

Human Library TOOLKIT

Supporting the Integration of
Ukrainian Refugees



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About The Project

This toolkit is a reflection of the incredible stories, courage, and connections shared by the young people from across Europe, that joined this project, including those who have experienced displacement, discrimination, and rebuilding their lives from scratch.



“Supporting Integration of Ukrainian Refugees: The Human Library Method” is a youth exchange project funded by the Erasmus+ Programme and designed in response to the growing need for inclusive, empathetic, and community-based solutions to social exclusion, hate speech, and discrimination, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine and the displacement it has caused.

The project brought together 37 young people and youth workers from Lithuania, Bulgaria, Germany, Georgia, North Macedonia, and Türkiye, including many Ukrainian refugees and individuals with fewer opportunities. Over the course of the project, participants explored the Human Library Method as a powerful non-formal learning tool that challenges prejudices and fosters mutual understanding. This method centers around “human books”. Individuals who have experienced discrimination or exclusion, sharing their personal stories with “readers” in a safe, interactive space.

The toolkit you’re reading is one of the main results of this collaboration. It was developed by and for young people, educators, and youth workers who want to replicate the Human Library experience in their own communities. It offers practical guidance on organizing an event, preparing participants, ensuring emotional safety, and creating meaningful non-formal learning moments.

Whether you’re working in education, youth work, refugee integration, or simply want to bring people together through dialogue and empathy, this toolkit is for you.

What is Human Library

Everyone has a story - a story that can inspire, challenge, and change lives. But not everyone is a writer, and not every story ends up in a book. What human library method teaches us is that **stories don't need to be written down to be heard.** Every single one of us is a living book, carrying experiences that have the power to spark conversations, break barriers, and make a real impact.



The Human Library is exactly what it sounds like. A library where, instead of borrowing books, you "borrow" people with real stories. These human books open up about their lives, share experiences of struggles, resilience, triumphs, and lessons learned. And the best part? **Nothing is off-limits.** Difficult questions aren't just allowed, they're encouraged. Because the goal is to understand, to gain empathy, and to connect.



The whole idea of Human Library started back in the 2000s as a project for the Roskilde Festival in Denmark. Ronni Abergel, his brother Dany, and their colleagues, Asma Mouna and Christoffer Erichsen wanted to create a space for honest and open conversations, ones that could challenge stereotypes and change the way people see each other. It took off quickly, spreading to Norway and then beyond.

What is Human Library

By 2006, the first permanent Human Library was set up in Lismore, Australia.

Today we can find some form of human library in most of the countries around the world, including Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Georgia, Germany and Ukraine.

As of 2025, more than 80 countries have embraced the Human Library method using it in schools, workplaces, and communities to raise awareness, educate, and, most importantly, share stories.



Human Library in Georgia, Zugdidi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCg0HJVy2ZU>



Human Library in Ukraine

https://www.instagram.com/livinglibrary_ua/



Human Library in Macedonia, Skopje

<https://www.connect-international.org/2022/06/12/european-living-library-has-visited-skopje-north-macedonia/>



Human Library in Bulgaria, Dobrich

<https://vum.bg/the-living-library-at-vum-dobrich/>



Human Library in Germany

<https://contactquarterly.com/contact-improvisation/newsletter/view/the-living-library-at-ponderosa#>



Human Library in Turkey

<https://society.tedu.edu.tr/en/whats-happening-tedu/living-library>



How To Organise Human Library



Define the Purpose

Decide what your Human Library will focus on. Is it about raising awareness on refugee experiences? Challenging stereotypes around mental health? Encouraging inclusion of minority communities?

A clear purpose helps shape everything else.



Recruit and Prepare Your Human Books

Human Books are the heart of your event. They are people willing to share personal stories of being judged, stereotyped, or excluded.

Invite people from diverse backgrounds (refugees, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, etc.).

Hold one-on-one prep sessions to explain the concept and help them shape their story into something they feel safe and ready to share.

Make sure they understand they can choose which questions to answer, and that they can "close their book" at any time.



Find a Cozy & Safe Venue

Choose a quiet, comfortable space where small conversations can happen. Libraries, community centers, schools, or even outdoors can work. Arrange chairs or small tables in separate corners or circles to allow privacy.



Gather Your Team

You'll need volunteers or team members to take care of:

Registration & welcome desk

Timekeeping (each conversation usually lasts 15–20 minutes)

Emotional safety support (e.g., a quiet space for Books or Readers who need a break)

Matching Readers with Books (like a human librarian)

Tips on Organising Human Library



Promote the Event Thoughtfully

Use inclusive, respectful language in your communication. Make sure your promotion reaches diverse audiences – both locals and refugee communities. Partner with local NGOs or community groups if possible.

