

# MESSAGING GUIDE

**imix**

Countering anti-migration messages in the UK. Core narratives, audiences and facts for the sector.

**SPEAKING  
OUT, STAYING  
SAFE**

# CONTENTS

<b>01</b>	<b>Why this guide?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>02</b>	<b>Core narratives: economy, society, competence</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>03</b>	<b>Speaking to decision makers</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>04</b>	<b>Handle with care: framings to watch</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>05</b>	<b>Know the opposition: three anti-migration narratives</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>06</b>	<b>Who are we talking to? Audience guidance</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>07</b>	<b>Messengers</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>08</b>	<b>Hard facts to have ready</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>09</b>	<b>Good examples and further resources</b>	<b>13</b>

# WHY THIS GUIDE?

**Right now, our movements need **shared positive narratives** on migration, because to change the story, it is going to take all of us.**

Everyone has seen the ugly debates. They are on our phones, in our workplaces, and especially in our politics. Anti-migration narratives have been parroted consistently on traditional and social media for decades. While many people do not inherently hold these views, there are clear concerns about migration that we need to acknowledge and possibly attempt to counter rather than dismiss.

With authoritarianism on the rise and our social fabric under strain, our messages needs to be as unified and as simple as the opposition's. To persuade audiences who are open to a different narrative, one that addresses their concerns and offers a better solution, we need to send unified message across broadcast media, digital channels and policy communication.

**We should not be afraid to stand up for the ideas we believe in. And we need to say them over and over.**

This guide is evolving as new research emerges on messaging that works for the current moment. It sits alongside our practical communications guide, [Speaking Out, Staying Safe](#)

# ON THE ECONOMY

**The cost-of-living crisis is hitting families across this country hard. We all want the same basic things, the chance to care for our loved ones, to rely on quality hospitals and schools, and to build a secure future. We deserve leaders who put people first and invest in the communities that keep this country running.**

## **NAME THE REAL VILLAIN**

Yet instead of tackling the real issues, some politicians point the finger at refugees and migrants, while handing billions to corporations like Serco, Clearsprings and Mears. **These companies receive £15.3 billion of Government money, while a sanctuary seeker may receive just £9 a week**, is barred from working, and is cut off from the community they want to contribute to.

We can help people support themselves with dignity by restoring the right to work for people waiting on asylum decisions. **This would boost the UK economy by an estimated £280 million every year.**

## **LAND ON THE VISION**

**People who come to this country are part of the solution.** They bring skills, culture, energy, and hope. Together, we can build a society where everyone, no matter where we're from, can work, feel safe, and build a decent life for our families.

A fair, evidence-based approach to immigration is not only logical, it is humane. It strengthens our economy, enriches our culture, and reflects the values we claim to stand for. A future that works for all of us is within reach. Let's choose leadership that makes it happen.

# ON SOCIETY

People in this country look out for our neighbours, whatever our background or faith. It's simply who we are. From cheering on the same football teams to our NHS healthcare workers, we see every day how Britain pulls together.

## STAND TOGETHER

We are at our best when we remember that we all call this island home, and that everyone deserves a fair chance to belong and to thrive. That's why it matters that we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with friends and neighbours who are being targeted by hatred. **Division doesn't solve real problems, it only distracts us from them.**

## CONTEXT THAT LANDS

**There are deep historical ties that explain why people move and seek safety here.** Around 70% of asylum seekers who have reached the UK in the past 20 years come from countries that were once British colonies.

## THE BRITAIN WE BELIEVE IN

Our towns are strongest when everyone's potential is valued. When we stick together, across race, religion and background, we build communities that are safer, fairer, and kinder for all of us. **That's the Britain we believe in.**

# ON COMPETENCE

**It's natural for people to want a migration system managed confidently. Hearing the news, it can feel like the UK is reacting to events rather than shaping them. We can make this country fairer and safer for everyone through practical, hopeful solutions.**

- 01 RESTORE THE RIGHT TO WORK**  
For people waiting on asylum decisions, boosting the UK economy by an estimated £280 million every year and helping people support themselves with dignity.
- 02 CREATE SAFE ROUTES**  
Working with EU partners and Border Force to create safe routes from Europe.
- 03 FAST-TRACK WELL-FOUNDED CASES**  
Reducing backlogs and giving people quicker, fairer decisions.
- 04 END FOR-PROFIT ACCOMMODATION**  
Replacing it with local-authority, not-for-profit housing, expanding emergency housing that benefits everyone in the community.
- 05 CHAMPION FAIR WORK FOR ALL**  
A migration system with fair working conditions and a robust economy, using a fair points-based system accounting for UK ties, a range of skills and English levels.
- 06 BUILD STRONG, INTEGRATED COMMUNITIES**  
A universal five-year route to settlement, ending NRPF for families with children, and reintroducing birthright citizenship so all children are welcomed equally.

