



migration  
communications

# Our media Toolkit

Creating messages and stories



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# **Our Toolkit -** creating messages and stories

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## About IMiX

IMiX exists to support organisation working in the immigration and refugees protection sector to grow their strategic communications capacity, with a focus on local and regional groups. In addition, we influence the public debate on immigration issues by producing communication outputs that cut through and have an impact.

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## IMiX Toolkit – creating messages and stories

Never has it been more important to talk about the people we support, the work we do, and why Britain is a welcoming nation for people who come here to live, work, or find safety. At the same time, it can seem like it has never been more difficult to do that – particularly through the media, which can seem impenetrable and even hostile. This guide has been created to help people with their external communications. We're happy for this to be shared with anyone who might find it useful. We would welcome feedback on how to improve our guide.

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## What do we mean by communications?

Communications simply means saying something or telling a story publicly. Communications covers everything from a weekly newsletter to your supporters, all the way up to a Cabinet Minister being interviewed by Mishal Husain on the Today Programme. **Communications for your organisation might be:**

- ▶ Newspapers
- ▶ Magazines,
- ▶ Newsletters
- ▶ TV interviews
- ▶ Websites
- ▶ Emails
- ▶ Blogs
- ▶ Tweets
- ▶ Podcasts
- ▶ Case studies / lived experience stories
- ▶ Reports or whitepapers

**Everyone does communications – and good communications can be crucial for securing positive change – but not everyone does it well, in a way that helps the organisation and the cause they work for.**

When you communicate through the media, we often talk about using a 'story'. A story could mean anything from a report being launched which recommends the government do something differently; to a person who you work with talking about their life and experiences in a broadcast interview.

Not all organisations have a specialist communications expert, so this guide has been created to help you think about what kind of communications your organisation could be doing, why you should think about how you use communications, and how to do it well to have a positive impact for the people you support and work alongside.



## Why communication matters

There are lots of reasons why organisations want to communicate around their work. For example, you might want to:

- ▶ Raise funds
- ▶ Support more people
- ▶ Change policy or practice
- ▶ Influence decisions
- ▶ Challenge public attitudes
- ▶ Raise awareness

Ultimately, communication should help an organisation deliver its strategy, in line with its mission and vision.

There are many important elements to good communication, including listening (what are people telling us) and engagement (how can we work together to create a better future). As communicators, we need to know what we are trying to achieve and have a plan to achieve our goals, and importantly, how and when to assess whether we are meeting these objectives.

Before setting down the road of what to communicate, it's best to know what change you are seeking and how to make that change happen (this is often known as a 'theory of change').

- ▶ What is the problem, what is the impact of the current situation on people you support, who can make things better and what does success look like?
- ▶ Who do we need to persuade to make change happen and how do we reach them?
- ▶ What messages will persuade them, and how do they need to hear those messages?

## What makes a good piece of communications?

Once you have thought about your theory of change (what you want to achieve and how to make it happen), you should think about who you need to persuade (this is often known as the 'target audience'). These two pieces of work are important, and often in time poor organisations, neglected.

### Top tips

Go through your charity's plan. How can media, digital or marketing help achieve your goals?

Understand the key challenges and opportunities your charity must manage, and how communications can help

Set clear goals and know how you will evaluate them regularly

There is a lot of work that has been done on target audiences, which is available to any organisation working in this area (see resources section).

Next, you should think about what values and stories are likely to motivate your target audience, and help change their mind.

For example, if you want to persuade a predominantly Christian audience, it would be a good idea to think about the values of compassion and care for the needy. If you are targeting parents, you should think about appealing to people's maternal and paternal instincts.

The same goes for what is often called the 'messenger' – the person who tells the story you want to tell. A parent or child is going to be more persuasive when communicating with an audience of parents.

Often, you'll end up with a story or messenger which doesn't appeal to you (because to use the above examples, you're not a parent or a Christian) – but the important thing is that it will appeal to someone else and it's that person who you need to persuade.

# How to persuade people

## 1. Think about 'shared values'

People don't want more problems, they have enough of their own without being handed more. And people don't like to feel powerless, so we need to show them that they can do something about a situation. People hearing our communications are more inclined to take notice if we give them something positive first, something that makes them feel good about themselves and which they can relate personally to – even if what we are really talking about is a problem we want fixing.

### Example

**USE:** Every parent loves their family and wants the same thing for them – a safe, secure, and loving home in which to live together. We would all hope that if our home was in danger, neighbours would open their doors to offer our family safety.

**AVOID:** Right now, millions of refugees are fleeing war and persecution. It is a disgrace that Britain doesn't do more to protect them.

