

# PREPARING FOR A MEDIA INTERVIEW

# What you will learn

---

Interviews with the media provide a huge opportunity to get across your message direct to an audience. Done well, their impact can be huge, reaching an audience of thousands or even millions, helping challenge stereotypes and raising awareness of an event or campaign that is incredibly important to you.

They can also seem like a daunting experience. Whether you're reading this ahead of your first interview or your hundredth, we'll let you into a little secret – that feeling never really goes away.

However, with the right practice and preparation, interviews will become easier than you imagine. You might even start enjoying them. Nothing beats the buzz when the donations for your fundraiser or signatories to your petition start flooding in after a successful interview.

In this guide we've compiled years of experience talking to journalists – whether it's for newspapers, podcasts, TV or radio. You'll find advice on everything from the right questions to ask to set-up an interview to how to prepare and get your message across on the day.

If you're arranging an interview on behalf of someone in your lived experience network, we've included a guide to safeguarding, which will help you to protect vulnerable interviewees and help them have a positive experience speaking to the media.



# Contents

---

- Responding to an interview request
- Pre-interview preparation
- On the day – maximising impact
- Interview types and tips
- Answering difficult questions and the art of 'bridging'
- Safeguarding and boundaries
- Supporting interviewees

# Responding to an interview request

You receive a call from a journalist wanting to interview you or someone from your organisation. This is your opportunity to find out as much as possible about the request.



## Ask lots of questions:

- Interviewer's name and contact details?
- Name of media outlet (Radio or TV station)?
- What's the subject matter?
- The deadline?
- What questions will they ask?
- How long will it be?
- Where will it be?
- Who else are they talking to?
- Name and nature of the programme?
- Where and when will it be broadcast? Will it be on the internet?

**Remember that the journalist is the one asking for your time. You hold the cards!**

Don't feel pressure to agree (or decline) straightaway. If you're speaking on the phone, buy yourself time to decide by asking them to follow up their request via email.

# Working with journalists

It's important that interviewees fully understand that their words will be recorded and publicly shared. Here's a handy list of the terms that a journalist will use and what they mean. We advise playing it safe and only sharing information with journalists that you are 100% comfortable with sharing in public.

## Journalist Jargon

'On the record'	I am writing down everything you are saying for publication
'Off the record'	Not for publication
'On background' or 'Unattributed'	You can use this information, but don't let it be traced back to me
'Source'	An anonymous interviewee
'On air'	We are recording and broadcasting live

## Things to think about...

- **How would your contribution fit into the story?** Letting the journalist explain their idea to you will also give you an insight into the angle they are approaching the piece from.
- **Research the journalist** and the organisation(s) they work for. Check their social media profiles for any previous stories they've produced in the refugee and migrant space. Did they cover the story sympathetically, or at least fairly?
- **If you decide to go ahead**, confirm the interview and get the details in writing. Make sure that any agreements, such as use of names, anonymity etc. are clearly laid out.

# Preparation

---

First, think about what you want to achieve from the interview. It sounds obvious, but many interviews don't go well because people haven't fully considered exactly what message they want to share, and more importantly, how they will communicate it.

In the refugee and migration sector there is a lot we want to speak about. The issues we deal with are incredibly complex and varied. However, media interviews are (usually) short. Thinking of one key aim, and three simple messages you'd like people to remember, will help you get the most out of the time you have.

## What do you want to achieve? Know your aim and key messages:

- How would you like your story told?
- You need **three bullet points** to keep on message during the media interview
- **Back it up.** Have some concrete examples that demonstrate your points

Like most things in life, being interviewed is a skill. **The more you practice, the better you'll be at it**, and the more confident you'll feel.

**Talk to the producer before the interview.** They may not give you exact questions, but they should let you know the general points they want to cover.

Think of some questions they're likely to ask. **Ask yourself what the audience may want to know.**

**Get a friend or family member to interview you.** Practice getting your key points across. If your friend doesn't understand an answer, make it simpler.

**Make sure you keep up-to-date with the latest developments on a story.** You'll come across as confident and knowledgeable, and you'll be less likely to be caught off guard by a question you haven't specifically prepared for.

# On the day

---

## **Remove the stress!**

Give yourself plenty of time to get there if you've travelling to the interview. If it's virtual, find a calm, quiet place to speak where you won't be disturbed.

## **Stay in interview mode**

It's best not to say anything that you wouldn't want broadcast or printed, even after you think the official interview has ended.

## **You are the expert**

Take confidence and remember that the journalist/producer wants to speak to you for a reason. And it's ultimately their job to turn the interview into compelling content and get the best out of your answers.

## **Keep it simple**

However, you can help them by communicating clearly. Most audiences are not specialists, so try to avoid jargon and acronyms.

Terms like asylum seeker, Section 95 support, or leave to remain make sense to us in the sector, but to the majority of audiences they will not mean a thing. Use them in an interview and you will lose your audience.

Keep it simple and bring people with you.

## **Avoid harmful language**

Remember not to repeat negative or dehumanising language. It can be easy to accidentally do this when you are reframing a question or challenging the interviewer!





# On the day

---



## Think about how you sound

It's not just the words you use, it's the way you say them.

Think about your tone. Are you too angry?

Do you seem patronising?

This could make people switch off from your message.

## Paint a picture

What turns an average interview into something excellent and memorable is making it **rich with details and experiences that people can relate to**. Adding personal experience and anecdotes to an interview helps bring it to life and engages a listener or reader.