**We need both competence and compassion to build a system that works. One that is fair, safe and well-run, creating a Britain that feels more secure, more confident, and more hopeful for all of us.**

# SPEAKING TO DECISION MAKERS

**We all see hatred and division on the rise in Britain, and the evidence shows that ever-tougher rhetoric on migration does not build public trust.**

**Research from British Future shows the public views tough migration rhetoric from decision makers as wooden and inauthentic. And even as net migration has fallen sharply, voters think it is still rising.**

**Ever-tougher announcements just reinforce the idea that migration is "out of control", deepening public anxiety rather than easing it.**

## THE CORE MESSAGE

**Chasing hostility on migration is a losing strategy.** Building public trust means focusing on competent policy solutions that change people's lives, from housing and GP appointments to stronger labour standards. That is the case we can make to decision makers of every stripe, as a matter of policy, not party.

# HANDLE WITH CARE

**Two framings come up again and again in pro-migration messaging. Both are well-intentioned, and both carry risks worth understanding before you use them.**

## COST NARRATIVES

Arguing that immigration is economically beneficial must be balanced with messages about its humane and social benefits. Otherwise, we risk reinforcing a frame which places economic value ahead of human life.

**Still, cost-based arguments have their place.** They can be combined with critiques of inhumane policy, particularly to point out the profit that the migration and border industry generates for billionaires. It is also important to be able to counter wrong-headed arguments from the right that immigration is itself costly.

## CONTRIBUTION NARRATIVES

Contribution narratives are risky. They are easily weaponised by the government, and they risk dehumanising people by implying that someone must be economically productive to be valued.

**Try this instead:** language such as "community participation" and "unlocking potential" speaks to the same ideas of building community and society, without reinforcing expectations that people must contribute economically in order to belong.

**When we talk about how migration is part of society, the test is simple: does this framing value people for who they are, or only for what they produce?**

# KNOW THE OPPOSITION

Audience research by [HOPE not Hate](#) identifies three attitudes driving anti-migration sentiment: **competition, culture and control**. Recognising which narrative you are dealing with helps you choose the right response, and keeps you responding to ideas and policies rather than people or parties.

## COMPETITION

A perceived threat to access to resources, such as social housing, medical appointments and school places.

- An "us and them" narrative: migrants are cornered off as the problem, rather than looking at inequality more broadly.
- A belief that newcomers receive benefits unavailable to UK citizens, sharpened during times of economic strain.

## CULTURE

Concern about changing demographics and their impact on community life. These concerns can quickly devolve into nativist principles and racist, Islamophobic stereotypes.

- Claims that migrants and refugees "don't integrate" or "don't belong", and rhetoric of "invasion".
- Often rooted in a sense of being ignored by those in power, and in political disengagement and distrust in the system.

## CONTROL

A craving for sovereignty and strong borders, and worry about the UK's international obligations.

- A perception that the UK is bounced into responding to global events without control over the outcomes. Disinformation stories feed this sense.
- Public opinion on the ECHR is malleable. Arguments framing it as a barrier to border control tend to be the most convincing, so this ground needs contesting.

# COMPETITION NARRATIVE

*"Those who are drawn to anti-immigrant narratives because of a perceived threat to access to resources e.g. social housing, medical appointments and school places."*

## COMPETITION EXAMPLES

- 'Us' and 'them' narrative - migrants are cornered off as the problem, rather than looking at the issue of inequality more broadly
- Migrants and refugees are benefiting from and taking advantage of the system, while Britons are ignored and left on their own
- Migrants and refugees need to earn their way to be part of the UK. Stop "the golden ticket" / Stop pull factors

## AUDIENCE CONTEXT

- Feel that asylum seekers are not fully 'paying their way'
- During times of economic strain, belief that newcomers may be receiving benefits that are unavailable to UK citizens
- Not just an economic concern - concerns around social integration and the impact of migration on community cohesion
- Many Britons feel the government elected in July 2024 is so far failing to meet its promise of 'change'

# CULTURE NARRATIVE

*"Those who are concerned about the changing demographics of the UK and the impact this will have on culture, including crime, freedom of expression, and the general atmosphere of their community. These concerns can quickly devolve into nativist principles and racist, Islamophobic stereotypes."*

## CULTURE EXAMPLES

- Migrants and refugees don't integrate (aka learn the language, abide by our culture), so they don't belong in Britain / Rhetoric of "invasion"
- "Multiculturalism has imported separate communities that reject our way of life" / "English national identity (to) be officially promoted"
- "Legislate against extremist forces that seek to undermine our way of life" / "Stop Sharia law being used in the UK"

## AUDIENCE CONTEXT

- Many people feel they are ignored by those in power
- A sense of political disengagement and distrust in the system often coincides with strong concern about migration and asylum
- Those who see these as top national issues are much more likely to believe politicians prioritise migrants over people like them
- The Reluctant Reformers - soft Reform UK voters - are even more likely to support multiculturalism than the national average