## 2. Talk about people – who are the villains and heroes?

When we do mention the problem (after we've used a shared value), we must remember to say who's to blame, who caused or who can solve the problem. We've got to give our audience a villain in our story. If we don't, they won't know that someone can fix it. Similarly, when we talk about the people we are supporting – people who have come to the UK as migrants, including refugees – we must describe them in human terms.

### Example

**USE:** Amber Rudd's Home Office has chosen to force children to grow up without their fathers, just because they don't earn enough money.

**AVOID:** Minimum income requirements mean that parents are prevented from cohabiting with their next of kin if their incomes don't meet a minimum threshold.

## 3. Speak in positive terms (mostly)

Once we've stated our shared value and identified the problem, we want to say what we think should happen to fix it. When we do that, we should use positive language which paints a picture of what we do want – not just negative language which says what we want to get rid of. We should be for something desirable and not just against something deplorable. Similarly, we should never simply negate the language of our opponents – for example, if we say, 'migrants do not lower wages', all people hear is 'migrants' and 'lower wages'.

### Example

**USE:** We must create an immigration process which is fair, humane and decent, and which lets families live together in a loving, secure household.

**AVOID:** We must fix our broken immigration system – it is unjust and harmful. It needs redesigning from the top down.

## 4. Talk about the outcomes you want, not the process through which you'll get it

Often when we talk about whatever it is we are advocating for, we focus on the process rather than the product we really want. Think about the light at the end of the tunnel, and give people a positive outcome to focus on.

### Example

**USE:** People who come to Britain as refugees should be given a fair chance to get on their own two feet by finding employment and somewhere to live.

**AVOID:** The government should do away with the move-on period, which inevitably results in administrative delays and big gaps in financial support.

## 5. Don't couch your language

There are two common ways people couch their language, and both should be avoided! The first is the passive voice – you should avoid ever using the passive voice in your writing and always think about how you can phrase what you're saying in the active voice instead. The second is with 'hedging phrases' such as 'seek to' or 'strive to' – these can almost always be removed to make your language more direct and ambitious.

### Example

**USE:** We campaign to stop the Home Office from choosing to deny people who come to Britain as refugees a fair chance of getting themselves on their own two feet.

**AVOID:** Our campaign aims to challenge people becoming destitute.

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## Telling people's stories

One of the best ways of getting any message across is through personal stories. People are turned off by facts and figures (particularly BIG numbers) and they find it hard to connect with something which is outside of their life experience.

But hearing someone talk about their own life and experiences has been shown to be very powerful in getting a message across.

For example, someone who came to the UK as a refugee talking about how they've been able to build a hopeful, happy life since arriving will almost certainly be more powerful than a report full of statistics and figures.

What makes a powerful personal story?

- ▶ **Local** – people relate more to people from their local town or region
- ▶ **Positive** – people like to hear good stories about people who do well
- ▶ **Values** – stories which talk about shared values (e.g. family)
- ▶ **Counterintuitive** – stories which challenge the stereotype or are unusual
- ▶ **Journey** – stories which show someone having grown themselves or improved their lives

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## How to get a good story

*principles of collecting and telling stories, photos and films*

Getting a good story is all about **trust**. Building trust can take time but losing that trust can take seconds. How you ask people to share experiences is important – it is rarely a “yes / no” scenario. Some people will have been in very vulnerable situations and will not want to share that information; if someone says no, you must not push them. If they are not sure, it is important to listen to their concerns and take the time to explain to them why it would help the cause to share their experiences. Even if they are keen, it is important to explain what telling their story means and the potential impact of telling their story. This is particularly important if there is an ongoing legal case – in this situation it is sensible to check in with their lawyer to ensure that telling the story won't jeopardise the case.

Within the migration and refugee sector, we believe that our storytelling should respect the **dignity and equality** of all people featured.

We tell the truth about the contexts within which we work, and present that information in a way that is digestible and appealing to our audiences. Getting those stories told is fundamental to the sector's ability to challenge the overwhelmingly negative narrative around migration.

We must carry out our storytelling to a high ethical standard, as inaccurate or manipulated information could cause personal harm, offence, or be counter-productive to the sector's goals. With safeguarding at the heart of any approach, we believe it is important to follow people-centred story gathering principles.

## Case Study

*story gathering for international development*

The following is an excerpt from an international development organisation, VSO International, and is based on principles that are widely used in international development called the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, which has been ratified by over 80 NGO organisations.