The simplest details can prove eye-opening and informative. Whether you're speaking from direct experience of the hostile environment, or working in a charity on the frontline, no one can dispute your experiences. **You are the expert.**

But please only share what you are comfortable to. Remember that most print and video interviews will be viewable online around the world. **Consider what you're willing to share beforehand.**

## Don't worry if you've missed something

Finally, don't worry if it feels like you haven't managed to fit in everything you wanted to say. Do the interview well and you'll be invited back again, giving you more opportunities to raise awareness of other important issues you care about.

Be clear. Be kind. Be informed. Be engaging, Be sincere. Be truthful. Be respectful.



# Interview types and tips

---

## Print and online interviews

- These are generally more relaxed, but don't get lulled into a false sense of security
- Set a time limit in advance
- If you don't want something printed, don't say it
- Stay focused on your key messages

## TV interviews

- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer, or camera if doing a zoom interview
- Viewers notice your body language first. Stay relaxed, try not to fidget
- Dress appropriately – wear something you feel comfortable in and avoid fussy patterns which are likely to strobe or distract on camera
- Ensure you don't move around. And avoid inadvertently nodding at questions
- At home? Check your background

## Radio and podcast interviews

- Take a breath before each answer
- Don't read from notes
- If it's appropriate, smile. It will help bring energy to your voice (if you need it)
- Speak clearly and with conviction
- Again, don't do anything unguarded

## Live or pre-recorded?

With TV, radio and podcasts ask if the interview is live or pre-recorded. When an interview is pre-recorded, it'll be edited afterwards. You can stop and re-do an answer, but the journalist still has the final say over what's included.

# Answering difficult questions

You've been asked a tough question you really don't want to answer, or just don't feel confident going into detail on. Don't panic. There is a simple and effective technique called 'bridging' which you can use to acknowledge the question, then quickly steer the interview towards surer ground.

Use a verbal 'bridge' to get your message across:

- A - acknowledge the question
- B - bridging phrase
- C - communicate your message

**These are some phrases you could use:**

- 'That's an interesting question, but/and/yet ...'
- 'That's a very common question/misconception, but to put it into perspective...'
- 'In my own experience...'
- 'I wouldn't know about/be able to comment on that, but from my own experience...'
- 'It's a valid point, yet what we've seen/heard as a charity...'

Question	How did you get to the UK?
<b>Acknowledge</b>	People are often curious about how refugees make their way to the UK.
<b>Bridge Phrase</b>	But I'm not here to talk about my method of travel, which creates trauma for me. I am here today to talk about my performance in a piece of theatre...
<b>Communicate</b>	that takes the audience on a journey through my life from Syria to Gateshead.

**Bridging in action:**

**Watch how Refugee Council's CEO, Enver Solomon uses the bridging technique in this interview with The Spectator:**

[What do refugees bring to Britain? Douglas Murray vs Enver Solomon | SpectatorTV](#)

# Safeguarding and boundaries

We know from research and professional experience that readers are most likely to engage with an issue if they hear from someone who has been personally affected talking about what it means to them.

However, the individuals we support to tell their stories have different personal and security concerns to juggle. The last thing anyone wants (including the journalist) is for them to share their story and later regret it.

It's important to have a safeguarding conversation to make sure that interviewees are giving informed consent before you connect them with a journalist. Make any requests they may have a condition of the interview. Here's the list we run through:

## **IMIX's safeguarding checklist:**

- Are you happy to speak to a journalist from X organisation?
- Do you understand what 'on the record' means?
- Do you understand that once a media piece is published, it is not possible to take it down?
- Do you understand you can stop the interview at any point?
- Do you have legal status in the UK? (If not, discuss the option of being anonymous)
- What do you want to get out of the interview?
- Would you be willing to be named and pictured?
- Are there any sensitive personal details that could put you, a family member or friend at risk?
- Is there anything you definitely don't want to be asked about?
- Are you aware that this interview may go online and could be read outside the UK?
- Anything in the news attracts social media comments, including some from trolls. We generally advise people to ignore these, but not everyone can. Does this change how you feel about doing the interview?
- Is there anything else we should know before putting you in touch with a journalist?

**Please refer to our Safeguarding resource for more details.**

# Supporting interviewees

---



## Supporting interviewees with messaging

With any interviewee, it's helpful to discuss in advance **what they want to get out of the interview** ahead of time. For example, if they are asked how they feel about moving to the UK, they could reply 'I'm really glad to be here, but I still fear for my family back home...' and use that as a lever to highlight the need for the government to move on resettlement.

If the interviewee wants to **highlight a specific campaign**, it's worth making this a **condition of the interview** from the outset. Journalists understand that interviewees agree to talk for certain reasons, whether that's promoting a film or raising money for cancer research, and it is perfectly OK to ask for something similar.

**Be careful of comments backfiring.** It's understandable that an asylum seeker might complain about their accommodation in an interview, but this could attract a public backlash. Explain this to interviewees and **help them adjust their messaging to maximise a positive reception.**

**imix**

## Telling the human story of migration

Find us on



@IMIX\_UK  
@human\_journeys

And follow our projects



Human  
Journeys



Good  
Neighbours



Un/Documented  
Podcast

Email us at

[media@imix.org.uk](mailto:media@imix.org.uk)

**imix**