

When the Body Speaks: Human Stories of Migration Through Theatre

New Horizons: Empowering Migrant Youth with Creative and Educational Initiatives (Erasmus+ KA2, KA210-000266407)

Within the Erasmus+ KA2 project **New Horizons: Empowering Migrant Youth with Creative and Educational Initiatives**, moments of exchange are not side activities—they are the heart of the project. New Horizons was created to open spaces where people with migrant backgrounds can learn, grow, and connect through creative and educational initiatives. In practice, this means building environments where participants feel safe enough to share, to listen, and to explore new ways of expressing what is often difficult to say.

One of the clearest examples of this vision came to life during a theatre-based workshop organised by **EuroMed Eve Belgium** in Brussels. The workshop centred on migration—not as a concept or a political topic, but as a lived journey: a path made of decisions, ruptures, hopes, losses, and ongoing negotiation between worlds. What made the workshop especially meaningful is that it did not rely only on words. By inviting participants to work with movement, space, and improvisation, it offered an alternative language—one that can go deeper than formal conversation, especially when emotions are complex or painful.

Migration is not one story

From the beginning, participants brought extremely diverse migration experiences. Some had moved from one European country to another, navigating cultural shifts that might appear “lighter” from the outside, but still carry disorientation, isolation, and the need to rebuild everyday life. Others had migrated under pressure—because of war, insecurity, or major instability—where leaving home meant leaving behind not only places and habits, but safety itself. Some participants carried the experience of **second-generation migration**, living between inherited memories and current realities, often balancing two identities while trying to be fully accepted in the society where they live. Others described a more “privileged” form of migration between economically stable countries—yet still faced the subtle weight of being a foreigner, adapting constantly, and feeling the quiet distance from one’s original environment.

This diversity created a powerful dynamic: participants realised that migration is not a single narrative. It is a spectrum of journeys, each marked by different obstacles, but often connected by similar emotional threads. Even when the contexts were not comparable, the feelings could be: the tension of starting again, the fear of not belonging, the exhaustion of explaining oneself, the longing for familiarity, and the desire to be seen beyond labels.

Putting emotions at the centre

The workshop was structured to gradually move from introduction and personal storytelling toward body exploration and collective improvisation. Participants first shared their experiences—sometimes touching on trauma and difficult memories linked to their journeys. But the turning point came when the workshop invited them to step beyond verbal explanation and enter a different kind of expression: one rooted in the body.

Through movement exercises, participants discovered how much the body carries—how emotions live in posture, rhythm, breath, silence, and distance from others. The workshop created a rare space

where emotional states related to migration could be explored without having to “perform” a coherent story. Instead, participants could simply show what the journey feels like.

Migration is never only logistical. It is emotional. It means leaving behind family, cultural references, familiar languages, and ways of being understood. It often requires moving through uncertainty while trying to build a new life. In that process, many people learn to protect themselves by keeping certain feelings unspoken. The workshop, however, made room for what is usually hidden: grief, fatigue, anger, shame, fear, and also resilience, humour, tenderness, and hope.

When the room became “the border”

In one of the most intense moments, the physical space of the workshop became a metaphor for migration itself. Obstacles were introduced. Participants were asked to move through them, interact, and improvise together. Slowly, the space transformed into something recognisable: a landscape of restrictions and access, of pathways that open and close.

At a certain point, the group’s improvisation naturally created two contrasting zones—one associated with freedom and one with oppression. Some participants began to “close” the borders between these zones, making it harder for others to cross. Without needing to explain, the group collectively built a scene that many recognised immediately: the reality of controlled borders, the exhaustion of waiting, the tension of crossing, and the vulnerability of being judged. It also captured the mixed emotions of arrival—relief intertwined with fatigue, joy mixed with loneliness, hope disrupted by uncertainty.

What emerged was not theatre as a performance, but theatre as truth. A shared recognition: the migration journey is often shaped by forces outside one’s control, and yet it is lived internally in deeply personal ways.

Recognition, community, and a space beyond “work mode”

One of the strongest outcomes was the way participants recognised themselves in one another. Despite different journeys, they could identify shared difficulties—especially those linked to integration and inclusion: the feeling of being “almost” accepted but still different, the effort required to build a sense of home, the invisible barriers that can appear in institutions, social contexts, or everyday interactions.

Several participants also underlined how important it was to have a space that sits **outside the usual “productive” or strictly positive work frameworks**—a moment where emotions are not something to manage quickly, but something that can exist, be shared, and be honoured. The workshop offered a circle where the body was not secondary. In daily life, many people feel pushed to function, adapt, and keep going—often leaving little room to reconnect with their physical self. Working through the body became essential precisely because everyday processes can oblige people not to occupy their body fully, or not to listen to it.

This is where the project’s added value becomes visible: it creates conditions for deeper self-awareness, mutual recognition, and emotional literacy—key ingredients for inclusion that cannot be built only through formal dialogue.

A moment of freedom: dancing again

Among the human stories that emerged, one stood out for its simplicity and power. A participant originally from **Iran** shared that the training gave her the chance to **dance again after several years**.

In that space, she felt free—able to move without fear, without judgement, and without the weight that had kept that part of herself silent for so long.

This moment was not “just” an activity. It was a reclaiming: of joy, of expression, of the right to take space. It reminded everyone that inclusion is also about enabling people to return to themselves—to parts of their identity that may have been interrupted by displacement, trauma, or years of adaptation.

From pain to imagination

After the intensity of the border improvisation, the workshop opened into a phase of release and reconnection through dance—allowing participants to let go of negative energy and regain strength. It then concluded with an imagination exercise: participants wrote privately about their dreams or their happiest day, and later created small scenographies with objects, sharing their texts in a space that blended silence and collective presence.

This final moment shifted the workshop from survival to projection. It reminded everyone that migrants are not only defined by what they have lost or endured, but also by what they imagine, desire, and build. The room became a stage of future visions: not abstract optimism, but grounded hopes shaped by real experience.

The added value of New Horizons

This workshop reflected the added value of the New Horizons project in a tangible way. It showed that inclusion is not achieved only through information or formal dialogue. Inclusion also requires spaces where people can express themselves beyond familiar patterns—spaces that recognise emotional reality and allow deeper self-knowledge.

By bringing people together through artistic practice, New Horizons creates pathways for participants to process lived experiences, develop awareness, and strengthen connections across difference. The workshop made clear that creative methods can help individuals access what is hardest to say—and, in doing so, build stronger foundations for integration, empathy, and community.

In the end, the most powerful “result” was not a single exercise or output. It was the human shift that occurred in the room: people feeling safe enough to be honest, to be seen, and to recognise one another. That is what meaningful inclusion looks like—and that is the kind of impact New Horizons is enabling.