

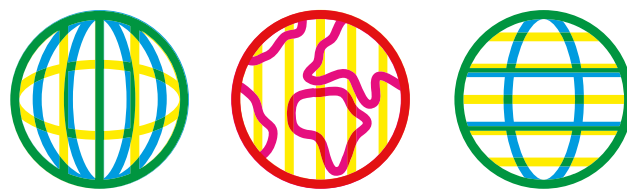
The Cross Talks, what we learned

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opportunities

for a fair narrative on migration



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The Cross Talks, what we learned

The assessment of the Cross Talks

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The Cross Talks, what we learned

This report aims to explore the possibilities of creating a Level Telling Field between people with a migration background and stakeholders. Stakeholders are people who, through their organisation or institute, can influence the coexistence with people with a migration background.

We call this the Cross Talk methodology.

In this report, we bring together the experiences of 9 pilots in 3 African and 6 European countries and make a number of recommendations based on these. In this article, we bring together the experiences of 9 pilots in 3 African and 6 European countries and make a number of recommendations based on these. The experiences of these pilots were evaluated by the partners of OPPORTUNITIES themselves by means of an extensive assessment. The assessment report on which this article is based can be found on the OPPORTUNITIES website.

First we will look at what the Level Telling Field entails, then we will delve deeper into the Cross Talk methodology and, based on the experiments, we give a number of recommendations. An afterthought concludes this chapter.



1. How the Level Telling Field principles are translated into the Cross Talk methodology

The Level Telling Field is, like the 'level playing field' in football, a set of principles. These principles can be translated into a process or a method. The LTF is therefore a 'roadmap and mechanism for an open, constructive and productive debate - the cornerstone of a democratic, pluralistic, secular society. The goal is therefore a fair dialogue in which all perspectives or stories are addressed.

They can best be seen as commitments by all participants in a debate to adopt a shared set of principles, to agree on principles and rules, and to define processes and procedures for conducting debates and documenting results. OPPORTUNITIES has defined the basic principles of LTF: a) a commitment to a democratic worldview based on human rights and a paradigm for human development; b) adherence to generally accepted standards for evaluating assertions, opinions and arguments; and c) sincerity, i.e. a serious commitment to debate as a democratic means of opinion-forming and decision-making. LTF principles include vertical multi-perspectivity, an ethic of listening and the adoption of perspectives.

These basic values are crucial: they are democratic principles like the will to listen, the willingness to take on multiple starting points and perspectives, daring to step into someone's shoes. These ethical principles cannot be questioned. These basic values are discussed during the trust-building process and reiterated at the beginning of the Cross Talk event. The audience guarantees these basic values during the Cross Talk events. The audience therefore plays an important role: it holds the participants jointly responsible for helping to determine a good dialogue. In addition, the audience can be asked to help find keywords or to use suggestions to steer the conversation in the right direction.

An ethic of listening is a prerequisite for any form of fair dialogue. Cross Talk events create narrative scenarios that enable migrants and refugees to share their experiences, and encourage citizens and other stakeholders to listen by involving them in lectures. Cross Talk events ensure that different voices are heard and valued in the conversation, including and especially those of more vulnerable groups. In this respect, an ethics of listening implies an 'image-other' (instead of the 'image-self') perspective among the participants.

To create an 'image-other' perspective, stories are central to the methodology. These stories are read out loud. This is the re-enactment phase: re-enactment refers to the process of retelling migrant stories. During Cross Talk events, NGOs and citizens retell testimonies of migrants and refugees to create a bond between in-groups and out-groups. The re-telling requires both empathy, i.e. the willingness of each participant to listen to the stories of the others and to take their perspectives, and political listening to understand the situation of the other (e.g. the motivation and reasons of an individual to migrate). It is through these modes of recognition that the process of re-enactment enables migrants and refugees to assume their role in the public sphere.

Participants in Cross Talk events who have no migration or refugee experience whatsoever (i.e. NGOs, citizens or other stakeholders) act out or retell testimonies of migration and refugee freedom in order to understand and

perhaps even adopt the perspectives of migrants and refugees. This process of re-enactment creates common ground between the interpreter and the migrant or refugee, enabling an honest dialogue between the interpreter, the migrant and the audience.

The dialogue phase begins with the search for common ground based on the re-enactment. The re-enactment ends with an inventory of keywords: what did the narrator think about the story when he read it?

