IDEAS FOR PRACTICE

COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC SERVICES



A Practical Guide to Communicating with GIM Beneficiaries

For staff of the General Inspectorate for Migration of the Republic of Moldova

AUTHORS

Nicolae Crețu and Lia Sclifos

n.cretu.biz

Chișinău, 2025

About this guide

How do you explain which document someone still needs to provide? How do you respond when someone has waited a long time and is upset? This guide draws on the conversations that GIM staff have every day with people who use their services.

Authors and context

Nicolae Crețu, a management consultant and trainer, and Lia Sclifos, who holds a doctorate in education, wrote this guide for the Beneficiary-Oriented Communication programme. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) organised the programme with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the General Inspectorate for Migration (GIM) as part of a project supported financially by the European Union. Read about the programme on the GIM website

Individual and team use

Staff can choose a situation from their own work, practise the conversation with a colleague and use the worksheet at the end to identify what they will do differently next time. Trainers can select role plays and case studies for workshops.

Editorial note

The Romanian manuscript was completed in February 2025. The Ideas for Practice edition was prepared in November 2026. The examples and teaching recommendations reflect the authors' views. The section on the institutional context includes an update on personal data protection.

Translation note

This edition was translated from Romanian into English using ChatGPT (OpenAI).

Suggested citation

Crețu, N., & Sclifos, L. (2025). A Practical Guide to Communicating with GIM Beneficiaries. Ideas for Practice series, 2026 English edition.

More publications at n.cretu.biz

Contents

I. Introduction..... 4
Purpose of the guide....4
Who the guide is for....5
Institutional context....6
How to use the guide....6
II. Principles of beneficiary-centred communication....8
Active listening....8
Empathy in professional interactions....12
Clarity and transparency....17
Objectivity and impartiality....19
III. The diversity of people using GIM services....22
Recognising different communication needs....22
Adapting your communication style....27
IV. Communication techniques and strategies....31
Body language and use of voice....31
Helpful phrases and phrases to avoid....34
Five steps for an effective interaction....37
Handling objections and complaints....40
V. Managing your stress and emotions....43
Relaxation and breathing techniques for managing stress....43
Personal reflection exercises....45
VI. Self-assessment and peer feedback....47
Peer observation and assessment....47
Benefits of team discussions and mentoring....49
VII. Quick assessment checklist....50
Practical exercise – Using the checklist....51
Interaction self-assessment worksheet....52

I. Introduction

Purpose of the guide

This guide helps staff at the General Inspectorate for Migration (GIM) strengthen their communication skills by focusing on the person using the service. Effective communication creates a fair, transparent and empathetic working environment and improves the relationship between the institution and the people it serves.

Why develop beneficiary-centred communication skills?

Every day, GIM staff meet people in difficult circumstances. They include migrants, refugees, people seeking asylum and foreign nationals who need help understanding migration law. Clear, empathetic and effective communication can:

- **Ease tension and reduce conflict through a calm, professional approach.**
- Build trust in the institution by providing accurate information and explaining decisions openly.
- Support compliance with legal requirements by presenting information clearly and in a logical order.
- Improve people's experience of the service and reduce frustration and confusion when they deal with administrative procedures.

Specific objectives

1. Help people speak openly and build their confidence in the services provided

- Explain procedures and requirements in language people can understand.
- Use active listening to establish trust and understand what the person needs.
- Respond calmly and professionally to concerns and objections.

2. Reduce conflict and manage tense situations

- Use de-escalation techniques to prevent tension from building.
- Use the acknowledgement technique to respond to strong emotions without escalating the situation.
- Distinguish facts from assumptions to make objective, impartial decisions.

3. Improve the institution's public image

- Act professionally and show empathy in every interaction with the public.
- Communicate openly and clearly to reduce frustration and mistrust.

4. Develop staff skills through self-assessment and regular feedback

- Use simulations and case studies to improve communication techniques.
- Use self-assessment and peer feedback to continue improving performance.
- Practise managing body language and tone of voice to communicate more effectively.

The guide gives staff practical techniques, exercises and examples to improve communication and foster trust and respect in their work with people who use GIM services.

Who the guide is for

The guide is for all GIM staff who work directly with beneficiaries, whatever their level of experience. Effective communication is an essential skill in migration services. The guide covers the basics and offers more advanced strategies for working with the public.

1. Staff new to the role. New staff can use the guide for independent learning and quickly become familiar with good practice and the specific demands of communication in migration services. It gives people starting work at GIM a grounding in the principles and techniques they need to:

- Understand the role communication plays in their relationships with service users.
- Follow the steps of a conversation with a beneficiary, from greeting the person to bringing the interaction to a close.
- Avoid common mistakes such as using overly technical language or failing to adapt to the person's communication needs.
- Manage emotions in difficult situations and maintain a professional manner.

2. Experienced staff developing their practice

Even experienced staff can find communication difficult, especially when tensions run high or people have high expectations. They can use the guide for professional development, to improve their practice and adapt their communication to beneficiaries' needs. It can help them:

- Refine their active listening and empathy skills.
- Improve how they handle objections and conflict.
- Use body language and tone of voice to stay composed during difficult interactions.
- Choose a communication approach suited to the person in front of them.
- Reflect on their own communication and adjust it through self-assessment and peer feedback.

3. Group training and independent learning

The guide is designed for independent study and for training in small groups.

- Independent learning. Staff can work through the guide at their own pace and try the techniques in practical exercises and case studies. Each chapter contains examples and ideas they can use immediately in their daily work.
- Group training. Trainers can use the guide for continuing education and professional development in the workplace. It supports:
  - Interactive exercises, role plays and case studies based on real situations.
  - Discussion and reflection on frontline experiences to improve everyday communication.
  - Assessment through simulations and practice across a range of settings.

Institutional context

The role and responsibilities of the General Inspectorate for Migration in the Republic of Moldova

The General Inspectorate for Migration (GIM) is part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova. It implements state policy on migration, asylum, statelessness and the integration of foreign nationals. Its main responsibilities in applying the relevant legislation are:

- Migration management. GIM monitors and regulates migration flows and keeps records of foreign nationals entering and staying in the Republic of Moldova.
- Addressing irregular stay. GIM identifies and takes measures in cases where foreign nationals are staying in the country unlawfully.
- Granting international protection. GIM assesses and decides on applications for asylum and other forms of protection.
- Integration of foreign nationals. GIM coordinates and implements measures to support social and cultural integration into Moldovan society.

GIM has regional directorates in Bălți, Cahul and Comrat, giving it a presence across the country to address migration issues.

