IMIX GUIDE FOR SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

Talking to the media about migration numbers

A two-page guide ahead of the ONS net migration release, Thursday 26 November 2026

On Thursday the ONS is expected to report another sharp fall in net migration. Journalists will want reaction. This guide helps you respond without accepting the idea that fewer people is the goal, and without telling the public they are wrong.

What you need to know

- Net migration was 171,000 in 2025, down from more than 900,000 in 2023. The OBR projects 120,000 for 2026.
- Almost two-thirds of the public (63%) think net migration has been rising. Only one in five know it fell. (King's College London with YouGov, March 2026.)
- Belief matters more than the figure. Of those who think numbers rose significantly, 73% call immigration a very big problem. Of those who think numbers fell, 19% do.
- Hostility has not fallen with the numbers. Recorded hate crime rose 7% in the year to March 2026, to 146,825 offences.

Five principles

1. Do not celebrate the number. If you welcome a record low, you agree that people moving here is a problem to be minimised. Talk about people and what communities need.

2. Do not lead with the correction. The researchers behind this week's findings say myth-busting alone will not settle the debate. People overestimate what they worry about. Acknowledge the concern, state the fact once, then move to your message.

3. Go local. 67% say immigration is a big problem nationally. Only 31% say so about where they live. Your local story, told by local people, is the one audiences already half believe.

4. Show the full picture of who migrates. More than half the public picture someone seeking asylum when they hear "immigrant", but most people come to study or work. Talk about the nurses, students, care workers and neighbours.**5. Speak with confidence.** The public think 60% of Britons want immigration cut signficantly. The real figure is 43%. Half the public (49%) oppose stopping all migration and removing recent arrivals. You are speaking to more people than you think.

Make it a story a journalist wants to tell

Reporters need more than reaction to a number. They need a person, a place and something to film or photograph. Behind every statistic is a person, and the organisation that can provide storytellers are more likely to get coverage.

- **Lead with a personal story.** One person's experience, told in their own words, does more than any figure. Use the statistic as a single line of context, not the opening.
- **Match the story to the data.** Thursday's figures are about students, workers, families and people seeking safety. Offer someone from the group the journalist is writing about.
- **Make it easy.** Have a storyteller briefed and ready, a location, and times they are free on Thursday and Friday. Local and regional outlets will want a local face.
- **Put safety and consent first.** Agree what can be shared, how the person will be named and pictured, and who supports them before, during and after.

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- **Ask IMIX.** We link journalists with storytellers and charities, and can connect your story with reporters looking for one: media@imix.org.uk.

Questions you may be asked, and how to bridge

The question	A way to answer
"Do you welcome the fall in net migration?"	"A single number tells you very little about the people behind it. What we see every day is [your work]. What matters to this community is [housing, services, people being able to work and take part]."
"Isn't it still too high?"	"People have real concerns about housing and public services, and they deserve real answers. Cutting the number of nurses, care workers and students will not build a single house. Here is what would help in [place]."
"The public clearly want lower numbers."	"People want a system that works and is fair. Most have no problem with the people who actually come here: seven in ten feel positive about doctors and nurses from overseas. In [place], people have [example of welcome]."
"What about small boats?"	"People seeking asylum are around one in five of those who arrive. They are people who have fled [war, persecution]. When they are allowed to take part in community life, everyone gains. Let me tell you about [person or project]."

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Do and don't

Do	Don't
State a fact once and plainly: "Net migration has fallen by more than three-quarters."	Repeat the myth to deny it: "It is not true that migration is out of control."
Acknowledge pressure on housing and services, then say what would fix it.	Tell people their concerns are ignorant or based on lies.
Talk about participation: people working, studying, volunteering, joining in.	Use "record low" as good news, or "flood" and "wave" language in any form.

If you are asked about costs: the OBR says lower net migration slightly reduces the economy's potential output, and one estimate puts the cost of a 300,000 fall at about £20 billion a year. Use these to answer a question, not to make your case. An argument that people are only welcome when they are useful is a weak place to stand.