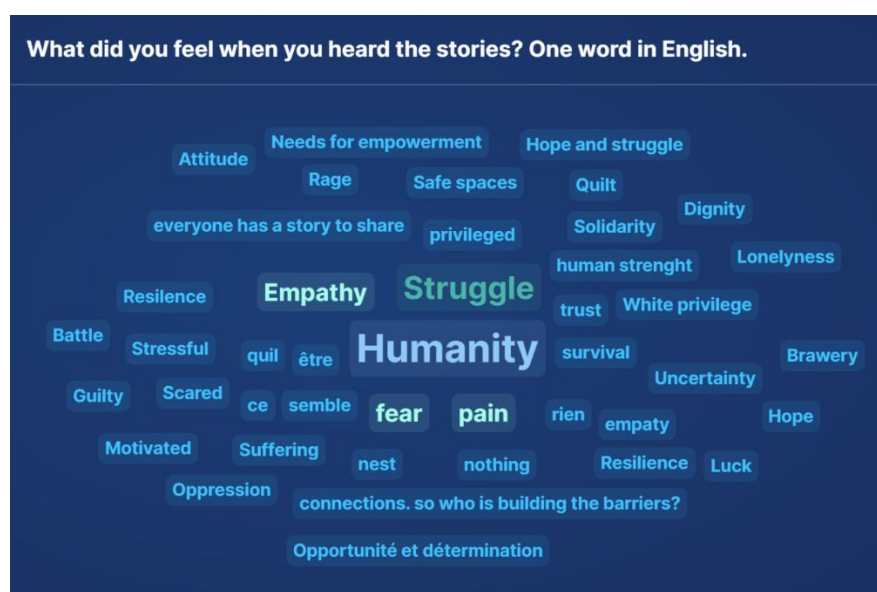


Figure 1 Keywords from the audience after listening to 8 stories during the final conference of OPPORTUNITIES on 31 January 2025

With the inventory of key words, you can now search for one (or more) common keyword(s).

Together a couple of common key words are sought. On the bases of these key words a dialogue on how to live together. The dialogue starts with the question what is needed to overcome negative key words (struggle, angry, oppression, ...) or what is needed to build on positive key words (humanity, empathy, resilience).

In next figure the method is visualized into five steps: (1) building trust for confidential storytelling – (2) migrants tell their life stories (either in oral or written form); – (3) the migrants re-tell their stories, thus ‘re-living’ what has been told; (4) public re-enactment – migrants and stakeholders tell each other’s stories in front of a public audience; (5) dialogue, the public re-enactment of the stories leads to a fair conversation on migration.

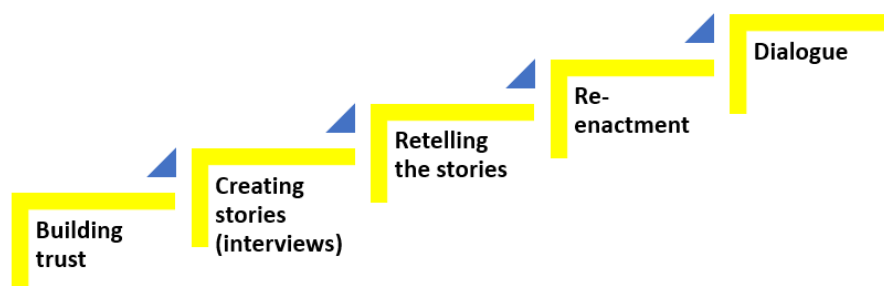


Figure 2 The ladder of the Cross Talk methodology

The five steps are called the Cross Talk methodology, the two last steps the Cross Talk.

2. The assessment of the Cross Talks pilots.

2.1 The nine pilots

The partners of the Opportunities consortium organised several meetings with individuals and organisations involved in immigrant communities. They followed the general guidelines of the Cross Talk methodology and adapted them according to their local social and cultural norms and their limited resources. Table one provides a snapshot of the countries and participants of the Cross Talk events.

The following table gives an overview of the pilots in the 9 participating countries.