What this means for communication with beneficiaries

Knowing and following the law directly affects how GIM staff communicate with beneficiaries. To communicate effectively and consistently with the law, staff should:

- **Protect confidentiality.** Under Law No. 133/2011, staff must protect beneficiaries' personal data, process them only for the purposes provided for by law and prevent unauthorised disclosure.

  November 2026 update. The reference above describes the framework in force when the guide was written. On 23 August 2026, Law No. 133/2011 was repealed and Law No. 195/2024 on personal data protection entered into force. Legislation published by the National Centre for Personal Data Protection

- **Provide clear and accurate information.** Beneficiaries have the right to accurate information about procedures that affect them. Explain the steps, rights and obligations in plain language and check that the person has understood.
- **Show empathy and professionalism.** Many people who use GIM services are in vulnerable situations. A respectful, empathetic manner can ease anxiety and make it easier to cooperate.
- **Ensure equal treatment.** National and international law require that all beneficiaries be treated equally, without discrimination on grounds such as nationality, ethnicity or religion.
- **Explain rights and obligations.** Make sure people understand their rights and obligations and the consequences of failing to meet those obligations.

How to use the guide

The guide supports independent learning and training sessions organised by GIM. Its modules build on one another, combining explanations with exercises that consolidate learning.

Working through the chapters independently or with a colleague

If you are studying the guide on your own, try the following approach.

1. Work through the material in stages

- Study each section in sequence. The concepts build on one another.
- Allow time to reflect on what you have read and how it applies to your daily work.
- If you have a learning partner, discuss what each of you studied and how you could apply it at work.

2. Put the techniques into practice

- Use the exercises and case studies to test and consolidate what you have learned.
- Practise active listening, clarification, restating key points and managing conflict in everyday conversations.
- Notice how these strategies affect your interactions with beneficiaries and adapt your approach in response to feedback.
- If you are studying with a colleague, compare your experiences and the results you observed.

3. Assess yourself and keep improving

- At the end of each chapter, reflect on the main points on your own or with a colleague. Write down anything you found difficult or want to improve.
- Use the self-assessment checklist in the final chapter to track progress and identify skills that need practice.
- Ask a colleague or manager for feedback if you are unsure how to apply a technique or find it difficult.

Guidance for trainers and managers leading training sessions

The guide can support workshops and formal training organised by GIM. The following suggestions are for trainers and managers.

1. Structure the sessions

- Divide the training into modules covering the chapters of the guide.
- Alternate explanations with practical examples so that staff understand the concepts and see how to use them in real situations.
- Give every participant access to the relevant materials, including worksheets and case studies.

2. Use case studies and simulations

- Invite groups to discuss the case studies in the guide.
- Use simulations and role plays so that participants can practise communication techniques and work through difficult interactions.
- Give constructive feedback that identifies strengths and specific areas for improvement.

3. Assess progress and adapt the training

- At the end of each session, ask participants what they found difficult or unclear.
- Use questionnaires, self-assessment and direct observation to assess how staff apply the techniques.
- Encourage staff to exchange experiences and suggest improvements to communication across the institution.

II. Principles of beneficiary-centred communication

Active listening

Opening activity – Assessing active listening skills

Purpose. Participants assess their current listening skills and identify what they can improve.

Before using the questionnaire

> For training purposes, you can record and review a role play with a colleague using fictional personal details. For real interactions, follow your institution's procedures for processing personal data.

To reduce the subjectivity common in self-assessment, staff are encouraged to:

1. Record a real conversation with a beneficiary, observing confidentiality requirements, and review it later using the questionnaire.
2. Ask a colleague to observe an interaction with a beneficiary and complete the questionnaire on their behalf.

This gives staff a more objective picture of their listening skills and helps them identify behaviours to improve.

Instructions

1. Observe your practice. Record a conversation with a beneficiary or ask a colleague to observe the interaction.
2. Assess yourself using evidence. Complete the questionnaire by considering what you actually did in the conversation.
3. Seek feedback if useful. Discuss your results with a colleague or mentor and ask for suggestions.

Active listening self-assessment questionnaire

Instructions. Rate each statement in relation to your work, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = never, 5 = always).

Statement	Score (1–5)
I maintain eye contact with the person I am speaking with.	
I set aside distractions such as my phone, computer or background noise when speaking with someone.	
I listen without interrupting.	
I use expressions that show I am listening, such as “I see”, “Go on” or “Tell me more”.	
I restate or paraphrase what I heard to check that I have understood.	
I ask clarifying questions to get more detail.	
I respond with empathy and show that I understand how the person feels.	
I let the person finish their point before forming an opinion or preparing my reply.	
I wait until I understand the situation fully before offering a solution.	
I summarise the main points at the end of the conversation.	

Total score: ____ / 50

Interpreting your results

- **40–50 points:** Strong active listening skills. Keep practising.
- **30–39 points:** You listen effectively, with room for improvement.
- **20–29 points:** Identify the skills you find difficult and work on them.
- **Below 20 points:** Make time to practise active listening and apply the techniques recommended here.

Questions for reflection

1. What are my strengths as a listener?
2. What do I need to improve?
3. How does my current listening style affect my relationship with beneficiaries?
4. What specific steps will I take to become a more active listener?

Option for group sessions

In a facilitated session, the trainer can invite participants to share their findings and discuss difficulties they have in common when practising active listening.

Active listening techniques

Active listening is an essential skill when working with GIM beneficiaries. It involves listening closely, interpreting what the person means and responding in a way that shows attention and empathy.

Why active listening matters

In conversations with beneficiaries, active listening helps staff to:

- **Improve service quality.** People who feel heard, understood and supported are less likely to become frustrated or dissatisfied.
- **Clarify requirements and needs.** Clearing up confusion and misunderstandings helps staff process requests correctly.

- **Build confidence in the institution.** Clear, attentive communication can change the way people experience administrative procedures.
- **Prevent conflict.** People who feel heard and understood are less likely to become upset or to find themselves in a tense exchange.

Ways to listen actively

GIM staff can use the following techniques to put active listening into practice.

1. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means expressing in your own words what the person has said and checking that you have understood correctly.

Examples of paraphrasing

- *"From what you've said, I understand that you'd like to know which documents you need to extend your stay. Is that right?"*
- *"If I've understood you correctly, you weren't told about this document when you applied, or you don't remember being told you needed it. Is that right?"*

Benefits

- *Shows the person that you have listened carefully.*
- *Helps prevent misinterpretation of what you have heard.*
- *Gives the person an opportunity to clarify if needed.*

2. Restating the key point

Restating is similar to paraphrasing. It draws attention to the central point of the person's message.

