



# CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ON ASYLUM: A MESSAGING GUIDE

## BACKGROUND

This messaging guide is a tool to help the refugee and migrant advocacy sector to think tactically, play to our strengths and win. We'll look at the methodology and messages that can help us carve out a new approach that will be successful in persuading the public that seeking safety is a fundamental human right.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ellie Mae O'Hagan was the strategic communications consultant on this project. Anat Shenker-Ostorio designed the methodology. For more information, see the [Race-Class Narrative](#).

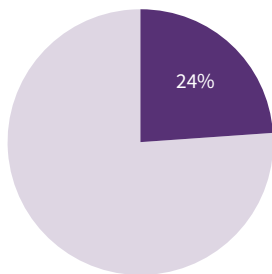
## THE METHODOLOGY

Over a six-month period, this project involved:

- A language analysis of current sector communications
- Online survey of 2,000 UK residents. We segmented our sample by asking them a series of questions where they had to choose between two answers.
- Based on responses to the questions, we segmented respondents into three groups:

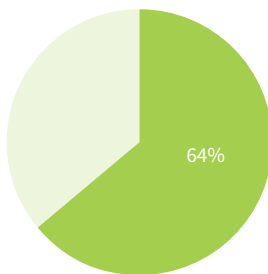
### Base

Those who will always agree with pro-refugee sentiment.



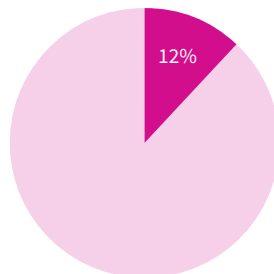
### Persuadables

The majority of the population, whose minds we can change.



### Opposition

Those opposed to refugee rights who will never change their minds.



As campaigners, our task is to **energise the base, persuade the persuadables,** and **alienate the opposition.** This research shows what messaging is most effective for persuading people in the UK to support the rights of people seeking safety.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## MESSAGE FORMAT

1. Lead with a shared value
2. Explain what and who is getting in the way of the value being realised
3. Assert a proactive solution

## MESSAGING PRINCIPLES

1. **Lead with the value of care and compassion.** All too often we open our message by talking about problems, which can often alienate our audience - who often already have quite a lot of problems in their own lives and don't need to hear about more. Instead we should lead with a shared value, which reminds us of what we have in common. We recommend leading with care and compassion as this did very well in our testing.
2. **Don't try to elicit pity for refugees.** By centering refugees' distressing experiences, we tell our audience that refugees have little in common with those of us already living in the UK. We may also make it less likely that people would support refugees settling in their communities, fearing that their experiences of trauma might have made them emotionally unstable. It's also important to note that refugees themselves do not like being talked about in this way.
3. **Avoid efficiency and waste frames.** Focusing on the efficiency of the current asylum system elides the real problem, which is that it is cruel. Campaigners who criticise the asylum system for being inefficient run the risk of making the argument that what we need is a more efficient version of the current system.

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4. **Point the finger at those responsible.** In order for people to believe that things can change, we need to make it clear that what is happening now is a choice made by people. We also need to explain why refugees are demonised, because if we don't, our audience might look for explanations from the opposition for why refugees are depicted so negatively in public discourse.
5. **Be comfortable with alienating the opposition.** We know this is outside of campaigners' comfort zones, but alienating the small section of the population with extreme opposition to refugees is how we ensure that our messages say something that is both substantial and progressive.
6. **Create something good.** Instead of talking about fixing a broken system, we need to talk about what we can build when we come together. Positive, future-focused messaging is what ensures our audience remains engaged and optimistic about the possibility for change.

