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SMILE SOFT-SKILLS CURRICULUM · MODULE 2

Empathy

Curriculum

Curriculum Template: EMPATHY

English edition

Young migrants 18-30

Trainers and youth workers

Empowerment Through Skills · Inclusion Through Opportunity



SMILE · Support Young Migrants Integration in the Labour market in Europe
Erasmus+ KA220-YOU · 2024-1-TR01-KA220-YOU-000256357 · October 2026





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EMPATHY

Module 2 · Curriculum · English edition



Support Young Migrants Integration in the Labour market in Europe (SMILE)

Erasmus+ KA220-YOU · 2024-1-TR01-KA220-YOU-000256357

Curriculum developed by KEAN (Greece) for the SMILE partnership

This document is the English edition of the SMILE curriculum for Module 2, “Empathy”, developed by the partnership of the Erasmus+ project “Support Young Migrants Integration in the Labour market in Europe” (SMILE). It is a faithful translation of the partnership's working document; the content has not been changed.



SMILE SOFT-SKILLS CURRICULUM • MODULE 2

Curriculum Template: EMPATHY

1. Brief Description

This module introduces empathy as a key soft skill for personal and professional development. It highlights how empathy strengthens communication, trust and collaboration in different settings and in diverse environments. Participants take part in interactive activities to recognise emotions, practise active listening and understand different perspectives. The module promotes an ethical and sensitive approach to trauma, difference and cultural complexity. It frames empathy as a relational practice shaped by lived experiences and social context. Designed specifically for young migrants, this module supports conflict resolution and the building of inclusive relationships through reflective exercises and real-life scenarios.

2. Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- **Outcome 1:** Define empathy and explain its role in interpersonal and intercultural communication, including its ethical and political dimensions.
- **Outcome 2:** Identify common barriers to empathy and develop strategies to overcome these barriers in various social settings, including biases rooted in colonial histories or cultural hierarchies.
- **Outcome 3:** Practise active listening and perspective-taking in real-life scenarios, using tools such as empathy mapping and role-play to explore layered identities and social systems.
- **Outcome 4:** Apply empathetic responses in workplace and community interactions in order to foster inclusion and collaboration, while remaining aware of power dynamics and avoiding a “saviour” mindset.

3. Curriculum

This module is structured into three thematic units designed to develop participants’ ability to understand and apply empathy in personal, social and professional contexts. The curriculum follows a progression from conceptual foundations to applied skills and includes activities that centre lived experiences, intercultural sensitivity and ethical reflection.

1. Understanding Empathy

This unit introduces empathy as a multidimensional skill that is cognitive, emotional and ethical, and distinguishes it from similar concepts such as sympathy. Participants explore how empathy works in communication and teamwork and begin to reflect on their own empathetic capacities through storytelling, visual tools and embodied activities.

- **Opening Ritual:** At the start of the workshop, participants create a shared “agreement ritual”. Using prompts such as “We listen to understand” or “We honour silence”, the group

establishes the common values it shares for communication. This ritual sets the tone for safety, respect and mutual responsibility.

- **Activity: Object Stories:** To ground the session in lived experience, participants are invited to bring or choose an object that represents “being understood”. In pairs, they share the story behind this object, exploring how empathy felt in that moment. This activity creates an atmosphere of vulnerability, trust and relational depth.

1.1 Defining Empathy and Its Core Components

Participants co-create a working definition of empathy through a shared “Empathy Brainstorming Wall”, using sticky notes or Jamboard. The facilitator (trainer) introduces the three dimensions of empathy:

- **Cognitive:** Perspective-taking (being able to see from another person’s point of view)
- **Emotional:** Emotional resonance (emotional echo and building connection)
- **Ethical:** Sensitivity and responsiveness to difference

Examples are given from migration and intercultural contexts, such as dealing with bureaucracy, language barriers or misunderstandings within the community. Colour-coded sticky notes help participants map their responses visually. A group discussion then follows, using these prompts:

- “Which dimension do you use most often?”
- “Which one do you find more difficult?”
- “What does empathy look like at a border crossing?”

