learning in Erasmus+ youth projects. Includes a competence framework, self-assessment tools and a guide for facilitators. youthpass.eu
SALTO-YOUTH	The European resource centre for non-formal education in youth work. Free toolbox of activities, training courses and methodological guides organised by theme and target group. salto-youth.net
Council of Europe Youth Portal	Policy documents, training resources, the Compass manual for human rights education and the full T-Kit series on youth work themes. coe.int/youth
European Youth Foundation	Grants and support for European youth organisations. Useful for organisations seeking to build on EMPOWER's network and develop follow-up activities. coe.int/eyf
Erasmus+ Programme Guide	Comprehensive guidance on all Erasmus+ action types, eligibility criteria and application processes. Updated annually by the European Commission. erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu
OECD - Social Entrepreneurship	Research and policy guides on social entrepreneurship, including sector-specific reports on youth, migration and inclusion. oecd.org/cfe/leed/social-entrepreneurship
Intercultural Cities Programme (CoE)	Tools, case studies and policy guidance for building inclusive intercultural communities. Direct relevance to the local action planning work in Chapter 6. coe.int/interculturalcities
EMN - European Migration Network	Up-to-date data, policy analysis and good practice guides on migration and integration across EU member states. emn.eu



EMPOWER



Steps for Social Entrepreneurship and Intercultural Dialogue

A Good Practice Handbook for Youth Workers

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