Examples of restating

- *"You're saying that you weren't told about the change in procedure. Would you like me to explain the next steps in detail?"*
- *"I can see that you're concerned about how long this is taking. I can explain the options available to speed up the processing of your application."*

Benefits

- *Brings the main point into focus.*
- *Moves the conversation towards solutions and specific actions.*
- *Eases anxiety by showing the person that their concern has been understood correctly.*

3. Clarifying

Clarifying means asking questions to obtain more information or resolve a misunderstanding.

Examples of clarifying questions

- *"When you say the documents don't meet the requirements, do you mean that some are missing or that they haven't been translated and legalised?"*
- *"Could you tell me which part of the information you received was unclear?"*

Benefits

- *Removes ambiguity and helps staff avoid making decisions based on assumptions.*

- *Helps staff gather the information they need to give an accurate answer.*
- *Shows genuine interest in the person's situation.*

4. Summarising

When summarising, the staff member reviews the main points to check understanding and bring the conversation to a conclusion.

Examples of summarising

- *"So far we've established that you need to bring document X and complete form Y. Is that right?"*
- *"To sum up, you haven't received a reply to your application. I can explain what you can do next."*

Benefits

- Organises information and prevents confusion.
- Gives the person a clear picture of the outcome and the next steps.
- Reduces the chance that someone will leave with incorrect or incomplete information.

Tips for effective active listening

- **Allow people to finish.** Give them time to express their thoughts fully before you respond.
- **Use eye contact and open body language.** These nonverbal signals can convey interest and respect.
- **Use a calm, friendly tone.** People may be tense or emotional, and your voice can affect their willingness to trust and cooperate with you.
- **Ask what the person means.** Clarify when necessary to avoid making assumptions.
- **Acknowledge the person's feelings without amplifying them.** If someone is frustrated, you might say, *"I can see how frustrating this situation can be. Let me explain what we can do to resolve it."*

Practical activity – Practising active listening skills

Purpose. Build and reinforce skills in paraphrasing, clarifying, restating and summarising through an interactive exercise.

General instructions

1. **Work in pairs or small groups.**
2. **One participant plays a beneficiary.** Another plays a GIM staff member and uses active listening techniques.
3. The beneficiary describes a real or fictional problem, and the staff member demonstrates active listening.
4. **Any observers assess the staff member's performance and offer feedback.**

Activity steps

1. Choose a scenario (5 minutes)

Each pair or group chooses or is given a scenario involving a GIM staff member and a beneficiary. Possible scenarios include:

- Someone is unhappy about how long it is taking to process their documents.
- Someone finds the requirements for a residence permit application difficult to understand.
- Someone is frustrated by a refusal and wants a fuller explanation.

The trainer or manager can provide prepared scenarios or invite participants to improvise from experience.

2. Simulate the conversation (10–15 minutes)

The beneficiary describes the problem using a tone and manner suited to the scenario.

The staff member practises the following active listening techniques:

- Maintain eye contact and use open body language.
- Use encouraging phrases such as *"I see"* and *"Go on"*.
- Paraphrase: *"From what you've said, I understand that…"*
- Ask clarifying questions: *"Could you tell me which part was unclear?"*
- Restate the person's message to check understanding.
- Summarise the discussion and clearly state the outcome.

3. Feedback and reflection (10 minutes)

After the simulation, discuss the interaction:

- Which techniques did the staff member use?
- How did the conversation develop?
- What reactions and behaviours did you notice in the staff member?
- What reactions and behaviours did you notice in the beneficiary?
- What worked well in the conversation?
- What could be improved, and how?

The staff member notes what they would like to improve in future conversations.

Observers, if present, give feedback based on what they saw. The trainer can add observations about how the techniques were used.

Adapting the exercise for individual learning

If you are working independently, you can:

1. **Record a real conversation with a beneficiary.**
2. Review the interaction and identify moments when you could have used active listening more effectively.
3. If you wish, discuss the interaction with a colleague or mentor.

Empathy in professional interactions

Opening activity – Drawing on what you already know about empathy

Purpose. Recall what you already know about empathy, reflect on your experience and identify the aspects of empathy that matter in professional interactions.

Instructions

1. Individual reflection (5 minutes)

Answer the following questions independently, drawing on your own experiences of empathy at work.

1. How would you explain empathy in your own words?
2. Recall a time when someone showed empathy towards you. How did it feel?
3. Have you ever felt that someone failed to show you empathy? How did it affect the interaction?
4. In your work at GIM, have you met someone who needed you to show more empathy? What did you do?
5. Do you see a difference between empathy and sympathy? How would you explain it?

2. Discuss in pairs (10 minutes)

Share your answers with a colleague and explore the similarities and differences in your experiences.

3. Group discussion (10 minutes)

The trainer collects ideas from the group, notes them on a board or flip chart and highlights the main concepts.

Clarify any confusion about cognitive and emotional empathy and relate the distinction to professional interactions.

Alternative group activity – A sticky-note wall

In a classroom, invite participants to write their answers on sticky notes and place them on a wall or flip chart under headings such as:

- *Definitions of empathy*
- *Positive experiences*
- *Negative experiences*
- *How do we use empathy at GIM?*

The trainer uses the responses to introduce the ideas the group will explore in greater depth. This opening activity connects participants' experience with the topic and creates room for reflection and different perspectives. It helps participants engage with new material and recognise the importance of empathy in their work with beneficiaries.

Empathy in professional interactions

Empathy is one of the most important skills in working with beneficiaries. It builds trust, eases tension and improves communication. For GIM staff it is especially valuable when people are facing difficult or stressful circumstances.

Understanding cognitive and emotional empathy

Cognitive and emotional empathy are complementary. GIM staff need to understand the difference and recognise when and how to use each in a balanced way.

Type of empathy	Definition	Example in a conversation with a beneficiary
Cognitive empathy	Understanding another person's thoughts, perspective and feelings without personally experiencing them. It draws on reasoning and objective analysis.	*"I see this situation is complicated for you and you'd like a clear answer. Let me explain the steps you can take."*
Emotional empathy	Sensing another person's emotions and responding to them instinctively. It draws on emotional connection and can lead to strong personal involvement.	*"I can see how stressful it is to wait this long for a reply. Let's look together at what we can do to move things along."*

Finding a balance

- Cognitive empathy helps staff remain professional and objective when making decisions.
- **Emotional empathy helps build a human connection.** Staff need to manage their own response to avoid becoming overinvolved or emotionally exhausted.
- **Balancing the two helps staff respond effectively to beneficiaries.**

How empathy builds trust

Empathy helps create an open, positive environment for conversation. When people feel heard and understood, they are more willing to cooperate and consider the solutions offered.