This section encourages participants to reflect on how empathy works in multi-layered, real-world situations. (Reference: Smaling, 2007)

1.2 Empathy and Sympathy: What Is the Difference?

Using two contrasting scenarios, participants analyse the difference between sympathy and empathy. Small groups use a checklist to identify the key distinctions, followed by a whole-group discussion. To deepen engagement:

- A short comic strip or role-play is presented in which one character responds with sympathy and the other with empathy.
- Participants are invited to rewrite the sympathetic response to make it more relational and emotionally attuned.

The facilitator presents Khader’s view, which criticises sympathy as an external and moralistic approach, highlighting the depth and reciprocity of empathy. An “Empathy Map” worksheet is used to explore each character’s inner world, helping participants move from projection to presence. (Reference: Khader, 2018)

1.3 The Role of Empathy in Communication and Teamwork

Participants take part in an “Empathy Relay” activity: in pairs, one person shares a personal challenge while the other listens silently, then paraphrases what was said in their own words and validates the emotional content. The roles are then swapped. After the relay:

- A group debrief explores what felt easy and what felt difficult.
- Discussion questions include: “What made it safe for you to share?” and “What made you hesitate?”

The facilitator links this exercise to workplace collaboration, trust-building and intercultural teamwork. Brené Brown’s “Power of Empathy” video is used to support the discussion with accessible language and emotional clarity. (Reference: Brené Brown’s “Power of Empathy” video)

2. Empathy in Diverse Settings

This unit explores empathy as a tool for navigating cultural differences, layered identities and systemic barriers. Participants examine how bias, stress and colonial legacies can hinder empathy and practise strategies for communicating ethically across difference. Through visual tools, storytelling and role-play, they learn to recognise structural dynamics and to develop relational sensitivity.

- **Mini Case Studies:** Short, anonymised real-world stories from young migrants are presented in order to analyse empathy blockers (bias, miscommunication, stress). Participants identify unmet needs and propose empathetic responses. This grounds abstract concepts in lived realities and makes the discussions more culturally meaningful.

2.1 Cultural Sensitivity and Perspective-Taking

The facilitator introduces the “Empathy Onion”, a visual tool showing nested systems of influence: individual, family, social network, community and world/earth. Participants draw their own onion diagrams and reflect on how each layer shapes their identities, relationships and empathetic responses. To deepen the activity:

- Participants write a short dialogue between two layers of their identity (e.g. “My social self speaks to my individual self”), thereby exploring inner tensions and relational insights.
- Group sharing focuses on visibility, invisibility and cultural assumptions. Prompts:
 - “Which layer feels the most misunderstood?”
 - “Where do you feel the most empathy?”

This section helps participants to visualise complexity and to recognise empathy as a relational, context-sensitive practice. (Reference: Zembylas, 2018)

2.2 Barriers to Empathy: Bias, Stress, Miscommunication and Colonial Legacies

In small groups, participants brainstorm “empathy blockers” they have experienced or witnessed. Responses are collected anonymously via Slido or Mentimeter and displayed in a Gallery Walk format. Participants move around the posters and add sticky notes with responses such as:

- “What would empathy look like here?”
- “Which needs are being overlooked?”

The facilitator introduces the following concepts:

- Empathy excesses (e.g. over-identification)
- Saviour mindsets
- Structural bias and miscommunication

Reflection questions include:

- “How can we move from projection to presence?”
- “What does ethical empathy look like in unequal power dynamics?”

This activity fosters critical awareness and collective thinking about how empathy can be distorted or blocked by systemic forces. (References: Khader, 2018; Marino, 2022)

2.3 Empathy in Conflict Resolution and Collaboration

Participants take part in role-play scenarios that simulate interpersonal or intercultural conflicts (e.g. a workplace misunderstanding, a housing dispute, community tension). Each role-play includes:

- **Pause and Rewind Technique:** Participants can pause the scene, suggest a more empathetic response and replay the scene with adjustments.
- A debrief focusing on emotional shifts, power dynamics and the role of empathy in de-escalating tension.

Facilitators guide participants to identify:

- What was said versus what was felt
- Where empathy was present or where it was missing
- How reframing and active listening changed the outcome

This section provides practical skills for managing real-life tensions with emotional intelligence and ethical sensitivity. (Reference: LaCapra, 2014)

3. Empathy in Practice

This unit focuses on applied empathy through active listening, role-play and personal reflection. Participants develop practical tools for empathetic communication and relate empathy to their own migration journeys and career goals. The activities centre embodied listening, creative expression and ethical sensitivity.