Create a Clear Structure

Have a schedule with defined time slots (e.g., 20-minute reading sessions). Offer a short introduction at the beginning and a feedback session at the end if possible.



Provide Language Support

Consider having interpreters or multilingual volunteers if language barriers exist. Visual signage and bilingual materials can also help participants feel more at ease.

Ensure Psychological Safety

Let participants know they can stop at any time. Create ground rules: respectful questions only, no recording without consent, and confidentiality must be respected.



Collect Feedback

Use short forms or casual check-ins to gather feedback from both books and readers. This helps improve future events and shows participants their input is valued.

Books & Readers Preparation



Orientation and Training

Hold a pre-event meeting or workshop where the Books can: Understand the Human Library format and purpose; Get comfortable with possible questions from Readers; Define boundaries – what they want to talk about and what they don't; Practice telling their story in a short and clear format; Learn self-care tips and how to signal if they need a break.



Consent and Confidentiality

Ensure each Book signs a consent form and knows they can withdraw at any time. Reinforce that their well-being is the top priority.



Emotional Support

Some stories can be difficult to share. Consider offering access to a mental health professional or peer support during and after the event.



Emotional Safety & Dealing with Trauma

What Is Emotional Safety?

Emotional safety means creating an environment where people feel secure, respected, and free from judgment or harm while expressing themselves. In a Human Library, this is especially important for the “Books”, who may be sharing personal and sometimes painful experiences.

When emotional safety is prioritized, participants are more likely to engage honestly, openly, and with trust.

Why It Matters in a Human Library

Many “Books” are sharing stories that involve trauma, loss, or discrimination. Without a sense of safety, they may feel exposed, overwhelmed, or retraumatized. A secure environment encourages meaningful dialogue and deeper connection. This applies to “Readers” as well. Being respectful, gentle, and open contributes to a safer space for everyone involved.

What Is Trauma?

Trauma is the emotional and psychological response to deeply distressing or disturbing experiences that overwhelm a person’s ability to cope. It can be caused by events such as war, forced migration, violence, loss, or long-term discrimination. Trauma doesn’t affect everyone the same way. Some people may seem outwardly fine but still carry invisible wounds.



Emotional Safety & Dealing with Trauma

Trauma can influence how a person thinks, feels, and interacts with others. It may lead to anxiety, emotional numbness, mistrust, or difficulty concentrating. In a Human Library setting, it's important to remember that even sharing one's story, though empowering, can also bring up painful memories.

That's why emotional safety, choice, and consent are crucial. Participants must always feel that they are in control of their story, and that they can pause or step back whenever they need to.

Tips for Organisers

Adopting a trauma-informed approach is key. This means recognising that people may be carrying invisible emotional wounds, and that certain questions or topics might be triggering. As an organiser, you should never pressure anyone to share more than they want to, and always be ready to offer emotional support. Make sure there's a private space where someone can step away if needed.

It's also important to prepare the Readers. Begin the event with a short introduction explaining the concept of the Human Library and encouraging respectful, empathetic listening. Readers should understand that their role is not to debate, challenge, or give advice—they are simply there to listen and learn from someone else's lived experience. Establish clear ground rules: listen without judgment, don't interrupt, ask respectful questions, and never record or share a story without permission.



Emotional Safety & Dealing with Anxiety

Dealing with Anxiety – Before, During, and After the Event

- Normalize nervousness. It's okay to feel anxious, this means the experience matters to you;
- Allow breaks. Books should always know they can pause or stop a session;
- Use a signal or code word to quietly ask for support if needed;
- Check in with the Books personally. Ask how they're feeling;
- Provide access to a support person;
- Encourage reflection through journaling, art, or group conversation;
- Celebrate courage – remind Books and Readers that showing vulnerability is a strength, not a weakness.

Consequences of prolonged anxiety

Addiction to anxiety is related to the fact that long-term anxiety becomes a habitual state, and the brain gets used to a constant flow of adrenaline. When anxiety suddenly disappears, a feeling of emptiness, apathy, and even depression may occur.

When anxiety lasts for a long time, it becomes familiar, and the brain adapts to constant tension. Without it, it may seem like the drive to act has disappeared, the hormonal balance changes, and apathy can set in. The absence of anxiety itself can even feel unsettling because the body doesn't know how to function without it.