Benefits of empathy in professional interactions

- **Eases tension and conflict.** A calm voice and an empathetic response can quickly defuse a tense exchange.
- **Improves satisfaction.** People who feel respected and understood tend to see public services as more effective.
- **Supports decision-making.** People are more receptive to the next steps when they feel the staff member understands their point of view.
- **Strengthens the institution's reputation.** Empathetic treatment builds public confidence in GIM.

Ways to show empathy when working with beneficiaries

1. Listen actively and acknowledge feelings

Example: *"I can see how frustrating it is to wait so long for a reply. May I explain exactly where your application stands?"*

Why it works. It acknowledges the person's feelings and offers a clear way forward.

2. Adapt your tone and language to the person's emotional state

Example: If someone is upset, a calm voice and a moderate speaking pace can ease tension.

Why it works. A calm tone can help the person regain composure and think through the situation.

3. Restate the concern to clarify it

Example: *"If I've understood correctly, you're worried that your documents haven't been accepted. May I explain exactly what you need to do?"*

Why it works. It shows that the staff member listened closely and can offer a useful explanation.

4. Find common ground

Example: *"I know this procedure can seem complicated. I'd like to help you make sense of it."*

Why it works. It encourages cooperation and reduces the potential for confrontation.

Practical tips for developing empathy at work

- **Give yourself time before making a judgement.** Every person has their own story and people respond to stress in different ways.
- Ask clarifying questions to learn what you may still be missing about the person's situation.
- **Manage your emotions.** Stay aware of your own feelings when the person you are helping expresses theirs.
- Phrases such as *"That's the rule"* or *"That's how the system works"* can make someone feel dismissed. Try *"Yes, this is difficult. Would it help if I explained the reasons for the rule?"*
- **Practise empathy in everyday life.** Pay attention to the feelings and perspectives of the people around you.

Practical activity – Assessing and practising empathy with beneficiaries

Purpose. Practise cognitive and emotional empathy with people who need clarification, support or a considerate response. These everyday scenarios involve ordinary concerns and do not require techniques for defusing intense emotions. Regular practice helps staff evaluate their responses and offer clearer, more professional and compassionate support.

General instructions

1. Work in groups of three:

- One person plays a GIM staff member.
- One person plays a beneficiary.
- One person observes and assesses how the staff member shows empathy.

2. Each group receives a scenario involving a person who needs cognitive or emotional empathy in a situation without intense emotion.

3. The staff member uses empathy to understand the person's situation and respond appropriately.

4. The observer completes the assessment sheet and gives feedback.

5. Rotate roles so that everyone has a turn as the staff member, beneficiary and observer.

Possible scenarios

- **Scenario 1 – Someone needs help understanding a procedure**

- The person has read the online instructions but still has questions about submitting documents.
- They ask, *“Could you explain it a little more clearly? I’ve read the information, but I’m still not sure what I need to do.”*
- The staff member uses cognitive empathy, restates the information clearly and explains it in accessible language.

- **Scenario 2 – Someone feels unsure and hesitates**
- The person is unsure whether they have brought all the documents they need.
- They say, “I’m not sure I’ve got everything ready. Maybe something’s missing…”
- The staff member uses emotional empathy, acknowledges the concern and offers guidance at a pace the person can manage.

- **Scenario 3 – Someone is sceptical but calm**
- The person doubts the fairness of the process and says, “Someone told me it takes less time if you know somebody here.”
- The staff member acknowledges the doubt without taking it personally and gives an objective explanation of how the procedure works.

- **Scenario 4 – Someone is in a hurry but remains polite**
- The person wants a quick answer: “I don’t have much time. Could you tell me how long this takes?”
- The staff member uses cognitive empathy and gives a clear, concise answer while remaining attentive.

Empathy assessment sheet

Completed by the observer after each scenario

Aspect assessed	Yes	Partly	No	Observations
The staff member showed cognitive empathy by understanding the person’s concerns and explaining the reasons clearly.	☐	☐	☐	
The staff member showed emotional empathy by acknowledging the person’s concerns and keeping their own response proportionate.	☐	☐	☐	
The staff member used active listening through eye contact, paraphrasing and clarification.	☐	☐	☐	
The staff member gave a clear, structured answer and included only relevant information.	☐	☐	☐	
The staff member maintained a calm, professional tone.	☐	☐	☐	

Debrief and reflection

After all the scenarios, each participant reviews the feedback they received.

Questions for reflection

1. In which situation did I show empathy most effectively?

2. Which technique did I find hardest to use?
3. How can I balance cognitive and emotional empathy in future conversations?
4. What will I change about the way I communicate with beneficiaries?

This activity helps staff assess and improve how they show empathy in everyday situations where techniques for defusing strong emotions are unnecessary. With regular practice, staff can manage conversations more effectively and give clear, professional and considerate support.

Clarity and transparency

Opening activity – Rewriting complicated administrative language

Purpose. Identify and remove administrative jargon, avoid ambiguity and practise explaining information in language beneficiaries can understand.

Instructions

1. Divide participants into groups of two or three.
2. Give each group a list of complicated phrases commonly used in administrative communication.
3. Ask each group to rewrite every phrase so that it is clear and easy for a beneficiary to understand.
4. Each group presents its versions. The trainer discusses what works in each version and what could be improved.

Phrases to rewrite

Complicated wording (administrative jargon)	Clear, accessible wording
“Your request is undergoing processing in accordance with the legal provisions currently in force.”	“We’re reviewing your application. You’ll receive a reply within X days.”
“The file must be supplemented with the relevant documentation in accordance with the stipulated requirements.”	“To complete your application, you need to add the following documents.”
“Under the applicable regulations, the request cannot be admitted in the absence of supporting documentation.”	“We can’t approve the application without the required documents. I can explain what you still need to provide.”
“With a view to a favourable determination of the request, submission within the prescribed time limit is required.”	“For your application to be approved, you need to submit the documents by date X.”
“The beneficiary shall comply with the regulatory provisions prescribed by the legislation in force.”	“The law sets out the rules you need to follow. I can explain exactly what you need to do.”
“The period for resolution is established by the applicable regulatory instruments and varies according to the particulars of the request.”	“Processing time depends on the type of application. On average, it takes X days.”

Discussion and conclusions

The trainer gathers participants’ observations and highlights the principles of clear communication:

- Use short, precise sentences.
- Avoid technical jargon.

- Explain the steps and deadlines clearly.
- Adapt your language to the person you are helping.

Finally, each participant reflects on their own communication, writes down an administrative phrase they often use at work and considers how to express it more clearly.

