SUPPORT TOOL TO IFRC CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Guidelines for Media and Communications Activities with Child Refugees, Asylum seekers or Survivors of Trafficking

Purpose

These guidelines are designed to assist IFRC and National Society communications personnel who are working with child refugees, asylum seekers or survivors of trafficking and are determining if and how to involve these children in media and communications activities.

As defined in the IFRC Child Safeguarding Policy, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, child refers to a human being under the age of 18 years regardless of the applicable legal definition of the term in the relevant country.

Background

Hearing first-hand from child refugees, asylum seekers and survivors of trafficking is a powerful way to raise awareness and advocate for improvements to national systems and raise funds for National Society work. It can also be empowering for children to share their stories in their own words. However, children have often been through traumatic experiences and telling their story can be an exhausting and sometimes upsetting process. They are also likely to need additional support: many will not speak local languages, will lack immigration status, and will be coping with the effects of trauma or abuse.

Below is a guidance that should be followed when engaging a child refugee, asylum seeker or survivor of trafficking in communication work. Communications officers should always work closely with a member of the Red Cross Red Crescent team who knows the child or children in question well.

General considerations

- Drawing public attention to a child migrant's story can have consequences on legal processes. For example, if a child's account conflicts with his or her formal declarations, this could harm his or her asylum application. An article or online piece, if read in a child's country of origin, might put the safety of his or her family at risk. Children will not always be aware of these risks and it is your job to make sure they have considered them, working closely with their caseworker. To complement this, communications specialists should also be able to make a determination on whether the activity is going to put a child at risk or not and then decide to carry on or to stop.
- Children may also have unrealistic expectations. They may think that attracting public attention to their story will help to resolve their immigration case. Expectations should be carefully managed at every stage of the process.
- Children (and other service users) may agree to participate in media work because they feel they 'owe' a debt to the Red Cross Red Crescent for the help it has given them. They may even feel that future assistance from the Red Cross Red Crescent might be conditional on their cooperation. Make sure that children and all service users clearly understand that their participation in media work will not affect the Red Cross Red Crescent's assistance in any way, positively or negatively, and that they should decide to participate or not on this understanding.
- Only involve children in media and communications work if there is enough time to prepare them. Because briefing and preparation absorb time and resources (for communications as well as support teams), the Red Cross Red Crescent will only promote communications priorities (such as raising awareness of campaign themes, for example destitution in the asylum system).

Working with children

- Any child or young person who agrees to take part in communications work must understand what they are signing up to. They must also know that they can withdraw at any point. This is important because a child's circumstances (immigration status, living arrangements, school) can change suddenly.
- No one under the age of 18 can be interviewed, photographed or filmed without the prior written consent of their parent or legal guardian. This also applies to anonymous interviews, because a child might still be identified from details of his or her story.
- When working with an unaccompanied child, consent must be given by the local authority that looks after him or her, and (if relevant) his or her foster carer.
- Unaccompanied or separated children should only be considered for media and communications work in exceptional circumstances. The relevant operations manager must approve such decisions.
- If a child agrees to share his or her story, he or she should be prepared, briefed and debriefed according in the manner described below. A member of the team who knows the interviewee must be closely involved at each stage and must be present during any interviews, photography or filming.
- Always respect the principle to 'do no harm'. Take seriously the possibility that taking part in media and communications work may re-traumatize a person (and perhaps especially a young person) and consider carefully what is in the child's best interest. It is vital to respect a child's dignity, and to take particular care with children who are vulnerable. If in doubt, consult someone who knows the child well (a relative or therapist, for example) before approaching the child or taking a decision to proceed.

Collecting a case study

1. Case studies should be collected and written up by a member of the communications team. The researcher should work closely with operations to identify children who are willing to share their stories (as well as their legal representative) and should ensure, where needed, children receive information about appropriate support like psychosocial care, health services, and where to seek help for violence, abuse, or exploitation. If our contact with the child was made through a contract with a local authority or another partner their press office should also be consulted before any communications work is initiated.

2. Interviews should take place in person where possible. Allow enough time and make sure to find a quiet, discreet and welcoming location where the child will feel comfortable. Before you meet or speak, obtain from his or her caseworker basic details of the child's story (country of origin, current situation, how the Red Cross Red Crescent helped). Always ask the interviewee if they would like an interpreter or their caseworker to be present. You should also outline what you want to speak to the child about and estimate how much time the interview will take. Interviews with children must never be done in isolation. There needs to always be at least one other person in the room.

3. Always start by explaining to the child and their legal representative why you want to hear the child interviewee's story and what it will be used for and, therefore, where it could be seen or heard. Reassure the child interviewee that you can protect their identity, and that they are entitled to tell you as much or as little as they wish, and can review the notes you take and the story before it is made public. Remind yourself that reliving the past can be exhausting and traumatic for an interviewee. Make sure you take down all the details you are told, to avoid having to ask again at a later stage. Take note of any topics they clearly find difficult to speak about.

4. When the interview is finished, ask the child if they are comfortable and willing to have what he or she said used in communications. Explain exactly where the child's story might be seen. Make him or her aware that online content may be seen in his or her home country. Ask the person whether he or she would prefer to remain anonymous or whether they would prefer not to make public any part of the interview. Only if you are certain you can complete this, offer to send the child interviewee a preview copy, which will allow the interviewee to review what he or she has said; offer to provide a translator if appropriate.

