

Introduction to Interviewing for Refugee Advisory Group members

This handout was prepared by Joanna Crocker and Emma Pritchard, University of Oxford, for a training session on 3rd June 2025 for the Refugee Advisory Group (RAG) at [Refugee Resource](#). The project was part of the [Science Together](#) initiative.

Preparing for the interview

Checklist	Tips
<p>Prepare a list of interview questions or topic guide (a list of the topics you need to cover in the interview).</p> <p>It is a good idea to practise the interview with someone before you do it. You could also record yourself asking the questions and then role-play answering them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid professional/technical jargon• Avoid leading questions, which imply a preferred answer (e.g. “What would you find helpful?” rather than “Do you think English language lessons would be helpful?”)• Avoid questions which might sound judgemental (e.g. “Tell me about how you made that decision” rather than “Why didn’t you...?”)• Use open questions (e.g. what/how/why) in preference to closed questions with a yes/no answer (although closed questions, if factual, can be useful precursors to open questions)• Ask about concrete experiences rather than abstract or theoretical questions e.g. “Think about the last time you came to Refugee Resource – what did you like/not like about your experience?” rather than “What do you like/not like about Refugee Resource?”
<p>Assess and manage the risks to interviewees</p>	<p>It is important to identify and plan for risks, even if they are small or very unlikely to happen. The risks to the interviewee can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emotional or psychological distress, especially if the interview questions might lead them to recount trauma or difficult experiences.• Their interview information being accidentally shared with people it wasn’t intended for (e.g. if it is lost). If the information allows them to be identified, there is a possibility it might be used in a harmful way. <p>Make a plan to minimise these risks and manage them if they arise. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid asking questions which are likely to trigger distress.• If the interviewee does become emotionally distressed, give them time and space. Ask them if they would like to pause or stop the interview. Offer them a tissue if they are tearful. At the end of the interview, give them information about who they can contact for emotional/psychological support if they wish (e.g. Refugee Resource).• Make plans to ensure their information is kept safe and secure. If possible, avoid collecting personal/identifiable information (e.g. name, initials, contact details).

Assess and manage the risks of the interview to yourself (the interviewer)	<p>It is important to identify and plan for risks, even if they are small or very unlikely to happen. The risks to the interviewer can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional or psychological distress, especially if an interviewee becomes distressed during the interview or if what they say triggers you to feel distressed. • Physical harm, if the interviewee becomes violent. <p>Make a plan to minimise these risks and manage them if they arise. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange to have a debrief with your supervisor (e.g. a member of Refugee Resource staff) after interviews. They can talk through any reflections or concerns and provide psychological/emotional support if needed. • Be prepared to pause the interview if you need to. Carry tissues with you! • Avoid conducting interviews alone in private spaces. Use public/open spaces (if privacy is not important) or bring an interview buddy with you. Let someone know when and where you are interviewing and what time you expect to finish. • If you start to feel unsafe, stop the interview and leave.
Ensure you have the necessary permissions to carry out the interviews	<p>These include permission from the venue (e.g. hotel) and the organisation you are working for (e.g. Refugee Resource). If you are carrying out academic research, other permissions will be needed (e.g. approval by a Research Ethics Committee). If you are collecting personal/identifiable information from interviewees, written permission from them may be needed.</p>
Consider whether you may need an interpreter and/or translated information	<p>If you may be interviewing people whose first language is not English, consider whether you may need an interpreter to accompany you. You may also need to provide materials (e.g. Refugee Resource information) in multiple languages.</p>
If it is a group interview (sometimes called a “focus group”), allow more time than for a single interview	<p>The more people there are in the group, the more time you will need to allow for everyone to participate in the discussion.</p>

Starting the interview

Checklist	Example script (for hotel interviews)
Introduce yourself and explain why they have been invited to the interview.	<p><i>Hello, my name is _____.</i> <i>[Introduce yourself, and whatever you a comfortable sharing about your own migration status.]</i></p>
Decide in advance what and how much you would like to say about yourself.	<p><i>I’m here today on behalf of Refugee Resource, an organisation which supports asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants in Oxfordshire.</i> <i>I would like to ask you a few questions to understand more about how Refugee Resource could help asylum seekers.</i></p>

	<i>I am here with a researcher from the University of Oxford, who is supporting this project. [Researcher to introduce themselves]</i>
Explain what the interview is about and why it is important.	<i>The questions are about whether you've heard of Refugee Resource before and received any support from them, or whether you might benefit from their support. I would also like to ask a few questions about you, so Refugee Resource knows a bit about the people we have spoken to.</i>
Explain that they may skip any questions they do not wish to answer, or pause or stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason.	<i>You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to answer. You can also pause or stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason.</i>
Explain what information you will be recording and what will happen to it, e.g. their answers will be shared anonymously with others (say who) but you will not record their name or any information that could identify them.*	<i>The conversation we have will be kept confidential. I won't take your name, but Emma/Joanna and I will write down/type your answers to the questions. The answers from you and other people I speak to will be shared anonymously with Refugee Resource and the team we are working with from the University of Oxford.</i>
Say if they will receive anything for giving their time.	<i>We will offer you a £5 gift voucher at the end of the interview, to thank you for your time.</i>
Check if they have any questions.	<i>Do you have any questions before we begin?</i>