Clarity and transparency

Clear, transparent communication is essential when GIM staff speak with beneficiaries. People who ask for information or help face a complex administrative system. Technical language can become a barrier. Explain procedures in accessible language and avoid jargon or wording that could mean several different things.

Explaining administrative terms and procedures in plain language

People are more likely to understand the process when staff use simple language and organise the information clearly. The following approaches can help.

Use everyday language that fits the person's needs

Avoid technical expressions such as *"Your request will be processed in accordance with the regulations in force."*

Try *"We'll review your application and you'll receive a reply within X days."*

Break the explanation into concrete steps

Where there are several steps, explain each one clearly and in the order the person needs to take it.

Example: *"To obtain a residence permit, submit an application with the following documents: 1, 2 and 3. We'll review it and you'll receive a reply within 30 days."*

Use examples to make information easier to understand

Example: *"Proof of residence can be a tenancy agreement or a statement from the property owner."*

Check understanding

After explaining the process, ask, *"Is there anything you'd like me to explain further?"* or *"Is everything clear, or would more detail help?"*

Avoid jargon and ambiguous wording

Excessive administrative jargon and ambiguous expressions are common obstacles. They can make information difficult for beneficiaries to understand.

Examples of jargon and more accessible alternatives

Administrative jargon	Plain-language alternative
"An additional instrument is required to be submitted in conformity with the legislation in force."	"Under the current rules, you need to add one more document to your application."
"Your case is pending resolution."	"We're still reviewing your application. You'll receive a reply soon."
"The procedure is governed by Article Y of Law No. X."	"The law sets this rule. If you'd like more detail, I can show you where to find the official information."

Tips for avoiding jargon and ambiguity

- **Adapt the message to the person.** A lawyer may be familiar with legal terms, while someone with no legal background may need a simpler explanation.
- **Use short, precise sentences.** Break up long, complex explanations.
- **Give a specific time when you can.** For example, *"within 10 working days"* is clearer than *"within a reasonable time"*.
- **Check how familiar the person is with the procedure.** Even when they seem knowledgeable, ask whether anything needs clarification.

Benefits of clarity and transparency

- **Greater trust in the institution.** People can see that the process is fair.
- **Fewer repeat questions.** A clear explanation reduces the need for people to return for clarification.
- **More efficient interactions.** Well-structured communication saves time for both beneficiaries and staff.
- **Less frustration and conflict.** When people understand the process, there is less room for dissatisfaction or disputes.

Practical exercise – Rewriting an administrative message

Instructions

1. Give each participant an administrative message written in technical language.
2. Ask them to rewrite it so that it is clear, friendly and easy for the beneficiary to understand.
3. Compare the answers and discuss which versions work best.

Example message to rewrite

"With a view to the favourable resolution of your request, it is necessary to supplement the file with the relevant documentation in accordance with the applicable legal provisions."

Plain-language version

"We need a few more documents before we can approve your application. I can explain exactly what you need to bring."

Objectivity and impartiality

Opening activity – Fact, assumption or interpretation?

Purpose. Explore how participants interpret information and help them distinguish facts from assumptions. The exercise introduces the topic and demonstrates why objectivity matters in professional interactions.

Instructions

1. **The trainer reads out or displays a series of statements.**
2. **Each participant decides whether each statement is a fact or an assumption.**
3. **Group discussion.** After each answer, discuss what makes the statement a fact or an assumption and how such a perception could affect a professional decision.

Situations to analyse

Situation	Fact or assumption?	Explanation
A beneficiary comes to the counter frowning. They must be angry.	Assumption	A facial expression does not always reveal a person's feelings. They may be concentrating or worried.
A beneficiary's application was refused because a document required by law was missing.	Fact	This can be checked against a clear rule.
The person in front of me does not speak Romanian, so they clearly understand nothing I say.	Assumption	They may understand some Romanian or already know the procedure. The conclusion is uncertain.
The person insists on being seen without an appointment. They must be trying to gain an unfair advantage.	Assumption	Their reasons have yet to be established. They may have a genuine emergency.
An applicant is late and did not call ahead. They probably have no respect for the institution's rules.	Assumption	There may be practical reasons for the delay, such as traffic or a personal difficulty.
The applicant says they submitted all the necessary documents. Our system does not show that they did.	Fact	The statement describes what the person reported and what can be checked in the system.
A person who received a refusal appears to accept the decision without comment. The outcome probably does not bother them.	Assumption	An outward reaction does not always reveal how a person feels.
Over the past three days, the same document was missing in five cases. All five applicants made the mistake because they do not read the rules.	Assumption	There may be a problem with how the requirements are communicated. The missing documents alone do not establish inattention.

Discussion and reflection

- What does this exercise teach us about the way we perceive beneficiaries?
- How can we avoid making decisions based on assumptions and interpretations?
- How can this approach help us treat every beneficiary impartially?

Objectivity and impartiality

Objectivity and impartiality are fundamental to the work of GIM staff. Decisions and interactions should be grounded in verifiable facts, clear rules and fair treatment. Personal impressions, assumptions or interpretations can interfere with that judgement.

Distinguishing facts from assumptions and interpretations

An essential part of being objective is knowing how to distinguish a fact from an assumption.

- **Fact:** Information that can be checked against documents, official statements or direct observations.
- **Assumption or interpretation:** A conclusion reached without sufficient evidence, shaped by personal perceptions or stereotypes.

Examples

Situation	Fact	Assumption or interpretation
A beneficiary does not have the documents needed for an application.	*One of the documents on the required list is missing from the file.*	*"They didn't read the instructions. They don't care about the rules."*
A person begins to cry while speaking to a staff member.	*The beneficiary has a health problem and feels unwell.*	*"She's manipulating us. She wants the staff member to feel sorry for her."*
An applicant speaks loudly at the counter.	*The person raises their voice and interrupts the staff member's explanation.*	*"They're difficult. They'll refuse any solution."*
A person asks for the procedure to be expedited.	*They explain that they have an urgent medical situation and provide supporting documents.*	*"They want special treatment, just like everyone else who tries to jump the queue."*

How assumptions can mislead us

- They can affect decisions and the way staff treat a beneficiary.
- They can prompt inappropriate responses and heighten tension.
- They can lead to discrimination or preferential treatment on subjective grounds.

Ways to avoid assumptions

- Check the information before drawing a conclusion.
- Listen actively and ask clarifying questions.
- Assess the situation against the relevant rules and procedures. Check your personal impressions against the available facts.

Why consistency and equal treatment matter

- Applying rules consistently and responding consistently in similar circumstances makes the administrative process fair and predictable.
- Treating people equally builds trust in the institution and helps prevent complaints about discrimination or favouritism.