In such cases, you can try switching to other sources of stimulation, such as the previously mentioned sports and creativity.

Additionally, work on your perception of anxiety, understanding that life without it is not empty but simply requires new meanings.



Tips for Dealing With Anxiety

Name it to tame it

Anxiety often feels like a fog - heavy, shapeless, and hard to understand. Next time you feel anxious, pause for a second. Ask yourself: What's really going on? Maybe your chest feels tight. Or your stomach feels weird because you have to talk to someone new. Or maybe, you're just overwhelmed, and that's okay too.

Say out loud or write down whatever is in your mind. You can also use some guiding questions, such as:

- What does anxiety feel like in my body right now? Where do I notice it most?
- What thoughts are looping in my mind today? Are they facts or fears?
- What's one small thing I can control right now?
- When was the last time I felt safe and calm? What helped me feel that way?

Putting your emotions into words helps your brain process them. It gives you a sense of clarity and control. You stop fighting the feeling and start understanding it. Think of it like this - Anxiety thrives in silence. But when **you name it, you turn on the light.**

Ask for Help

Sometimes people cannot handle their anxiety alone and need support from others to avoid feeling lonely. Talking to a close person you trust brings relief, helps to see the situation from a different perspective, and provides emotional support.

However, if anxiety is chronic and interferes with normal life, it is important to seek professional help. A psychologist or psychotherapist can help identify the causes of anxiety, share effective methods for coping with it, and provide a safe space to work on your emotions.



Tips for Dealing With Anxiety

Meditating

A great way to fight anxiety is through meditation. It is a kind of immersion into your subconscious, a chance to distract yourself from intrusive thoughts and focus on the present moment.

To do this, you need to find a comfortable position, turn on a meditation video (on YouTube, they are very common). During this ritual, you should take deep breaths in or out to control your breathing and calm your nervous system. You also need to focus on the sensations that arise in your body and avoid focusing on the thoughts that come up in your subconscious.

The duration can range from 5 to 30 minutes or even longer, depending on how much time you are willing to dedicate to it.

Creative activities

Creativity is a wonderful way to distract from anxious thoughts.

- Drawing allows you to focus on the present moment, express emotions, and calm the mind.
- Paper crafts, such as origami or scrapbooking, develop fine motor skills and relax.
- Reading books immerses you in another world, distracting from anxieties and developing imagination.

Any creative activity that brings pleasure can help manage anxiety. The main thing is to find what suits you and enjoy the process.



Tips for Dealing With Anxiety

Do Sports

Physical movement is one of the simplest ways to interrupt the spiral of anxiety. When your body moves, it releases built-up tension. Your brain picks up on this and starts to calm down.

Instead of reaching for your phone the moment you wake up, try starting the day with small movements. Stretch your arms, roll your shoulders, loosen your neck. These gentle actions boost blood flow and ease stiffness, especially in places where stress often hides.

Follow this with a few deep, slow breaths. Feel the air fill your chest. Let it out slowly. Repeat. Your heart rate slows down. Your mind softens its grip.

You don't need to run a marathon to feel better. A 10-minute stretch, a walk around the block, or even dancing in your room counts. Yoga is a great way to build strength while calming your nervous system. Pilates can help release muscle tension and ground your awareness in your body.

The goal isn't performance. The goal is release. Over time, these small routines can teach your body that the day doesn't have to start with panic. It can start with care. A final tip: drink a glass of water afterward. Hydration helps your body recover from stress. And it's one more way to remind yourself — you're taking care of you.



Non-Formal Activities

STEREOTYPES & PREJUDICE WALL

Objective:

To explore and reflect on national and cultural stereotypes, and to encourage empathy, self-awareness, and critical thinking about bias and assumptions.

Duration:

60 minutes

Materials:

Flipcharts or large sheets of paper (one per country), markers

Instructions:

Hang one sheet of paper for each represented country around the room. Invite everyone to walk around and anonymously write down stereotypes, associations, or common impressions they have about each country — both positive and negative.

Once everyone has finished writing, ask participants from each country to stand by their paper, read through the comments, and share how they feel about what was written. Encourage open dialogue with the group, focusing on listening and reflection rather than debate.

Reflection prompts:

- How did it feel to read the comments about your country?
- Did any of the stereotypes surprise you or feel unfair?
- Were there any you recognized or connected with?
- What do these stereotypes say about how we see each other?
- How can we break these patterns in everyday life?