# CONTROL NARRATIVE

*"Those who crave sovereignty and strong borders, and who are worried about the UK's international responsibilities to other countries. These might be people who question the UK's membership of international laws."*

## CONTROL EXAMPLES

- ECHR gives foreigners the right to live in the UK, providing them with a right to asylum or citizenship
- Disinformation stories like the 'chicken nuggets' case that claimed an individual's deportation was stopped on the basis of his child's dislike of foreign food

## AUDIENCE CONTEXT

- There is a sense of 'lack of agency' or 'control'. Failure to control borders plays into that sense of lack of agency
- Reflects broader concerns about the government's ability to enforce rules on asylum and migration - particularly when those rules are shaped by international agreements
- There is a perception that the UK is bounced into responding to global events and migration patterns without having full control over the outcomes
- Public opinion on the ECHR is malleable
- Arguments against the ECHR, particularly those which focus on the convention as a barrier to the UK controlling its borders and deporting those who may cause harm to citizens, tend to be more convincing overall

# WHO ARE WE TALKING TO?

**More in Common's** segmentation of the British public identifies persuadable audiences who are enthusiastic or agnostic about migration. The pills show which core narratives work best for each group.

## Progressive Activists

12%

Globally minded and justice-driven. Prioritise climate and equality but often feel alienated from mainstream politics. Supportive of multiculturalism. Read the Guardian, BBC, Channel 4 and the Independent.

SOCIETY

ECONOMY

## Incrementalist Left

21%

Community-focused and moderate. Favour gradual reform, trust experts and institutions, and tend to avoid polarised issues. Popular outlets: Sky News and the BBC.

SOCIETY

ECONOMY

## Established Liberals

9%

Prosperous and confident. Believe the system works, trust institutions and experts. Popular outlets: Sky News, the BBC, the Times and the FT.

COMPETENCE

SOCIETY

## Sceptical Scrollers

10%

Digitally native and distrustful of institutions. Seek alternative information sources online rather than mainstream media. 77% believe news can't be trusted.

ECONOMY

## A note on the agnostic groups

For these audiences, immigration is rarely the top concern. They tend to support more controlled and selective systems, and they worry about cohesion and the pace of change. They respond to stories that humanise, examples of community cohesion in action, and people working together across differences.

# MESSENGERS

**The same message lands very differently depending on who delivers it. The most powerful messengers are often not the most senior, they are the most trusted.**

- 01 PEOPLE WHO SPEAK TO THE BROADER ISSUES**  
And who do not reinforce the "us and them" narrative. Community leaders who see how the issues affect everyone: faith leaders, local charity bosses, local councillors, and family members.
- 02 RELATABLE, TRUSTED COMMUNITY VOICES**  
Nurses, teachers, librarians, veterans and unionists. Unexpected messengers cut through where campaigners cannot. See our good examples on page 13.
- 03 PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ASYLUM AND MIGRATION**  
Always with proper safeguards in place to protect them. IMIX has practical guidance on [safeguarding and media engagement](#), including consent, anonymity and boundary-setting with journalists.

**A note on safety: anyone still awaiting a decision on their asylum claim should remain anonymous until they have refugee status. Brief every messenger, agree boundaries in writing, and offer support after any public appearance.**

# HARD FACTS TO HAVE READY

**0.16%**

**Asylum seekers as a share of the UK population.**

Home Office, 2025

**17th**

**The UK's per-capita ranking for asylum claims among EU+ countries in 2024, despite ranking 5th in absolute numbers.**

Migration Observatory

**<2%**

**Of the world's 37.6 million refugees are in France, and around 1% are in the UK, out of 117 million people displaced globally.**

UNHCR

**20%**

**Of NHS staff in England report a non-British nationality. In 2022, about 19% of non-EU-born workers in the UK worked in health and care.**

House of Commons; Migration Observatory

**13% v 28%**

**The real share of UK residents born abroad is 13%, but the public, on average, thinks it is 28%.**

ONS; British Future, 2025

**71%**

**Of the public agree that people should be able to seek refuge in other countries, including the UK.**

British Future, 2025

**4%**

**Say immigration affects them personally, even though it is the number one concern for 32% of the public.**

IPSOS, 2025

**1920s**

**The UK built fewer homes per year in the 2010s than in any decade since the 1920s. Housing pressure is a policy failure, not a migration story.**

Shelter

**90%+**

**Employment rates after 18 months for migrants in the Australian system arriving without a pre-approved job offer, with higher average salaries than employer-sponsored entrants.**

**£280m**

**The estimated yearly boost to the UK economy from ending the asylum work ban.**

LSE, 2025

**SAY IT CLEARLY.  
SAY IT TOGETHER.  
SAY IT AGAIN.**

**This guide was produced by IMIX and is endorsed by HOPE not hate. It is evolving as new research emerges, so check back for updates.**

**To talk to us about training, mentoring or communications support, email [media@imix.org.uk](mailto:media@imix.org.uk)**