*If possible, it is best to avoid taking any personal information (including name, initials, contact details, voice recordings or any information that could identify them). If you need to collect this information, you are legally required to adhere to the UK Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulation with regard to its collection and use.

During the interview

Checklist	Tips
Prevent distractions.	Try to choose a quiet, private space for the interview and turn off your phone.
If it is a group interview, set some "ground rules" or principles for the discussion. These can be written down and stuck on the wall for all to see.	The principles should include respecting what other people say (even if you disagree), and giving each other the space and opportunity to participate in the discussion. Others might include turning off mobile phones, or avoiding talking about certain very sensitive or controversial topics. Involve the group in creating a list of principles that everyone can agree with.

Try to stick to the topic guide, but be flexible within it.	Depending on the interviewee, you may need to change how you ask a question to help them understand it, or change the order of the questions.
Note down the interviewee's responses as they are speaking.	These don't have to be verbatim, but try to capture the key points.
Reflect back what the interviewee is saying	Check you've understood their answer to your question by offering a brief summary or paraphrasing what they've just said.
Keep track of time.	Make sure you can clearly see the time while you are interviewing. If the interviewee is very talkative, you may need to gently steer them through the interview topics.
Maintain an open curiosity.	Avoid making assumptions about the interviewee's experiences, feelings and needs, even if they seem similar to your own. Your task is to understand and accept, not to sympathise or judge.
Be aware of body language.	As well as paying attention to the words people say, you can also pick up on how they're feeling from their facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures. Think about your own body language and eye contact to show that you're calm and ready to listen.
Try not to interrupt the interviewee when they are speaking.	Often with good intentions, it can be tempting to interrupt and offer reassurance or solutions when someone is speaking about their experiences. However, this can feel frustrating or demoralising for the other person and they may disengage with the interview if they feel you aren't listening. As they're talking, you can nod or make small utterances, such as 'yes' or 'ok', to show that you're listening and interested in what they're saying. However in some cases if the interviewee is very talkative, you may need to interrupt to ensure you are able to ask the key questions in the time you have.
Don't be afraid of some silence.	Silence can give the interviewee time to think about how they respond to your questions. If the silence is prolonged, it may be that the person hasn't understood the question or doesn't want to answer it. You could try asking again in a different way, or checking whether they have understood it.
Be aware of cultural sensitivities.	What are the likely cultural backgrounds of your interviewees? What cultural and social behaviours are considered appropriate

	and inappropriate? Understand these in advance so you can adapt your interviewing if needed.
If it is a group interview, be aware of group dynamics	<p>Some people will want to speak a lot; others will tend to remain silent. As the facilitator, you need to ensure everyone has the opportunity to speak, for example by occasionally inviting the quieter members of the group to talk.</p> <p>Another challenge you may face is people talking a lot about something which is off-topic (but important to them). You could have a “parking bay” (e.g. a flipchart) to note down things that are important to people but which can’t be the focus of the present discussion due to time restrictions.</p> <p>Finally, you may have to deal with disagreements and conflict between group members. If this happens, you may need to interrupt and refer back to the ground rules or principles that were set at the start of the group interview.</p>
Finally, try not to overthink!	While being aware of all the above considerations is useful, try not to put too much pressure on yourself. It’s more important to stay focused on what the interviewee is telling you.

Closing the interview

Checklist	Example script (for hotel interviews)
Thank the interviewee for their time	<i>Thank you so much for your time today. It will help Refugee Resource provide better support for asylum seekers. Here is your £5 voucher.</i>
Explain what will happen next	<i>We will analyse all the information we have gathered from our interviews and present a summary to Refugee Resource.</i>
Offer information about further support (including contact details)	<i>If you would like to talk to someone confidentially about how you’re feeling, or if you would like to find out about other support, you can contact Refugee Resource on this number/email [offer leaflet].</i>

After the interview

Checklist	Tips
Reflect on your own thoughts and feelings about the interview.	Some people find it helpful to write down their own thoughts and feelings in an interview journal. This can be useful for personal learning and also your debrief session (see below).
Have a debrief session with your supervisor as soon as possible.	This is your chance to talk about your own thoughts and feelings about the interview(s), and any concerns or questions you may have. Refugee Resource can provide emotional support if needed.

Trainee notes