## DON'T SAY / DO SAY

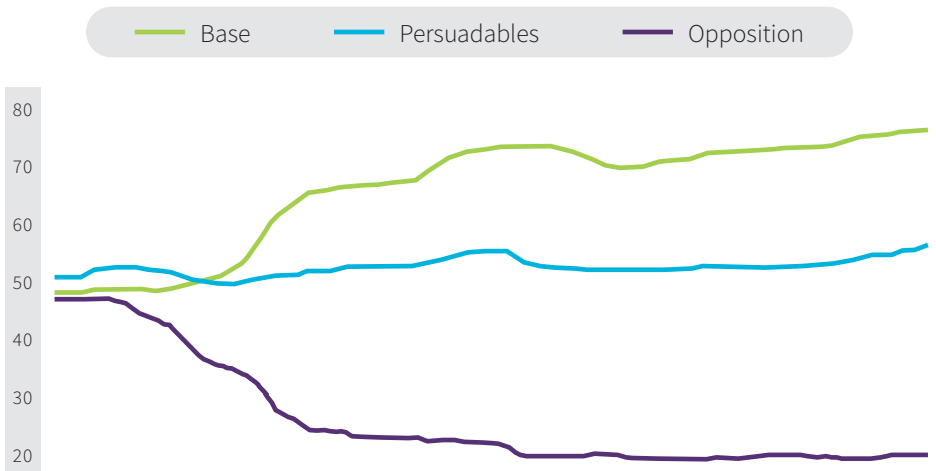
DONT SAY	DO SAY
Home Office	This government
Safe and legal routes	Safe routes
As British people	As caring people
Resettle	Safely rebuild their lives as part of our communities
People have been detained	This government has detained people
Fix the system, reform asylum policy	Create a fair and efficient asylum system
Graphic descriptions of torture, murder, sexual abuse	Put in harm's way, denied basic rights
Vulnerable people	People seeking safety
It is not illegal to claim asylum	Supporting people who need help is the right thing to do
No human being is illegal	Wherever we come from, we all have a right to feel safe

# MESSAGES TO AVOID

## Status quo message

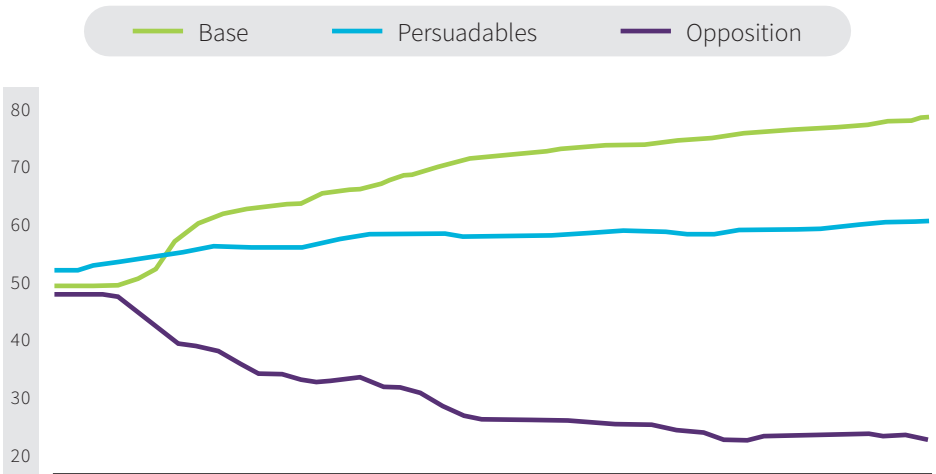
**This message is a composite of the communications of different organisations across the sector.**

*It is nearly impossible to claim asylum in the UK without resorting to dangerous journeys. There is an urgent need for the Home Office to create safe and legal routes to the UK for desperate people fleeing war, torture and persecution. People seeking safety in the UK should be met with compassion, not hostility. The UK has space. We only take 0.26% of the world's refugees. It's perfectly legal to enter a country irregularly if you are seeking asylum. As a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the UK has a duty to provide protection to those who need it and treat everyone with dignity while they are in our country.*