- **Closing Ritual:** At the end of the workshop, participants gather in a “gratitude circle”. Each person names an empathetic moment they witnessed during the session. This ritual reinforces collective learning, highlights positive behaviours and closes the training with emotional resonance.

3.1 Active Listening Techniques

Participants practise the “Listen-Summarise-Reflect” method: in pairs, one person talks about a personal experience for two minutes while the other listens and reflects back the emotional tone. The roles are swapped. The group then discusses:

- Listening habits and emotional attunement

- The difference between hearing and listening
- Moments of discomfort or connection

To deepen the activity:

- Use the “Active Listening Checklist” to help participants assess themselves and set intentions.
- Add a short warm-up question: “What does it feel like to be truly heard?”
- Invite participants to share a listening habit they would like to strengthen.

(Tool: Active Listening checklist)

3.2 Role-Play and Real-Life Scenarios

Participants rotate around an “Empathy Lab” with stations that simulate real-life situations (e.g. a job interview, peer conflict, a community meeting). At each station, they practise empathetic responses and document their emotional insights using Jamboard or sticky notes. To enrich the lab:

- Add a “silent” station where participants respond only with gestures or drawing, to explore non-verbal empathy.
- Add a station where participants write a short message to someone they have misunderstood, practising repair (making amends) and reflection.
- Use scenario cards containing emotional cues and power dynamics to guide the role-play.

Facilitators encourage reflection on ethical dilemmas, relational dynamics and emotional shifts. This section helps participants to internalise empathy in different, complex situations. *(Reference: Carnicero et al., 2022)*

3.3 Reflection and Personal Application

In a storytelling circle, participants share moments when they felt truly seen or not seen. A “listening witness” role is introduced, which reflects back what has been heard without judgement and models deep presence.

Guided journaling prompts include:

- “What made empathy possible in that moment?”
- “What did you need?”
- “What did you learn about yourself as someone who gives or receives empathy?”

Participants then create a “Migration Map” that traces a journey (real or imagined) and notes moments of empathy, isolation or misunderstanding. This visual tool helps to connect personal experience to wider social systems.

The session closes with a shared “Empathy Manifesto”, co-created as a visual mural or a digital collage. Participants contribute phrases, colours and symbols that represent empathy, inclusion and ethical care. *(Reference: Marino, 2022)*

4. Module Duration

Total Duration: 3 hours

Suggested Breakdown:

- 1.5 hours of theory (concepts, discussion, examples)
- 1.5 hours of practical or reflective work (activities, role-play, personal reflection)

This module is designed to be flexible and adaptable to different learning environments and participant needs. It can be delivered as:

- **A single 3-hour session:** Ideal for intensive workshops or training days. This format allows a continuous flow from conceptual foundations to applied practice and reflection.
- **Two 1.5-hour sessions:** Suitable for community centres, youth programmes or organisations with time constraints. This format allows deeper absorption between sessions and can be adapted for asynchronous reflection (e.g. journaling or empathy mapping between sessions).

Suggested pacing for single-session delivery: Facilitators are encouraged to adapt the timing and flow to the group size, language needs and the emotional energy in the room.

5. Training Methodologies

This module is based on participatory, experiential and trauma-informed pedagogy adapted to the lived realities of young migrants. It draws on feminist, decolonial and psychosocial frameworks to foster both individual growth and collective learning. The teaching approach centres emotional safety, relational depth and ethical sensitivity.

Core Pedagogical Principles (Three-Stage Structure)

- **Introducing Concepts:** Short, accessible inputs using visuals, stories and real-life examples. Facilitators use metaphors (e.g. bridges, mirrors) and culturally relevant narratives to introduce the dimensions of empathy.
- **Guided Practice:** Activities include role-play, empathy mapping, embodied exercises and scenario analysis. Participants engage in a structured exploration of emotions, power dynamics and relational cues.
- **Personal Reflection:** Through journaling, storytelling circles and group dialogue, participants relate empathy to their own migration journeys, career goals and ethical commitments.

Trauma-Informed Practice

- Grounding techniques such as breathwork, movement and sensory objects (e.g. textured fabrics, calming scents) help to regulate emotional energy.
- Facilitators offer opt-out options for emotionally intense activities, respecting participants' boundaries and autonomy.
- "Check-in" and "check-out" rituals (e.g. emotion cards, body scans, one-word reflections) help to monitor group energy and create rhythm.

