



Part 2. Handbook

Creative Strategies
for Overcoming Cultural Barriers
for Migration Professionals and Migrants



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programme "Creative Pathways:
Navigating a New Reality"

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Theoretical Foundations	2
Methodological Principles of Facilitation	3
Tool 1	4
Tool 2	5
Tool 3	6
Evidence-Based Strategies for Overcoming Cultural Barriers	7
Practical Materials	12
Ethical Guidelines	13
References	13

Introduction

Cultural barriers represent one of the central challenges that arise during the integration of migrants. These barriers may manifest as misunderstandings, differing behavioural norms, expectations, emotional expressions, or distinct patterns of interaction with institutions. Both migration professionals and migrants themselves require practical tools to overcome these barriers—tools grounded in contemporary approaches to intercultural communication, creativity, and psychological support.

This methodological guide provides a structured description of three creative tools applied within the Creative Pathways training programme and further expands them with evidence-based strategies drawn from academic literature. These approaches can be applied in community work, social services, educational environments, and integration support programmes.

Theoretical Foundations

Intergroup Contact Theory



Positive contact between members of different cultural groups reduces prejudice, normalises differences, and promotes mutual understanding. Research shows that effective intercultural contact requires several key conditions:

- relatively equal status among participants;
- shared or common goals;
- institutional or organisational support;
- a safe and supportive space for interaction.



Co-creation



Involving migrants in the development of solutions strengthens trust, increases the relevance of integration programmes, and enhances participants' sense of ownership and responsibility.

Peer support



Meetings with people who share similar migration experiences help normalise emotions, reduce feelings of isolation, and strengthen the sense of belonging and connection.

Cultural humility



A methodological approach that emphasises equality in dialogue. The practitioner is not an “expert in another person’s life,” but rather a partner who learns together with the migrant.



Methodological Principles of Facilitation

Creating a Safe and Supportive Space

- Respect for personal stories
- Voluntary participation
- Confidentiality
- The right to remain silent or not share details

Equal Participation and Voice

Facilitators ensure that everyone has the right to speak and that no one dominates the discussion.



A Strengths-Based (Resource-Oriented) Approach

Ukrainian migrants possess many hidden competencies that support their adaptation. The facilitator's task is to help participants recognise and activate these strengths.

Reflection and Learning Integration

After each activity, the group conducts a brief reflection:

- What was new;
- What I take away from this experience;
- What step I can take next.

Tool 1

Tool Description



A representative from the host country is invited to the session — in this case, a German journalist who works on migration topics and is familiar with the experiences of Ukrainian refugees. The format is a two-way dialogue and exchange.

The journalist shares observations on German cultural norms, explains how certain behaviours are perceived locally, provides context, and answers participants' questions. At the same time, they ask Ukrainian participants about their experiences, achievements, and challenges — creating a balanced mutual exchange.

Dialogue and Experience
Exchange with a Local
Culture Representative (a
German Journalist)



Why It Works



- Reduces anxiety by providing direct answers to the question, “Why does everything work this way in Germany?”
- Improves communication accuracy by explaining cultural differences and norms.
- Creates a space for equal dialogue, where participants feel that their stories are valued.
- Fosters mutual respect, as the local expert demonstrates openness and a willingness to listen.



Recommendations for Facilitators



- Introduce the guest and outline the session framework.
- Collect participants' questions in advance.
- Ensure balanced participation so that the journalist is not the only voice.
- Avoid generalisations such as “all the Germans...” or “all the Ukrainians...”.

Tool 2

Meeting with a Female Migrant from Afghanistan (Peer Testimony)

Tool Description



A female migrant from Afghanistan was invited to the training. She shared her personal adaptation story, including the challenges she faced, her strengths, mistakes, sources of support, and her experience of integrating into the local community.

Why It Works



- Normalises emotional experiences.
- Makes the integration journey more understandable and realistic.
- Helps participants feel: “I am not alone in this process.”
- Creates a horizontal support model among equals.



Tasks of the Facilitator



- Ensure psychological and emotional safety.
- Prevent invasive or inappropriate questions.
- Conclude the session with the question: “What do I take away from this story for myself?”

Tool 3

Invitation of an Experienced Migrant from the Country of Origin (a Cultural Broker)

Tool Description



A cultural broker is a person who migrated several years ago, has successfully adapted, and understands both Ukrainian cultural codes and those of the host country. This person serves as a “bridge” between cultures.



Why It Works



- Explains why certain behaviours are perceived in a particular way in Germany.
- Possesses natural credibility: “He/She has been in my situation.”
- Understands real barriers and realistic solutions.
- Provides practical advice on daily life, communication, employment, and interaction with institutions.

What a Cultural Broker Can Do



- Explain German behaviours and expectations using relatable and understandable examples.
- Provide guidance in key areas (employment, healthcare, public services).
- Help shape a realistic picture of the integration journey.
- Enhance motivation through personal example.

Evidence-Based Strategies for Overcoming Cultural Barriers

Some evidence-based strategies for integration work with migrants are given below. Each strategy includes:

- ✓ What it is
- ✓ Why it works
- ✓ How to apply it
- ✓ Examples of practical activities

Co-creation Workshops

What It Is

A process in which migrants and professionals collaboratively develop programmes, rules, or community initiatives. This replaces traditional consultative models with genuine partnership.

