

Every Story(Teller) Matters: Human Library Events and the Path to Intercultural Inclusion

The Human Library methodology has proven to be a powerful educational tool for fostering empathy, dismantling stereotypes, and promoting intercultural dialogue. Within the framework of the Erasmus+ project Every Story(Teller) Matters – Human Libraries and Mutual Recognition (EStM-HLMR), six partner organisations across Denmark, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Romania, and Türkiye implemented a series of Human Library events, both in-person and online, that reached more than 500 participants. These activities demonstrated not only the adaptability of the model to different contexts—schools, youth mobilities, community spaces, and digital platforms—but also its capacity to transform perceptions and inspire inclusion at both personal and collective levels.

The events specifically targeted young people, with a distinction between participants under the age of 18 and young adults aged 18 to 30. For adolescents, the activities were primarily held in schools and educational institutions. Pre- and post-event surveys revealed that more than half of the younger readers sought to increase their awareness of diversity and inclusion, while almost half were motivated by the desire to understand social issues and develop empathy. Post-event analysis confirmed that these aims were largely achieved: participants reported a greater understanding of social realities, new perspectives, and enhanced emotional engagement. However, while empathy and respect were significantly strengthened, fewer young readers felt confident to act publicly or engage in broader social action, suggesting a need for further reinforcement of activism and public speaking skills in educational follow-ups. Importantly, the Human Library created a safe and respectful environment in which young participants could reflect critically on biases and develop early competences for intercultural dialogue.

The impact among young adults (18–30) was even more pronounced. This age group, often navigating transitions into higher education, employment, and civic life, demonstrated strong openness to the methodology. Nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated their primary motivation was to gain new perspectives, with more than half explicitly identifying empathy, respect, and deeper understanding of diversity as central goals. Post-event evaluations confirmed substantial cognitive and affective shifts: participants highlighted learning about resilience, developing confidence to share personal stories, and, in significant numbers, feeling inspired to take social action. The feedback underlined that the Human Library not only provides information but also strengthens personal conviction and motivation to act for inclusion. Participants praised the authenticity of the format, noting that hearing lived experiences directly from Human Books created powerful emotional resonance and challenged preconceptions in ways that traditional educational methods cannot achieve.

Online events added another dimension to the project, extending participation to individuals unable to attend in person. Although nearly half of respondents expressed a preference for face-to-face interaction, virtual sessions still delivered meaningful impact. Over 60% of online participants reported gaining new perspectives, more than half indicated a stronger understanding of social issues, and many described feeling motivated to contribute to more inclusive communities. The accessibility of digital formats was widely appreciated, even as participants noted that in-person encounters may offer richer emotional connections. Suggestions for improvement included hybrid formats, more diverse representation of Human Books, and extended time for dialogue. These findings indicate that the online approach should be seen not as a substitute but as a complementary expansion, capable of broadening reach while maintaining substantial educational value.

Across all age groups and modalities, common themes emerged. Participants consistently highlighted the value of listening to authentic personal stories, the emotional depth of the interactions, and the opportunity to reflect critically on stereotypes and privileges. The small-group format and respectful facilitation were repeatedly praised for creating trust and intimacy, enabling participants to engage honestly with challenging topics such as migration, discrimination, and identity. Suggestions for improvement—longer sessions, more varied stories, and better logistics—reflect both the high level of satisfaction and the appetite for deeper engagement. Most importantly, a majority of participants expressed interest in attending future Human Library events, either as readers or as Human Books themselves, underscoring the model's sustainability and long-term potential.

Beyond the events themselves, one of the most significant outcomes of the project is the development of the Every StoryTeller Matters Toolkit. This resource consolidates the lessons learned during the project and offers youth workers, educators, and NGOs a practical guide for applying the Human Library methodology and related storytelling practices in diverse educational contexts. The toolkit includes conceptual foundations of intercultural competence, structured methods and activities, adaptable templates, and multimedia resources such as infographics and short videos. By combining accessible explanations with ready-to-use materials, it equips practitioners with the tools to foster empathy, communication, and cultural awareness among young people. Its design responds directly to the needs identified during the events, particularly the call for more structured support in developing confidence, resilience, and public engagement. As such, it represents both a legacy of the project and a forward-looking instrument to ensure that the Human Library approach continues to inspire inclusive, participatory, and culturally diverse environments.

We encourage educators, youth workers, and community leaders to take these insights forward by implementing Human Library events in their own contexts and by making active use of the Every StoryTeller Matters Toolkit. The evidence shows that storytelling can transform perceptions and foster empathy, and with the toolkit's ready-to-use resources, the methodology is accessible to anyone willing to promote intercultural dialogue and inclusion. By adopting and adapting this approach, organisations can create safe spaces for authentic human connection, empower marginalised voices, and contribute to building stronger, more inclusive societies across Europe and beyond.