Decolonial and Feminist Pedagogy

- Before each session, facilitators reflect on their own positionality, considering how power and identity shape their roles.
- Storytelling and oral traditions from diverse cultures are used to honour lived experience and collective memory.
- Empathy is framed not as a neutral skill but as a political and relational act. Participants explore how history, power and resistance shape emotional connection.

Assessment and Reflection

- **Formative Tools:** Reflection journals, peer feedback circles and creative outputs (collage, manifesto).
- **Evidence of Learning:** Participants' empathy maps, onion diagrams and scenario reflections serve as assessment artefacts.
- **Self-Assessment:** The Active Listening checklist and journaling prompts help participants to track their progress.

Making Cultural Connections

- Activities include localised examples (such as bureaucracy in Greece, intercultural misunderstandings in schools).
- Participants bring songs, proverbs or stories from their own cultures to show empathy in practice.
- Facilitators encourage connections to be made between personal migration journeys and wider systemic contexts.

Embodied Learning

- Activities such as “Empathy Walks” encourage somatic (bodily) awareness by inviting participants to imagine another person’s experience while walking in silence.
- Creative modalities such as drawing, collage, music and gesture enable participants to express empathy beyond words.
- Movement-based reflection (e.g. prompts such as “Step into the circle if this statement applies to you”) supports emotional attunement and group cohesion.

Creating a Safe Space

- Group agreements are co-created with participants, using statements such as: “We listen to understand”, “We honour silence”, “We speak from lived experience”.
- Visual tools such as a “safety thermometer” help to gauge comfort levels and invite non-verbal feedback.
- Facilitators model consent practices (e.g. asking before sharing stories, offering choices in participation).

Multimodal Engagement

- Oral storytelling is paired with visual mapping (e.g. empathy maps, migration journeys).
- Multilingual prompts and culturally resonant symbols support linguistic diversity and inclusion.
- Tactile materials (e.g. clay, fabric, cards) engage kinaesthetic learners and support emotional grounding.

Connecting to Wider Skills

- Explicitly connect empathy to: Conflict resolution in multicultural teams, Employability skills (job interviews, teamwork, leadership) and Civic engagement (community organising, advocacy).

Role of the Facilitator

- Facilitators act as co-learners and guides, holding space for vulnerability, complexity and the co-construction of meaning.
- A reflection guide is provided: “What power do I hold in this space? How can I share it?”
- Facilitators are encouraged to model curiosity and humility, using phrases such as “I don’t know, but let’s explore it together”.

6. Materials

The following materials support the delivery of the module and can be adapted or translated as needed:

Core Materials

- **Presentation slides:** Visually engaging slides introducing empathy, its dimensions and its relevance in different settings. Include definitions, quotes and visual metaphors (e.g. bridges, circles, mirrors).
- **Scenario cards:** Short, culturally relevant role-play prompts based on real-life situations (e.g. job interviews, peer conflict, navigating bureaucracy, intercultural misunderstandings).
- **Empathy Map worksheet:** A printable or digital template that helps participants explore another person’s experience by mapping what they might think, feel, say and do.
- **Active Listening checklist:** A simple handout summarising key listening behaviours (e.g. open body language, paraphrasing, asking clarifying questions, avoiding judgement).
- **“Empathy Onion” visual tool:** A diagram of concentric circles (individual, family, social network, community, world) used to explore how identity and empathy are shaped by nested systems. It can be printed as a poster or drawn collaboratively on flipcharts.
- **Follow-up Toolkit:** A one-page handout summarising empathy practices (active listening, the empathy onion, reflection questions). Participants take it home as a practical reminder and resource.

Optional Tools

- **Jamboard or Miro:** For collaborative empathy mapping, scenario analysis or group reflections in hybrid or digital settings.
- **Mentimeter or Slido:** For anonymous sharing of “empathy blockers”, emotional check-ins or feedback.
- **Safety Thermometer:** A visual tool (e.g. a poster or handout) that helps participants to express their levels of emotional comfort non-verbally. Useful for check-ins, pacing and grounding in trauma-informed sessions.

Supplementary Resources:



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- Short video: “The Power of Empathy” by Brené Brown, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evvgu369Jw&t=32s>

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