Why It Works

- Migrants have direct knowledge of their own needs.
- Participation reduces institutional distrust and enhances agency.
- High engagement correlates with better integration outcomes.

How to Implement It

- Conduct regular needs assessment sessions.
- Involve migrants in testing new services.
- Use design thinking steps: empathy → problem definition → idea generation → prototyping → testing.

Example

A group of migrants and social workers collaboratively creates a “first-month challenges map,” which leads to the development of a guide for new arrivals.

Pairing new migrants with experienced migrants or local volunteers

Buddy/ Mentorship Programmes

What It Is

A volunteer mentor supports the new arrival throughout the first months of adaptation.

Why It Works

- Accelerates socialisation.
- Reduces feelings of loneliness.
- Helps address real-life practical challenges.
- Builds trust in the host community.

How to Implement It

- Match pairs based on interests, age, or context.
- Establish a flexible schedule (e.g., weekly meetings).
- Provide mentors with brief training on ethics and boundaries.

Example: Buddy Card

- First meeting: Introduction and identification of needs.
- Second meeting: Orientation in the city.
- Third meeting: Professional goals.
- Fourth meeting: Social integration.
- Fifth meeting: Summary and conclusion.

Contact-Based Intercultural Interventions



What It Is



Structured interactions between migrants and locals, such as:

- Joint volunteering
- Interest-based clubs and groups
- Culinary evenings
- Sports activities
- Community improvement projects

Why It Works



High-quality contact reduces prejudice, especially when:

- Participants have an equal voice.
- Participation is voluntary.
- Tasks are structured but flexible.
- Real interaction takes place.

How to Implement It



- Form groups based on interests.
- Initiate joint community projects.
- Use “local + migrant” pairs for collaborative tasks.

What It Is



Participants share their migration stories through:

- Oral narratives
- Creating collages
- Creative prompts (“My Future Story”)
- Short written reflections

Storytelling and Narrative Approaches



Why It Works



- Integrates complex experiences into a coherent narrative.
- Creates a sense of being heard.
- Supports identity reconstruction.
- Helps reinterpret life changes.

How to Implement It



- Use small groups.
- Provide guiding questions.
- Support voluntary and trauma-sensitive sharing.

Practices for Developing Cultural Humility



What It Is



Not cultural competence (knowledge of cultural facts), but ongoing reflection:

- What biases do I hold?
- How can I listen without judgment?
- How can I stay in dialogue rather than instructing?

Why It Works



- Reduces the “expert–client” asymmetry.
- Prevents conflict escalation.
- Builds trust.

How to Implement It



- Conduct reflective circles for staff.
- Use the “10-second pause rule.”
- Collect feedback from migrants regarding interactions.

What It Is



Scenarios for practice, such as:

- Interacting with institutions
- Visiting a doctor
- Workplace misunderstandings
- Conflicts with neighbors

Why It Works



- Provides training in a low-risk environment.
- Fosters empathy toward all parties.
- Develops practical communication skills.

How to Implement It



- Prepare from 3 to 5 scenarios.
- Assign the roles.
- Conduct a structured debriefing afterwards.

Intercultural Role-Plays and Simulations



Creative Collective Projects (Community Art Projects)

What It Is



Collaborative creation of tangible outputs, such as:

- Photo exhibitions
- Murals
- Installations
- Story galleries
- Musical or theatrical projects

Why It Works



- Reduces language barriers.
- Builds emotional connections.
- Helps express identity and overcome invisibility.

How to Implement It



- Form a small group.
- Select a theme collaboratively.
- Present the outcome to the community.



What It Is



Short instructional sessions explaining how:

- The healthcare system works
- Document-related processes are carried out
- Registration procedures are conducted
- Communication norms operate within institutions

Why It Works



- Reduces fear of institutions.
- Prevents cultural misunderstandings.
- Enhances autonomy.

System Navigation Sessions

Cultural Mapping

What It Is



A visual tool for comparing cultures along axes such as:

- Directness vs. indirectness
- Power distance
- Rule orientation vs. flexibility
- Personal boundaries
- Time orientation

Why It Works



- Reframes differences as knowledge rather than conflict.
- Reduces personalization of misunderstandings.
- Helps explain culture shock.



What It Is



Small steps that accumulate into significant progress.

Examples:

- One new contact per week
- Visiting a new place
- Learning five new words
- One interaction with an institution

Why It Works



- Avoids pressure to “succeed quickly.”
- Reduces fear of failure.
- Builds stable participation habits.

Small-Scale Actions to Support Integration



Practical Materials

Group Rules Template

- Listen to each other.
- Speak from personal experience.
- Do not give unsolicited advice.
- Maintain confidentiality.

Discussion Questions

- What was the most useful for me?
- What has changed in my understanding of integration?
- Which piece of advice will I apply this week?

Evaluation Questions

- Do you feel more confident in understanding the local culture?
- Which tools were the most valuable?
- Which topics require further attention?



Ethical Guidelines

Participants may choose not to answer questions.



Avoid generalisations about ethnic or cultural groups.



Personal stories are not shared outside the group.



Provide support during emotional moments.



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