Principles of equal treatment

- **Apply the same rules to everyone.** Any exception needs a justification.
- **Take a consistent approach to similar situations.** Two people in the same circumstances should receive the same response.
- **Guard against outside influence.** Base decisions on the facts and the law.

Common ways unequal treatment can arise

- Judging people by their appearance, clothing, accessories, nationality or manner of speaking.
- Favouring someone on subjective grounds: *"They seem trustworthy. I'll accept the application even though some documents are missing."*
- Applying the rules differently depending on your feelings or mood.

Ways to maintain impartiality

- Follow institutional procedures and explain to the person that the same procedures apply to everyone.

- When making a decision, ask yourself, *“Would I do the same thing if someone else were in this situation?”*
- Pause before reacting. Review the facts calmly before making a decision.

Practical exercise – Fact or assumption?

Instructions

1. The trainer reads out several situations.
2. Participants decide whether each statement contains a fact or an assumption.
3. Discuss how staff can avoid assumptions and put impartiality into practice.

Example situations

- *“This person is very upset. They’re bound to misunderstand what I say.”*
- *“The applicant is missing documents required by the list on the website.”*
- *“The person in front of me is wearing expensive clothes, so they have no financial difficulties.”*
- *“The documents this person has provided show that their situation is urgent.”*
- *“They don’t speak Romanian, so they clearly don’t know the immigration rules.”*

III. The diversity of people using GIM services

Recognising different communication needs

Self-assessment quiz – How well do I recognise different communication needs?

Purpose

Use this quiz to assess how well you recognise different patterns of behaviour, identify your strengths and see where you could improve.

Instructions

1. Read each situation.
2. Choose the option that best describes the person’s behaviour in that situation.
3. Compare your answers with the answer key and identify what you would like to work on.

Self-assessment quiz

1. Someone avoids eye contact, gives short answers and asks no questions. Which description fits best?

☐ A) Introverted

☐ B) Sceptical

☐ C) Aggressive

2. Someone raises their voice, says they have been waiting too long and insists on being seen immediately. Which description fits best?

☐ A) Stressed

□ B) Aggressive

□ C) Unprepared

3. Someone asks many questions, seems unwilling to accept the answers and challenges the institution's rules. Which description fits best?

□ A) Sceptical

□ B) Unprepared

□ C) Introverted

4. A person arrives at the counter looking confused. Some documents are missing and they do not understand what to do. Which description fits best?

□ A) Stressed

□ B) Unprepared

□ C) Sceptical

5. Someone speaks quickly, appears agitated and worries that their case will never be resolved. Which description fits best?

□ A) Stressed

□ B) Introverted

□ C) Aggressive

6. Someone has arrived without the required documents and appears not to have read the information beforehand. Which description fits best?

□ A) Unprepared

□ B) Sceptical

□ C) Aggressive

7. Someone is polite but insists on having every detail explained and appears worried about being misled. Which description fits best?

□ A) Stressed

□ B) Sceptical

□ C) Introverted

Answer key

1 – A) Introverted

2 – B) Aggressive

3 – A) Sceptical

4 – B) Unprepared

5 – A) Stressed

6 – A) Unprepared

7 – B) Sceptical

Interpreting your score

- **6–7 correct answers.** You are good at recognising patterns and adapting your approach to the situation. Keep practising.
- **4–5 correct answers.** You have a good understanding. Think of situations you have encountered and practise distinguishing between the different patterns.

- **1–3 correct answers.** Spend more time identifying the patterns. Review each description and practise recognising the behaviour in everyday interactions.

Discussion and reflection

✓ Did you find the patterns easy to recognise?
✓ Which type of interaction do you find hardest to manage?
✓ How could you apply this knowledge in your daily work?

Recognising different communication needs

At GIM, staff work with people from diverse cultural backgrounds who bring different experiences and expectations. A person's behaviour may reflect their emotional state, legal situation or understanding of the administrative process.

The descriptions below are illustrative. In their everyday work, staff will encounter other patterns and may use their experience to identify and describe them. What matters is adapting the approach so that the conversation remains effective and respectful.

A person who is introverted

Description. A reserved person who may find it difficult to express what they need or ask questions clearly.

What the person may need

- A safe, encouraging environment in which to speak.
- Extra time to process information and respond.

Challenges for staff

- It can take time to obtain all the information needed.
- The person needs to feel comfortable and able to trust the conversation.

Approaches to try

- Use open questions to start a dialogue.
- Be patient and give clear explanations.
- Ask follow-up questions to check what the person has understood.

A person who is sceptical

Description. Someone who mistrusts authorities or procedures and often asks for further clarification.

What the person may need

- Detailed, transparent explanations.
- A way to verify that the information is genuine.

Challenges for staff

- Staff may need to repeat and clarify the steps several times.
- The person may challenge the information provided.

Approaches to try

- Give clear information backed by official documents.
- Keep your tone calm and professional.
- Respond patiently and avoid taking the person's scepticism personally.

A person behaving aggressively

Description. Someone who expresses frustration in a hostile or confrontational manner.

What the person may need

- Acknowledgement of their frustration and a clear response to the issue raised.
- Respectful treatment, even when they raise their voice.

Challenges for staff

- Managing difficult behaviour while keeping the situation from escalating.
- Remaining professional when someone behaves provocatively.

Approaches to try

- Stay calm and firm.
- Use the acknowledgement technique to ease tension and avoid mirroring the person's aggression.
- Set clear limits and involve a supervisor if necessary.

A person who is stressed

Description. Someone overwhelmed by anxiety, uncertainty or fear, often because of their legal situation or unfamiliarity with a procedure.

What the person may need

- Support and empathy during the interaction.
- A step-by-step explanation to help them understand their situation.

Challenges for staff

- They may find it hard to take information in accurately.
- Too many details at once can become overwhelming.

Approaches to try

- Speak calmly and organise the information clearly.
- Explain one small, manageable step at a time.
- Encourage the person to ask questions about anything that remains unclear.

A person who is unprepared

Description. Someone who is missing required documents or is unfamiliar with the steps they need to follow.

What the person may need

- Clear information about which documents are missing and how to obtain them.
- Patience from staff as they explain the requirements.

Challenges for staff

- Staff may need to repeat information frequently.
- Incomplete documentation can delay processing.

Approaches to try

- Provide a written list of the required documents.
- Explain the next steps in plain language.

- Where possible, direct the person to sources of additional help.

A person who is impatient

Description. Someone who wants the process completed as quickly as possible and insists on it.