Country	Participants				
		Immigrants	Stakeholders	Audience	Opportunities' Team
Africa	Ghana	I-6, II-7	I-5, II-6	I-3	2
	Mauritania	I-II 7	9	-	2
	Senegal	I-4, II-5, III-6	I, II, III-10	-	1
Europe	Austria	5	5	3	
	Belgium	5	5	10	2
	France	8	3	3	4
	Italy	5	4	I-8?	3
	Portugal	I-3, II-3	I-8, II-5	7	2
	Romania	3	5	1	3

Table 1 The Cross Talk events by country, participants and their gender balance, 2023

Notes:

I and II refer to the session number.

Figures in brackets, M and F, refer to the gender of participants, based on the available information.

Stakeholders include human right activists, academics, civil society organisations (NGO), government officials and representatives of international organisations.

In each local event the number of immigrants involved ranged from between six and 10 and those of stakeholders and audience (members of the public) between three and 12.

The pilots were organized between spring and august 2023.

2.2 What we learned.

2.2.1 Creating trust is a necessity

Trust is the foundation, this is true not only for the participants but also for the stakeholders. Both must have trust in the method but also in the facilitators and researchers.

In the description of the method we put a lot of emphasis on building trust. After all, participants have to cooperate for a long time, they have to tell and use their life stories, aspirations and expectations in a narrative, and they have to dare to engage in dialogue.

The experiments used several inputs for this purpose: working with NGOs that already work with migrants, with cultural mediators and experienced facilitators, in addition to creating a welcoming atmosphere. The attitude is listening, never judging, just respecting. We take them as they are, people with expectations. Even if participants drop out partially, there must be respect for this decision. This creates a working together on an equal footing. Stakeholders must also trust the method: after all, they need to get beyond their, mostly, institutional position. After all, the dialogue sessions are not about official positions, but about how can we live and work together for a common future. This did not always succeed in the experiments; after all, it is and remains difficult for those in charge of services and governments to go beyond their official position. Therefore, investing in trust is needed. One of the ways is to ensure anonymity. This applies not only to the interviews and stories, but also to the dialogue session. The dialogue sessions were mostly private, with a limited and selected audience. Trust is the basis for a successful Cross Talk: taking time and space for this is necessary.

9 2.2.2 Preparing for a CT takes time.

The application of Cross Talk can never be short. There are several reasons for this. The first two steps take up a lot of space: we already mentioned the need to build a relationship of trust; the interviews and their processing must be able to be carried by the participants; and writing the stories requires a lot from the participants. The next steps can be faster, provided that the participants are ready. This is the most important reason: participants, because of language barriers, cultural barriers, education and possible negative experiences and traumas, are the “weakest” in a dialogue. In other words, if we bring them into a dialogue with stakeholders, they must be sufficiently strong in their positions.

Consequently, in some experiments, participants dropped out: the dialogue sessions and re-enactment were too challenging, too heavy for them. Confidence in oneself does not come overnight. In all experiments, therefore, investments were made in empowering migrants.

All this shows that a Cross Talk requires time, space and resources.

2.2.3 Tailoring the Cross Talk

The Cross Talk is a five-step framework. How these steps will be taken is not fixed, only the goal and the order. This provides many opportunities for the implementer to get creative with it. How trust is created, how interviews are conducted, how stories are written, how dialogue sessions are conducted, ..., all this is in the hands of the implementer.



This freedom should always lead to stronger participants, a good story, respect for dialogue and good dialogue: the interviews, the stories, the re-enactment of the stories by others, the search for common ground, and the dialogue, these are the foundations.

2.2.4 Is collaboration necessary?

The 9 experiments were based on collaboration with NGOs. In some countries, the implementers are also an NGO already working with persons with a migration background. Additional collaborations were also sought in these countries. Of course, collaborations were sought with cultural organizations or individuals for cultural translation. Few partners have this knowledge and practice in-house.

All collaborations began from the start and even before. NGOs are needed to reach the participants, gain and maintain trust, contacts with institutional parties, and also for the dissemination of the project.

NGOs can also help support the participants: social and psychological support, skills support, support in getting out into society, ...

Working together yielded a plus for all the experiments.

2.2.5 Why is the re-enactment phase so important?

The re-enactment is the foundation on which the dialogue is built. Without a well-executed re-enactment, an interesting dialogue is difficult.

The re-enactment consists of reading aloud a story of another person; the other person is either a stakeholder or a migrant. By reading someone else's story aloud, this story becomes a part of you: you are forced to step into the shoes of the other.

