



Media guidelines

for reporting
on refugee communities



Reporting on refugee issues and interviewing survivors of trauma and other vulnerable groups can be challenging. This may be a new experience for you, and for refugees and volunteers this may be their first experience with media.

The majority of media will act in a respectful manner, and media have a really important role to play in this refugee crisis. Media can provide a platform for refugees and volunteers to share their experiences and to advocate for further support that might be needed. Media can hold the refugee response accountable, making sure vulnerable people get the support they need, and money is spent the way it was intended. But as in every industry, some people may act in an unprofessional way that could make volunteers and refugees feel unsafe, harassed, or upset.

Internews and the Independent Journalism Center have come together to develop **7 basic tips to interviewing refugees and volunteers in this crisis.**

- 1. Refugees are people:** Being a refugee is not a person's entire identity. Refugees are people with friends, family, jobs, and interests. Avoid stereotyping refugees or promoting damaging narratives that could lead to stigma or persecution. Media has an important role to play in giving voice to vulnerable groups and helping the wider community understand the refugee experience.
- 2. Introduce yourself:** If you visit a Refugee Accommodation Center, warehouse, or any other refugee service, introduce yourself to the facility manager before you start work. Provide your name, organization, and basic contact details. Some people may pretend to be media workers to exploit vulnerable people, so it is important there is a basic record of media visits kept at refugee facilities.
- 3. It's ok to say no:** Always ensure the interviewee understands who you are, what the purpose of your interview is, and where your story will be shared so they can give informed consent to any interview, photograph, or filming. Refugees and volunteers have the right to ask for their name to be changed, refuse to answer a question or to end an interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable or change their mind.
- 4. Interviewing Children:** Children, whether they are a refugee or not, should not be interviewed without their parent or guardians' knowledge. Explain the purpose of the interview and its intended use. Do not publish a story or an image which might put the child, siblings, or peers at risk even when identities are changed, obscured, or not used. See here [more guidelines from UNICEF on interviewing and reporting on children.](#)

- 5. Difficult interviews:** Retelling a traumatic story can be very distressing for a person. Practice trauma-informed journalism. Trauma-informed journalism means understanding trauma, thinking about what a trauma survivor is experiencing before you begin your interview, and understanding how your actions [as a journalist] might impact them after the interview is over. If a person becomes upset during an interview, please alert a volunteer who connects them with support if they are interested. For more resources on trauma-informed journalism, [see this tip sheet from The Journalist's Resource](#) and [these tips from the DART Center on interviewing survivors of trauma](#).
- 6. Treat RAC centers like a home:** Refugee Accommodation Centers are a temporary home to people who have arrived from Ukraine. It is important everyone feels safe, secure and can have the privacy they need. Be respectful of this home and consider when a photo is in the public interest. Do not photograph or film in sleeping or private spaces without permission.
- 7. Look after yourself:** Working in a refugee crisis can also have serious impacts on media workers. Listening to and reporting on stories of suffering can impact on your own mental health – this is called vicarious trauma. Vicarious trauma can impact on your relationships, your ability to work and can lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Working long hours and listening to and reporting on stories of suffering can also lead to burnout. [This manual from First Draft](#) discusses how individuals and newsrooms can avoid vicarious trauma. [This tip sheet from the Headlines Network](#) explains how to look out for signs of burnout in your colleagues, [this guide from the DART Center](#) is for editors and managers. It is important to learn to recognize these signs of stress in yourself and your friends and colleagues to support each other.

More resources about reporting on refugees and refugee issues:

- Internews manual, Reporting on Humanitarian crises (2014) - <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/reporting-humanitarian-crisis-manual-trainers-journalists-and-introduction-humanitarian>
- UNHCR – Countering toxic narratives about refugees and migrants: <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f0417.pdf>
- UN Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) - Reporting on migrants and refugees: handbook for journalism educators (2021), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377890>
- DART Center for Journalism and Trauma - Resources for reporters working on the Ukraine crisis including interviewing survivors of trauma, interviewing children, use of language, etc. <https://dartcenter.org/resources/resources-reporters-and-editors-covering-conflict-ukraine>