What the person may need

- As little waiting time as possible.
- A prompt, clear answer to their request.

Challenges for staff

- The person may become frustrated if the process seems too slow.
- They may interrupt or press for an immediate solution.

Approaches to try

- Give a realistic estimate of the time needed to process the application.
- Stay calm and reassure the person that you are doing what you can to help.
- If there are options for faster processing, explain them.

These descriptions are a starting point. GIM staff may encounter different patterns in their own work. Each interaction is individual. Adapt your approach and look for other patterns when the situation calls for it.

Principles that apply to everyone

✓ Treat each person with respect and professionalism.
✓ Remain objective and adapt how you communicate to the person's needs.
✓ Be flexible while following institutional rules and procedures.

Final practical exercise – Who am I?

An interactive game about communication needs

Purpose. Practise quickly recognising different patterns of behaviour and adapting your communication to the person you are speaking with.

Instructions

1. Prepare the cards

- Prepare cards representing behaviours such as introverted, sceptical, aggressive, stressed, unprepared or impatient.
- Give each card a few behavioural clues without naming the category.

2. Play the game

- Each participant draws a card without looking at it and places it on their forehead or back, or holds it where the others can see it.
- Participants take turns talking with the rest of the group, who play GIM staff members.
- The group speaks to the participant as if they were the person described on the card, adjusting their responses and behaviour accordingly.
- The participant guesses the category on their card from the way the others respond.

3. Discuss the experience

- After everyone has guessed, discuss how staff could handle a real interaction with someone displaying each pattern.
- Identify which strategies worked and what could be improved.

Sample cards

A person who is sceptical

- Asks many questions and wants evidence for every explanation.
- Questions rules and processes and expresses mistrust of the system.
- Asks for details about each step in the procedure.

A person who is stressed

- Speaks quickly and seems overwhelmed by the situation.
- Expresses concern about the process and fears that the application will be refused.
- Loses track during explanations and may seem disorganised.

A person behaving aggressively

- Raises their voice and seems irritated.
- May accuse staff loudly of following an unfair process.
- Wants an immediate solution and refuses to listen to explanations.

A person who is introverted

- Says little and avoids eye contact.
- Asks no questions and gives short answers.
- Appears unsure but does not ask for clarification.

A person who is unprepared

- Has arrived without all the necessary documents and seems confused.
- Asks questions about information set out clearly on the website or in the guides.
- May ask for a compromise because required documents are missing.

A person who is impatient

- Says they have no time and asks to be seen immediately.
- Complains about how long the process is taking.
- Checks their phone frequently and interrupts staff to speed up the conversation.

Final discussion

✓ Which pattern of behaviour was easiest or hardest to recognise?
✓ How did the person’s behaviour affect the conversation?
✓ Which techniques worked best for each pattern?

Adapting your communication style

Self-assessment – What is my communication style?

Purpose. Recognise your own communication style and identify changes that could help you respond better to people with different needs.

Instructions

1. Each participant completes the questionnaire below.
2. Review your score and reflect on the communication style you use most often.
3. In small groups, share your conclusions and discuss these questions:

- What are your strengths?
- Which communication style do you use most often at work?
- What would you like to improve?

Self-assessment questionnaire – What is my communication style?

Instructions

Rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5.

- **1 – Never**
- **2 – Rarely**
- **3 – Sometimes**
- **4 – Usually**
- **5 – Always**

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. I adjust my tone and speaking pace to the person I am talking to.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. When someone raises their voice, I stay calm and avoid reacting defensively.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I explain information as clearly as possible, using plain language and avoiding administrative jargon.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I rephrase my answer when I notice the person has not understood.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I listen closely and let the person explain their concerns without interrupting.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I try to adapt my response to the person's emotional state.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I organise information so that the person can follow it easily.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. When someone is sceptical, I offer evidence and further explanations to address their concerns.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. In difficult situations, I focus on possible solutions and try not to take the person's reaction personally.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. I pay attention to my body language so that I convey openness and professionalism.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Interpreting your results

40–50 points: You communicate flexibly and effectively.

You adapt well to different people and adjust your style to the situation. Keep practising and refining your strategies.

30–39 points: You communicate well and have room to improve.

In some situations, you may respond automatically and miss a chance to adapt to the person's needs. Think about a difficult encounter and what you could do differently.

20–29 points: You tend to use a standard approach with limited adaptation.

You may find it difficult to adjust your tone and approach to individual needs. Practise active listening and identify more precisely what each person needs.

Below 20 points: Work on making your communication more flexible.

You may rely on a fixed approach or react impulsively in some situations. Observe colleagues who handle difficult conversations well and practise adapting your message to the context.

Group discussion and reflection

- What did you discover about your communication style?
- What would you like to improve?
- Can you recall a situation where another style would have been more appropriate?
- Which techniques could help you adapt to different people more effectively?

Adapting your communication style

Effective communication involves adapting the way you give information to the person's needs and circumstances. People vary in their expectations, their understanding of the process and how they feel. A standard response can make a conversation more difficult. Flexibility, professionalism and respect for both the individual and the rules help staff handle each situation well.

Tailoring your approach to the person's needs

The following strategies illustrate how you can respond to different patterns of behaviour, communicate effectively and reduce the risk of emotions escalating.

1. A person who is introverted

✓ **How to communicate**

- Ask open questions that encourage the person to speak.
- Allow extra time for a response and let the person set a comfortable pace.
- Explain the procedure one step at a time.

△ **What to avoid**

- Pressuring the person to say more.
- An authoritarian or hurried tone that discourages conversation.

2. A person who is sceptical

✓ **How to communicate**

- Give detailed explanations and concrete examples to support the information.
- Be transparent about where the rules come from and identify the relevant sources.
- Answer follow-up questions calmly and patiently.

△ **What to avoid**

- Vague or general responses that can deepen mistrust.
- Personal opinions presented in place of clear, documented information.

3. A person behaving aggressively

✓ **How to communicate**

- Keep a calm, neutral tone to prevent the conflict from escalating.
- Listen patiently and show that you understand the person's frustration.
- Steer the conversation towards solutions and avoid a confrontation.

△ **What to avoid**

- Raising your voice or becoming defensive.
- Taking verbal attacks personally. Maintain a professional manner.

4. A person who is stressed

✓ **How to communicate**

- Explain the information clearly and briefly, limiting unnecessary detail.
- Show that you understand how the person feels.
- Respond patiently and give them time to organise their thoughts.

△ **What to avoid**

- A detached tone that may worsen their stress.
- Giving a large amount of information in a short time.