As per the Code of Conduct, the choices of images and messages will be made on the people-centred principles of:

- ▶ **Respect** for the dignity of the people concerned;
- ▶ **Belief** in the equality of all people;
- ▶ **Acceptance** of the need to promote fairness, solidarity and justice.

**We should always obtain written or verbal informed consent** from individuals detailed in our communications work. Some of these principles are purposefully subjective, so we will have an open conversation to ensure we don't cross a line whilst still needing to fulfil our communications objectives.

### **The Dochas Code of Conduct:**

1. **Choose images and related messages based on values of respect, equality, solidarity and justice;**
2. **Truthfully represent any image or depicted situation both in its immediate and in its wider context to improve public understanding of the realities and complexities of development;**
3. **Avoid images and messages that potentially stereotype, sensationalise or discriminate against people, situations or places;**
4. **Use images, messages and case studies with the full understanding, participation and permission of the subjects (or subjects' parents/guardian);**
5. **Ensure those whose situation is being represented can communicate their stories themselves;**
6. **Establish and record whether the subjects wish to be named or identifiable and always act accordingly;**
7. **Conform to the highest standards in relation to human rights and protection of the vulnerable people.**





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## Principles for story gathering

These principles are used by IMiX to guide us through story gathering and can be followed by anyone using this guide:

- ▶ We are evidence-based. We never lie, misrepresent or set up shots to display something that isn't done as a natural part of the work being depicted, e.g. we can set up a shot illustrating a training technique, or cinemagraph, but not ask someone to pretend to be unwell or grief-stricken. If actors are used to reconstruct a situation, we will identify it as such.
- ▶ Imagery will never be offensive or perpetuate a cultural or racial stereotype. We must be mindful of representation of different ethnic or community groups.
- ▶ We will not film someone if it puts him or her at risk.
- ▶ We will not produce content that positions people as undignified, pathetic or takes their voice away. This includes music, which should always be engaging and emotive but never offensive or sensational.
- ▶ We will avoid using a voice-over, particularly when the people featured are able to speak for themselves and articulate the story, unless additional information is needed, or an overview.
- ▶ We will use subtitles wherever possible to engage our hard-of-hearing audiences, or those with less advanced English. Furthermore, accurate translation is essential.
- ▶ Language and copy will always be respectful, e.g. never 'asylum seekers' but people seeking asylum, not 'poor people' but people living in poverty.
- ▶ We are accountable and share our materials with those featured.
- ▶ When identifying a child in an image, do not mention surnames or personal details that could reasonably be used to trace that child.

### Getting consent

While some people are keen to share, others might be nervous. It is important – whether people are keen or not – that they understand why we are asking them to share their stories and where these stories might be shared.

It is vital that people understand that once a story is in the public domain, it is impossible to make it disappear; this means we need to be clear that if they are telling their story to a journalist, it may go on social media; or if it's part of policy briefing to MPs, it might end up in the press or be mentioned in parliament.



## How to get a good story

Personal stories are excellent ways to demonstrate the true impact of our work. They are more persuasive than statistics. The key is making the story **engaging, emotive, exciting, and digestible**.

### Their story should:

- ▶ Have a journey element – *the situation before, what changed, where they are now, what comes next*.
- ▶ Bring that person to life.
- ▶ Contain the most interesting and relevant facts.
- ▶ Demonstrate work, intervention and/or impact.

### Interviewing:

- ▶ Never forget to ask: *Who, Where, What, Why, When and **How did they feel?***
- ▶ Details about that person – *name, age, members of their family, job?*
- ▶ Ask your subject to describe the issue in their own words and how it impacts them or the people they know.
- ▶ Before and After. Could they raise their family in safety, without worrying about their children being in danger? Do their children now have happy lives, making friends at school and enjoying their studies?
- ▶ What does their future look like now?

### Writing:

- ▶ Catchy title: snappy, short and grabs attention, or strong quote.  
*“... has changed me, the community and my future” – Safaa’s story.*
- ▶ **Intro paragraph:** In three sentences, set the scene, intro your main character and explain the relevance to your organisation / the cause.  
*“What surprised her most when she arrived in the UK to begin her new life was how much west Wales looked like the region of Syria where she grew up.”*

### The story you write can be a Q&A, a third person article or a first-person story:

- ▶ Set the scene, explain the issue, the community, and the family.
- ▶ Bring the most interesting part of the story to the top – what is unique or transformative, e.g. *‘the first girl to study engineering in the community’*
- ▶ Short, well-structured and easy to read sentences are key. Use language you would expect to hear in a normal conversation.
- ▶ Include stats that give **context**.
- ▶ Use direct quotes if they are interesting or explain something only.
- ▶ Mention your Brand: *‘Thanks to Asylum Matters / If it wasn’t for Migrants Organise/ Women for Refugee Women have taught us...’*

### Top tips

Use easy, day-to-day language

Don’t let interesting details go un-investigated

Always get informed consent and add pictures

### Good sentence guidance:

*“This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together are monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring.*

*Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes, when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals—sounds that say, listen to this, it is important.”*

# YOUR LOGO/NAME

## Consent form

Thank you for letting {insert name of organisation} feature your story. By signing this form, you agree that you do not own the copyright and understand that the film/ audio/photographs/words gathered may be published in any type of materials and/ or formats (including websites, social media platforms, printed materials), for any purpose, without limitation, forever.