## National Pride message

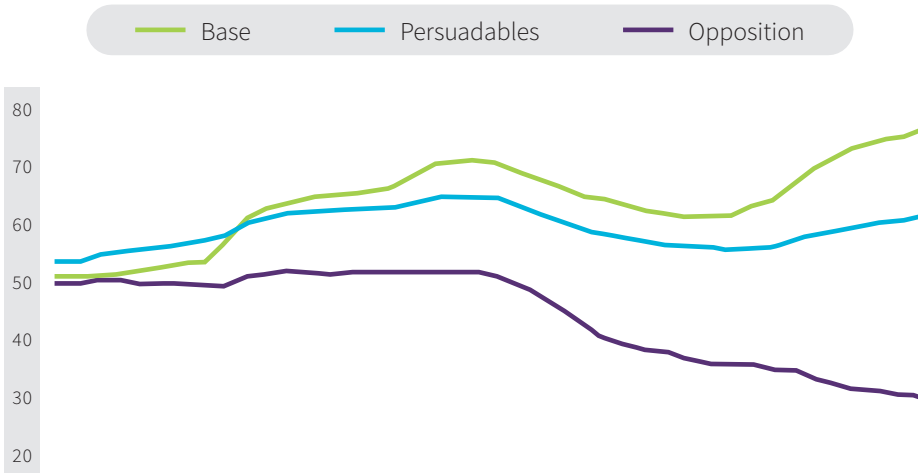
*How we treat refugees is about who we are as a country. Britain is one of the richest countries in the world, and most British people believe in giving others a helping hand. We should set an example to the world, welcoming those who need sanctuary. Our asylum system should set the gold standard; reflecting our values of compassion and justice by processing all those who arrive on our shores as quickly and fairly as possible and ensuring those who need our help are able to rebuild their lives in safety and become part of our British communities.*



# MESSAGES THAT TEST WELL

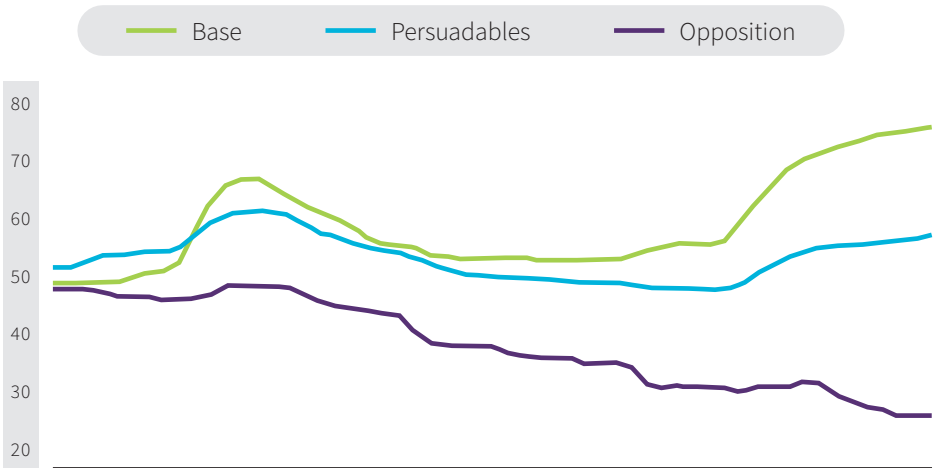
## Golden rule message

*No matter what we look like or where we come from, most of us strive to treat others the way we'd want to be treated. If any one of us feared for our lives or for our loved ones, we'd want to know that others would help us to safety. But certain politicians are trying to turn us against people who come seeking safety, hoping we'll look the other way while they endanger families who have been forced to flee their homes. We won't fall for that. It's time to create a fair and effective asylum process for everyone, and to support people to rebuild their lives in our communities.*



## Race-class message

*Whatever our background or postcode, religion or race, we all deserve to live peacefully and free from harm. But today, a small group of politicians and their greedy friends hurt all of our families by taking money out of our communities, running the NHS into the ground, and denying us fair pay for our work – all while pocketing the profits. They will do anything to distract us from their failures, encouraging us to blame refugees and migrants when things go wrong. While they do not care about us, we must show that we do care about one another. We need to come together to demand a fair and efficient asylum system that allows those who need sanctuary to safely rebuild their lives as part of our communities.*



To find out more about the work of Freedom from Torture, go to [www.freedomfromtorture.org](http://www.freedomfromtorture.org), or about our research and to and stay involved, email [campaigns@freedomfromtorture.org](mailto:campaigns@freedomfromtorture.org)