Almost all attendees at the experiments appreciated this moment: it was emotional, moving, shocking, ... "There were those who said that it was one thing to hear the story, but another one to read it." was one of the comments. Another comment was that this phase could last much longer.

The re-enactment is a phase. It lays the foundation for the search for common ground. And the common ground is then the starting point for dialogue.

2.2.6 How to measure the empowerment of the participants?

All experiments evaluated participants' participation. A list of possible indicators can be extracted from them:

- Active Participation: A key measure of empowerment is the degree of involvement of participants in project activities (information, participation, promotion, feedback, etc.). This includes their willingness to share personal experiences, contribute to storytelling and thematic discussions, and take responsibility for their role in co-creating stories.
- Self-confidence and voice: voicing their opinions and participating in group discussions; moving from initial hesitation to active engagement.
- Skills development: Participants' ability to acquire and apply new skills.
- Influence on the direction of the project: their input in shaping project activities reflects their growing influence and ability to guide discussions in ways consistent with their own experiences.
- Integration into the community: a proactive desire to become involved in broader societal structures. This shift from self-oriented to community-oriented actions indicates empowerment at the collective level.
- Advocacy and representation: a willingness to act as advocates for their experiences.

2.2.7 Ethics of the project

Any experiment needs a code of ethics, this is all the more important when vulnerable individuals are participating and facing stakeholders. Participants should come out of the project enriched and not damaged. The code of ethics was therefore discussed with the participants themselves, the NGOs who participated and with the stakeholders.

From these discussions, we learned that not only anonymity is important, but also that participants must be able to draw boundaries, that democratic values are necessary, and that trusted figures who can mediate are needed. All of this protects participants.

This code of ethics was regularly brought up again; it is necessary to remind everyone of about it.

2.2.8 Use creative methods

From the experiments we learned that we need to explore more creative methods that are less rooted in the world of “scientific” workshop/teaching methods. Certainly less language-skilled individuals can be more involved this way, which can produce a more supported outcome.

2.2.9 Communicate about the CT, not just through newsletters

In several countries, one of the evaluations was to find communication channels to make the results of the CTs known to a wider audience so that the insights from the CTs would not be lost.

Thus, a communication strategy is needed to disseminate the results achieved.

Within OPPORTUNITIES, each partner should disseminate at least a policy letter and a newsletter, in addition they were asked to produce a cultural product that can be used at other times. The partners were also asked to pay attention to the CT through their social media.

We introduced these cultural products for the sake of dissemination of the project on the one hand, how do we bring the experiments to a wider audience? and on the other hand in the interest of the project itself. After all, the participants participated for about 2 to 3 years, this is extremely long. The question, then, is how do they stay motivated to participate? The cultural translation of the project is therefore a way to keep them involved in the longer term, it also creates a good atmosphere among the participants and is also an important part in empowering them.



3. Afterthoughts

Cross Talk is an innovative method based on storytelling and re-enactment. It also follows the guidelines of the Participative Action Research theory. One of the goals is to empower vulnerable participants, not only through training and learning about their rights, but also by discussing the underlying causes of discrimination, oppression and racism with stakeholders.

Cross Talk is always a risky undertaking: it is risky for the vulnerable participants, for the stakeholders and for the organisers. The immigrants have to talk about their lives, their aspirations and the obstacles to these aspirations. This openness makes them more vulnerable. For the stakeholders, they must take a personal stance, away from their official position, and at the same time bring their knowledge of Cross Talk into their work. This is more than a challenge for them. Organisers can become activists and lose their role as a bridge between different cultures. Cross Talk is a promising method. It can also be used in situations of inequality. We have experimented with the help of refugees and people with a migration background, with the help of NGOs committed to a more equal world based on human rights, and with the help of stakeholders who dared to cross boundaries. We are more than grateful to them.

Now it's your turn. We hope you are curious. That is why we invite you to experiment with the Cross Talks. You can find more specific information on our website, where you will find the manual and several reports about the Cross Talks.

Good luck!

The background features a complex, abstract composition of overlapping geometric shapes and lines. On the left and right sides, there are stylized, colorful globes or spheres. These are composed of thick, curved lines in green, blue, and yellow. In the center, there are several thick, wavy, horizontal lines in red, pink, and yellow. The overall effect is a vibrant, multi-colored pattern that suggests global connectivity and movement.

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