Please complete this if you are over 18 (16 in Scotland) and can give consent for yourself and/or the young person you support	
Your full name:	
Child's name (for persons under 18):	
Location (town/city):	
Email address or mobile:	
Signature:	

### Media work – please tick the box if you agree that we can:

- Use your story when contacting journalists
- Ask you to speak to journalists about your story
- Use your image or video with journalists
- Share your story with other organisations supportive of us

To be completed by {insert name} staff member:	
Date of 'story' collection:	
Location or additional specific information	
Date:	

Data protection: {insert name of org} is the Data Controller of your data under the Data Protection Act (1998) and will use your personal data for the purposes of publicising the work and aims of the organisation. You may withdraw consent for your data to be used for these purposes at any time, at which point we will not use your data from that date. However, please note that any information which was placed in the public domain with your consent prior to that date cannot be withdrawn. If you would like to withdraw consent, please write to: {insert details of person to be contacted in this case}

# YOUR LOGO/NAME

## Guidance for people collecting stories

Please take the time to go through these points with anyone you're interviewing, filming or photographing. It's vital that they understand what agreeing to the use of their stories and images means. Staff that help to collect the stories have the responsibility to make this happen.

{INSERT NAME} would like to use more real stories of people who have migrated to the UK, including those who came as refugees, including people seeking asylum, those who have been detained, and refugees. All content, e.g. photography, film, words or pictures could be used in a variety of media; for example, radio, TV, press, internet, publications, events, advertising etc.

Most communications will link the images/stories to the overarching need {INSERT ORGANISATIONAL PRIORITY – supporting refugees, campaigning for an alternative to detention, etc}. Sometimes we need to tell an in-depth story about one area to help us discuss publicly the issues faced as part of a fundraising appeal or a news story.

We appreciate that this is a big step for people who are seeking asylum, are refugees, or are worried about their legal status. It's extremely important that they understand the importance to the charity that their contribution will make, but also how they might feel seeing their face in a magazine or as part of a fundraising appeal. It's important that they are confident and relaxed about their story being broadcast. Names can be changed, and anonymity protected, but this lessens the chance of the story being used by the media.

If the individual is open to be a media spokesperson or 'story teller' for the charity (e.g. speaking to journalists or appearing on the news), make sure you capture that information and think about how you train them to do this and how you will support them.

Please note that the form states that we have the right to use 'stories' and images 'forever'. We need to say 'forever' as we keep references (like reports or campaign graphics) on our website. Once it is in the public domain, we cannot withdraw it or make other people stop using it. This means that although people can ask {INSERT ORG} to stop using your story for any future publications, any that were published with their consent may still be seen by other people.

Please take the time to go through these points.



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## Resources

**There is a lot of free information available online to help you with communications, here are just a few resources that we've used:**

**Charity Comms** is an excellent source of advice and information on everything to do with communications from branding to PR. It also runs courses and training sessions.

<https://www.charitycomms.org.uk/>

**The Media Trust** provides some useful free resources to help you manage the media. It also offers paid for services including training.

<https://mediatrust.org/communications-support/resources/>

**Just Giving** share a lot of information on how to use digital media to increase donations.

<http://blog.justgiving.com/category/case-studies/>

**Skills Platform** has created some Toolkits to help navigate the digital world. They also run training courses.

<https://www.skillsplatform.org/charitysocialmediaToolkit/your-social-media-strategy.html>

### **Migration and Refugee sector communications network**

Every six weeks there is a meeting of the communications network where we talk about successes we've had, highlight upcoming opportunities, share plans, and learn from experts from both in and outside of the sector. If you would like to join the network to meet likeminded people facing the same challenges as you, email [media@IMiX.org.uk](mailto:media@IMiX.org.uk)

### **Messaging and audience insight**

There is a lot of information on how people perceive migration and how to talk to them about issues; to find out more visit

[www.imix.org.uk](http://www.imix.org.uk)