5. You should then ask them to sign a consent form to indicate what they are happy to share and where. It is best practice to have consent forms in other languages that service users speak, or at least to have the support of a translator to make sure information is communicated and understood clearly and accurately.

6. Once the child and her or his legal representative has approved the story, you should also share it with their caseworker for their signoff.

7. Once the story has been signed off by the service user and their caseworker, notes should be stored as per communication team guidelines. You are responsible for recording each use of the case study, and keeping track of any further approaches to the service user.

Additional points

- Freelancers (including photographers/videographers) who have been commissioned to carry out work should always be accompanied by a member of the IFRC or National Society communications team. They should never be left alone with service users. Freelancers must also follow the IFRC code of conduct and visual guidelines. They must sign a non-disclosure paper to ensure that they won't be using the content collected for any other purpose than the one originally agreed.
- If the service user discloses a safeguarding concern while telling you their story, such as suicidal thoughts or an allegation of abuse, you should tell their caseworker straight away. You must also tell the service user you are doing this and explain that this is because you want to help to keep them safe. The caseworker should then seek guidance and support from the protection focal point, in alignment with the relevant safeguarding policy.

Media interviews

The below steps should be followed if there is an opportunity to involve service users in print, online or broadcast media work. These may come about as a result of an enquiry from a journalist, or through interest in a piece that the Red Cross Red Crescent press office has proactively pitched.

1. Request/opportunity is screened by the communications team. If an approach is made directly to operational staff, this should be directed to their regional communications officer or the national communications team.

2. A communications officer will discuss the request with the journalist and establish details such as when and how they would like to do the interview, if anonymity can be guaranteed, what kind of questions they would like to ask (please note that not all journalists will provide a full list of questions) and whether the service user would be able to review the piece prior to print/broadcast.

3. If we decide to pursue an opportunity, a communications officer will work closely with the operations team to identify and approach a service user. Service users with media experience should be considered first. Operational colleagues will usually make the initial approach and outline the request – making clear that the service user is under no obligation to take part.

4. If the service user agrees, the communications officer is responsible for:

- Providing a briefing on the request - including interview format, time commitment, and what kinds of questions are likely to be asked (making clear that they are likely questions and not a definitive list).
- Explaining where the article/broadcast could be seen and checking that they understand risks such as home country broadcast, or any implications for their asylum case.
- Discussing whether they want to be anonymous.
- If requested, asking if they are comfortable with photography. If not, consider options such as silhouetted images.
- Checking if they would like an interpreter
- Establishing basic details of their story (if not known)
- Establishing if there are any aspects they would rather not discuss. For example, they might be happy to talk about their experience of life in the current country but not why they left their home country.
- Briefing the journalist about the service user and highlighting areas they do not want to talk about.
- All of the above should be done with enough lead-in time for the service user to consider the risks versus the benefits of engaging with the media and make an informed decision about whether they want to go ahead or not.

5. A communications officer will always accompany the service user to the interview. They will remind them that they do not have to answer any questions which make them feel uncomfortable and intervene if necessary. A member of the operations team can also be present.

6. Afterwards, the communications officer and/ or caseworker should have an informal debrief with the service user and check if they are happy with how it went, how they feel after sharing what could be private and sensitive information, and if they have any concerns about what they were asked. If they do have any concerns, the media officer will raise these with the journalist. If they show any sign of anxiety or distress, the communications officer should raise this with their caseworker and journalist where necessary.

7. When the coverage runs, the communications officer will share copies with the caseworker/service user and ensure that the service user receives a thank you for taking part.

Additional points

- Service users who are asylum seekers should generally have their identity protected. However, where integral to the story and if risks have been fully understood and considered by the service user, exceptions can sometimes be made. This should be decided on a case by case basis, in close consultation with the service user's caseworker and if necessary, seeking advice from their solicitor.
- Any costs incurred by the service user, such as travel or interpreters, should be covered by the media team budget. Where possible we will avoid service users being out of pocket (e.g. purchase train tickets for them) but if reimbursement is necessary, this should be done as quickly as possible.
- The communications officer will ensure that from a practical perspective, the interview is made as easy as possible for the service user – e.g. allowing them to choose location, journalists travelling to where they are based, meet & greet at train station.
- Communications officers can also request for comments on online pieces to be turned off. This should always be done if a story involves a child or young person.

Media visits to IFRC and Red Cross and Red Crescent services

1. Any visit by a journalist to a Red Cross Red Crescent service, however informal, must be approved by the media team and relevant Red Cross Red Crescent operations manager. If the drop-in is run in partnership with another organisation, their permission will also need to be sought.

2. Media access will only be granted if journalists give a clear idea of who and what they would like to interview/film/record during the visit and agree to respect the privacy of any service users who do not wish to be involved.

3. A media officer must always accompany any media visits to a service. They are responsible for ensuring the journalist respects the parameters agreed beforehand, and will intervene in the event of any inappropriate behaviour. They will also provide staff and volunteers who will be present with a written briefing beforehand, so they understand the purpose of the visit and can explain this to service users.

4. Interviewees should ideally be identified prior to the visit, to allow time for them to prepare. However, if a service user is happy to be interviewed on the day, that is fine as long as the communications officer and service manager are satisfied that they understand the implications of doing this.