Non-Formal Activities

LEMON DIVERSITY GAME

Objective:

To highlight the uniqueness of each individual and show how paying closer attention can shift our perceptions.

Duration:

30–40 minutes

Materials:

One lemon (or any fruit or vegetable with visual variety) per participant

Instructions:

Begin by giving each participant one lemon. Invite them to examine it closely and in silence. Encourage them to notice every detail. The shape, color variations, skin texture, soft or firm spots, dents, marks, or even how it smells. Give them some time to really get to know their lemon.

Then, collect all the lemons in a basket or on a table and mix them thoroughly.

After that, the task for everybody is to find their lemon.

Once everyone has found a lemon (or given up), ask them to sit back down.

Guide a group reflection on how they recognized their lemon, what surprised them, and what this reveals about how we see people around us.

Reflection prompts:

- How did you recognize your lemon? What clues helped you?
- Did you feel more connected to your lemon after observing it closely?
- What does this game teach us about how we notice people or fail to?
- Have you ever misjudged someone based on their appearance or your first impression?
- How might this change the way we look at each other, especially people we think are “different”?



Non-Formal Activities

PATH TO EQUALITY LAND

Objective:

To imagine an ideal, inclusive society and reflect on the real-life obstacles and actions needed to move toward it.

Duration:

60–75 minutes

Materials:

Flipchart paper or large sheets, markers, and optional materials for creative presentation (props, magazines for collage, colored paper, etc.)

Instructions:

Divide participants into small teams of 4–6 people. Introduce the scenario:

"You are setting off on a journey to a place called Equality Land."

Each group's task is to map out this journey. They should create a visual representation showing, what Equality Land looks like, what values it is built on, what obstacles or "monsters" they may encounter along the way, and what tools, allies, or strategies they'll use to overcome these barriers.

Encourage groups to be imaginative but thoughtful. After about 45 minutes, invite each team to present their journey and vision of Equality Land to the whole group.

Reflection prompts:

- What were the most common obstacles across different group journeys?
- Did anything in another group's presentation surprise or inspire you?
- What "monsters" or barriers exist in your own country or community?
- What would a small step toward Equality Land look like in your everyday life?
- How can young people lead or support that journey?



Non-Formal Activities

PUZZLE OF TERMINOLOGY

Objective:

To build a shared understanding of key terms related to social inclusion, discrimination, and equity.

Duration:

60–90 minutes

Materials:

Printed quotes or situations, terminology cards (with words like stereotype, bias, xenophobia, equality, equity, justice), flipcharts or visual aids

Instructions:

Split participants into small groups and give each team a set of quotes or short examples related to social issues. Their task is to match each quote with the correct term from a list. Encourage discussion within the group before making final matches.

Once finished, gather everyone and go through the answers together. Use visuals (such as the “equality vs. equity” tree or the shoe size metaphor) to explain more complex terms and clear up any confusion. Invite open questions and discussion.

Reflection prompts:

- Were any of the terms unclear or surprising?
- Which ones do you hear or use most often in everyday life?
- Why is it important to understand the difference between equality and equity?
- How can these concepts help us build more inclusive spaces?

Participants Voices

“This project helped me grow because...”

it made me realize that the person I've become isn't just a reflection of who I wanted to be, but also of everything I've been through. It taught me that truly understanding others means looking beyond how they appear or speak—it's about feeling what they've felt, living a part of their experience, and learning to see the world through their eyes

“A moment I'll never forget was...”

hearing about the the sacrifices the people of Lithuania made to protect their language and culture—it left a deep impression on me and made me reflect on the power of identity and resilience.

"Before the Human Library I thought that..."

everyone was happy, had everything figured out, and didn't really care about others or about life in a deeper sense. But after meeting the people here, I realized that they not only care deeply about their own lives, but also about the feelings and experiences of others. It made me understand that some people carry heavy stories that are often overlooked or dismissed by others.



Participants Voices



"Before the Human Library I thought that..."

I didn't really know what to expect—I had no real understanding or imagination of what it could mean. I had never experienced anything like it before. But through this project, I came to fully understand the idea behind it: that every person is like a living book, sharing their story and life experience. It's a powerful method that turns conversation into a way of learning, connecting, and seeing others in a completely new light.

I feel more confident about...

my English skills. Even though I'm still unsure sometimes, I've learned that trying is what really matters. I found many friends who supported me and encouraged me to speak, and helping others along the way became an amazing experience that really improved my communication.

