

Guide for Journalists, Researchers, Artists and those people seeking information and stories from Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Brief rationale to the guide

Over the years, many researchers, journalists, artists, and others with an interest in asylum and refugee issues have contacted organisations and individuals who work in the field, asking for access to interview asylum seekers and refugees.

We all understand the need to get information out to the public or to agencies who will be influenced by the experience and testimony of refugees. However, we are frequently taken aback by the lack of consideration given to the needs of those taking part in interviews or offering their personal experiences to be put into the public domain.

This often leads to accusations of gatekeeping or confusion as to why agencies might be reticent to provide access to their service users.

To explain this, a respondent provided an example of how things can go wrong even in a clinical setting:

A young Iranian man, a victim of torture and a homeless refugee, was referred to 'a specialist institution in the North West for assessment and possibly counselling. A medico-legal report would have been pertinent to his case.

On arrival, he was already distressed and as he began to recount his story, his mental state started to deteriorate, to the point where the therapist could no longer work with him and she went to the Mental Health Crisis Team.

The crux of the matter was, each time he retold his story he relived the events.

Clearly this is a severe case, but when working with refugees and asylum seekers we need to be aware how recalling events can affect them, what possible outcomes may follow the questioning and what help might be required for the people involved. In general, we need to recognise that the telling of a personal story or experience can trigger deep-seated emotions, things which people may have deliberately locked away.

It is also important that the journalist or researcher understands that the information given belongs to the individual. There is a responsibility on the part of the interviewer to explain what the information will be used for, how it will be used, and that the people taking part have a stake in whatever the project might be.

To facilitate the interview process with asylum seekers and refugees, the checklist below serves as a guide. It is drawn from Amnesty International's (2014) document on reporting on torture and empirical data from Uwamaliya's (2017) study to advance the rights and wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees.

Working through these questions may help the interview process

1. **Each individual case is different:** Conduct extensive research beforehand about the individual's country of origin and all background information that can help you have some understanding of the specifics of the story.

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2. **Share the list of questions with the interviewee:** Prepare your list of questions before the interview and make sure that the difficult questions are not at the top of the list. Include many open-ended questions that will allow the refugee and asylum seeker to tell their story at their own pace. Please send a copy of the questions and allow the interviewee to select questions he/she will not answer.
3. **Respect gender difference:** Ideally, female researcher/reporters should interview female refugees and male researcher/reporters should interview male refugees.
4. **Seek consent to take photographs/videos and audios:** Ask permission beforehand if you want to take photographs, audio recordings or a video of a refugee. Many refugees have fled their countries to escape persecution and publishing their photo would expose them or their relatives to danger.
5. **Choose appropriate venue:** Discuss in advance an appropriate location for the interview. You want to make sure that the person feels comfortable. Avoid basements and small windowless rooms as some asylum seekers and refugees may have been incarcerated. Involve them in choosing the appropriate venues.
6. **Do not insist on any particular questions:** You should be ready to accept that a refugee/ asylum seeker may feel uncomfortable answering some questions. *Do not press.* You should also be ready to accept the possibility that the person may end the interview at any stage if going further becomes too difficult.
7. **Pay a full attention:** Maintain good eye contact throughout the interview and listen attentively. They are trusting you with the most painful moments of their lives, so they deserve to have your full attention.
8. **Show empathy not grief:** Avoid facial expressions of horror or grief. Asylum seekers and refugees will appreciate your understanding, compassion, empathy and concern, but extreme reactions can make them feel worse. If you cannot control your emotions, take a break. It is important to ensure that you have someone who can then assist the person you are interviewing.
9. **Discuss the use of interpreter:** If an interpreter needs to be involved, the interviewee should be consulted so that an appropriate interpreter is used. All information provided must be translated and provided in the appropriate language (the interviewee's first language/mother tongue).
10. **Seek for final approval:** Provide a copy of everything in an appropriate format for final approval (e.g. recording on CD, transcriptions, photos taken etc.)

Please respond by YES or NO to each statement	YES	NO
1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided and have conducted extensive research about the individual's asylum seeker or refugee's country of origin, and all background information that can help me have some understanding of the specifics of the story.		
2. I have provided the list of questions, and I will not ask the interviewee any questions he or she does not wish to answer.		
3. I am the same gender as the asylum seeker/refugee I will be interviewing. OR: I am the opposite gender to the interviewee but I will arrange for an appropriate person to be present during the interview.		
4. I have asked permission to take photographs, audio recordings or a video		

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of a refugee.		
5. I have discussed the appropriate location for the interview with the interviewee and have booked it.		
6. I have arranged an appropriate person to assist the interviewee if needed.		
7. I will provide a copy of the interview in an appropriate format for final approval e.g. recording on CD, transcriptions, photos taken etc. (circle the appropriate one).		
8. I have consulted the interviewee and booked an appropriate interpreter.		
9. I will show empathy and pay full attention		
10. All information provided will be translated into the appropriate language (the interviewee's first language/mother tongue).		

Note:

- If you have answered 'Yes' to all the above questions, you can go ahead and make the final arrangement'
- If you have answered 'No' to any of the above questions, you need to speak to the gatekeeper to discuss what you need to do to gain access.

Name of Researcher/Journalist & Other:

Name of the organisation:

Contact details:

Email:

Tel:

Date:

Signature:

Name of interviewee (Asylum seeker or refugee):

Date:

Signature:

Name of gatekeeper:

Name of the organisation:

Contact details:

Email

Tel

Date:

Signature:

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Further reading

Amnesty International (2014) Reporting on Torture. A handbook for journalists covering torture. Available online at: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/act400042014en.pdf> (last accessed June 2017).

Karim, K. (2006). Doing Research with Refugees: Issues and Guidelines. *Community Care*, (1614), 42.

Quinn, N. (2014). Participatory action research with asylum seekers and refugees experiencing stigma and discrimination: The experience from Scotland. *Disability & Society*, 29(1), 58-70.

Sutton-Brown, C. (2014). Photovoice: A Methodological Guide. *Photography And Culture*, 7(2), 169-185.