This project helped me grow because...

it gave me many opportunities to learn new things about myself and others. I became more open to sharing my experiences and knowledge, and I wasn't afraid to express myself. I also challenged myself to communicate in English and made new friends along the way.

Participants Voices



"I feel more confident about..."

speaking English and interacting with other people. First day I was so anxious and I thought that I was gonna die if I talk in front of everyone. When everyone was saying his names and his passion, my hands was shaking and probably I turned into Heidi, because when I am ashamed my cheeks turn into red. But now I can speak in front of people even if it's a topic that I can't express good my feelings in English. I know that everyone gonna listen me carefully and gonna respect me for explaining my feelings. In almost a week I learned more than 3 years of my psychology study. Thanks to our coordinators they are always supporting us for speaking.

"A moment I'll never forget was..."

the first book experience between us. I learned new things that day and I felt really relieved after that book session. Opening yourself as a book to another person was difficult at first but when you start to talk and they listen you carefully, you just don't want to stop. Because you feel that they do care about you and your topic. It feels so weird that people who don't know you, can listen and care about you like this.

"Before the Human Library I thought that..."

other nationalities thinks about Turkish people as a bad vibe but I learned here that they don't think bad about us, and this was our stereotypes. Everyone has a big heart and accept everyone without any judge (unjudge). I learned so much about other nationalities, their cultures, universities, even the price of the prices for getting a driving license. The human library teached me a therapy method, I'm saying therapy because this is how you feel when you are the book. I'm sure that in the future when I became a clinical psychologist, I would like to use this method with some people.

Participants Voices



“A moment I’ll never forget was... ”

the deep conversations I had with my friends here. We all have different lives, cultures, different backgrounds, but we are all human, even though our thoughts and beliefs are different, our feelings are the same, and we get sad, happy, cry; these are what make us human. In the evenings we were here, we had the opportunity to have long conversations with each other and we shared our own stories, families, happinesses, sadnesses, and this was very special for me because it felt very good to be able to share and feel the same feelings with my friend who lives on the other side of the world, I am sure I will never forget these moments.

“I feel more confident about...”

speaking in public because no one here makes fun of me when I get stuck speaking or says things that will hurt my self-confidence, everyone is supportive, we help each other instead of criticizing, so I feel comfortable.

“Something I learned that suprised me was...”

that we have similar superstitions, for example, when something bad happens we knock on wood so that the same thing doesn't happen to us, or in Georgia it is believed that if a fork falls on the ground a guest will come, similarly in Turkey it is believed that if a baby crawls in the house a guest will come, I came across many examples like these here and they were very surprising.



Personal Stories

Anxiety is like a fog that envelops you, and you get lost in it, you can't see anything, you're just eaten up by your thoughts, and you think that this is the end.

At the very beginning, your heart just starts beating a little faster than usual, and your thoughts get confused. Then the fog thickens, becomes impenetrable, and you can no longer distinguish reality from your own fears.

I remember how one day I was standing by the window, and the world behind the glass seemed dangerous to me. I was afraid to go outside, I was afraid of people, I was afraid that something terrible would happen to me exactly when I left the house. I didn't go outside alone for several months, because I was simply afraid that I might get sick and die.

Thousands of thoughts swarmed in my head, each one more terrible than the previous one. They whispered to me that I was weak, helpless, that I couldn't cope. And I believed them. I believed them for a long time. I believed them for more than half a year. I tried to fight, but the more I resisted, the more the fog squeezed me in its embrace. I felt like a bird in a cage, beating against the bars, trying to break free, but only hurting itself.



Personal Stories

Then I turned to a psychologist. It was difficult, scary, but I did it. And this was the first step towards the light. The psychologist helped me understand my fears, taught me to accept them, and not fight them. He showed me that I was not alone, that many people experience the same thing. I began to learn to breathe, meditate, exercise. I began to take care of myself, my body and my mind. And gradually the fog began to dissipate.

And then I went to another country to rest, which was also a very difficult decision for me. A new place, new people, a new culture - all this was a huge stress for me. But I coped. I learned to adapt, learned to trust myself, learned to love and believe in myself. Of course, the fog sometimes returns. But now I know how to deal with it. I know that I am strong, that I can cope with any difficulties. And I am proud of myself for it.

Anxiety is not the end of life. It is a part of me, but it does not define me. I have learned to live with it, and I continue to learn. And I know that one day the fog will completely dissipate, and I will see the world in all its beauty.

So if someone is also going through such a period in their life now, know that you are not alone, and you will cope with everything, just start to understand your condition with a psychologist. I believe in you





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