5. A person who is unprepared

✓ **How to communicate**

- Structure spoken guidance so that it is easy to follow.
- Identify the required documents and the next steps clearly.
- Repeat important information to check that it has been understood.

△ **What to avoid**

- Showing frustration about the person's lack of preparation.
- Leaving out essential information because the person "should already know it".

6. A person who is impatient

✓ **How to communicate**

- Explain the process clearly, including how long each stage is likely to take.
- Stay calm and assertive even when the person is in a hurry.
- Explain why following the rules and respecting the order of service matters.

△ **What to avoid**

- Rushing the interaction, which can cause confusion or omissions.
- Short, abrupt answers that may sound dismissive.

Practical exercise – Say it another way

Practising how to rephrase messages for effective communication

Purpose. Practise adapting communication to the person you are helping. Turn rigid, technical or unclear statements into language that is accessible, empathetic and suited to the situation.

Instructions

1. Divide participants into teams of two or three.
2. Give each team a list of standard phrases that sound rigid, authoritarian or inflexible.
3. Ask teams to rephrase each statement, paying attention to:

- Clarity and accessibility
- The person's circumstances and behaviour, for example, whether they are stressed, sceptical, aggressive or unprepared
- A professional and empathetic tone

4. When all teams have finished, discuss their versions as a group.
5. The trainer gives feedback and highlights the wording that works best.

Examples of phrases to rework

Original phrase (rigid, technical or lacking empathy)	Person's situation	Reworded response (clear, empathetic and tailored)
"You don't have all the required documents, so your application can't be accepted."	Unprepared	"To approve your application, we still need these documents. I can show you exactly what to bring and where to obtain them."
"We can't make exceptions. Those are the rules."	Sceptical	"The rules set out these steps for every applicant. If you like, I can explain why each step is necessary."
"We can't see you without an appointment."	Impatient	"We use appointments so that everyone is served fairly. Would you like me to check the next available time?"
"You should have read the information on the website before coming in."	Stressed	"I understand it can be difficult to find all the information you need. I can explain the steps to you now."
"Please don't raise your voice. We can't discuss anything like this."	Aggressive	"I'd like to help you find a solution. It will be easier if we speak calmly. Let's look at what we can do together."

Final discussion

What did you find difficult when rephrasing the messages?

Which type of interaction was hardest to handle?

How do you think your choice of words influences the other person's response?

IV. Communication techniques and strategies

Body language and use of voice

Opening activity – What does this gesture mean?

Cultural differences in body language

Purpose. Explore how gestures and other nonverbal signals can carry different meanings across cultures. Recognising these differences helps GIM staff avoid misunderstandings and communicate respectfully with people of different national and cultural backgrounds.

Instructions

1. The trainer demonstrates several familiar gestures and invites participants to suggest what they can mean in different cultures.
2. Group discussion

- What might each gesture convey in the person's cultural context?
- How can staff avoid misreading body language?

3. Draw conclusions about how to use gestures more thoughtfully in conversations with beneficiaries.

Gestures to discuss

1. The “OK” sign (the thumb and index finger form a circle, with the other fingers extended)

- In many countries, including the United States and Romania, this can mean “everything is fine”.
- In France or Brazil, the sign can carry a negative meaning, such as “zero” or “worthless”, or be considered offensive.
- In Türkiye and some Arab countries, it can be considered vulgar.

2. Giving a thumbs-up

- In many Western countries, it signals approval.
- In Iran, Greece and Afghanistan, it can be interpreted as offensive or obscene.

3. Tilting the head to one side

- In many European countries, this can suggest curiosity or interest.
- In India, a sideways movement of the head can signal agreement.

4. Prolonged eye contact

- In Europe and the United States, it can express respect and confidence.
- In some Asian and Arab cultural settings, it can be perceived as aggressive or disrespectful.

5. Beckoning with the index finger (“come here”)

- In Europe and the United States, this is a common way to call someone over.
- In the Philippines and some other Asian countries, it can be deeply insulting because the gesture is associated with calling animals.

6. Striking the palm with a fist

- In some European and Latin American countries, this can express determination or strength.
- In Türkiye and parts of the Middle East, it can be interpreted as obscene.

Discussion and reflection

Did any of these meanings surprise you?

Have you ever seen someone misunderstand a gesture?

What can we do to avoid using gestures that a beneficiary may find inappropriate?

Body language and use of voice

People respond to the words staff choose, the gestures, facial expressions and posture that accompany them, and the tone, pace and volume of the voice. Together, these signals influence how the person interprets the message and how well the interaction goes.

Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication includes the gestures, facial expressions, posture and eye contact that accompany speech. These signals can reinforce or contradict the words we use and influence how the listener understands them.

Key aspects of nonverbal communication

Element	Role in the interaction	Guidance for staff
Facial expressions	Convey emotions and attitude. They can shape how open and empathetic the staff member appears.	Use a friendly, open expression. A frown or a blank expression can suggest irritation or lack of interest.
Eye contact	Can signal attention and respect. Looking away may be read as avoidance or lack of interest.	Use a comfortable amount of eye contact. If the person seems uncomfortable, adjust how long or how directly you look at them.
Posture	An open, relaxed posture conveys confidence and approachability.	Folded arms can appear defensive. Sit or stand upright in a relaxed position.
Gestures	Support and reinforce spoken messages.	Use natural, measured gestures to emphasise a point. Fast or abrupt movements can seem threatening.
Personal space	Cultural differences can influence what feels like a comfortable distance.	Respect the person's space. If they step back, give them room and maintain a distance that feels comfortable.

Common nonverbal communication mistakes

- × Avoiding eye contact entirely can be perceived as lack of interest or confidence.
- × Folded arms can suggest defensiveness or reluctance to engage.
- × An aggressive tone combined with abrupt gestures can intensify tension.
- × A rigid or expressionless face may suggest indifference or lack of involvement.

How you use your voice

The way you say something shapes its meaning. A listener may interpret the same words differently depending on your tone, volume, pace and pauses.

Key aspects of vocal delivery

Element	Role in the interaction	Guidance for staff
Tone	Can convey authority, empathy, irritation or lack of interest.	Use a calm, confident voice and avoid sounding aggressive or sarcastic.
Volume	Affects clarity and how comfortable the conversation feels.	Speak loudly enough to be heard while keeping a comfortable volume.
Speaking pace	Speaking too quickly can make you hard to follow. Speaking too slowly can frustrate the listener.	Adjust your pace to the person's understanding. Pause to allow time for information to sink in.
Intonation	Conveys emotion and emphasises particular information.	Vary your intonation naturally. A monotonous or overly authoritative delivery can make it harder to engage.

Common mistakes in vocal delivery

- × Speaking too quickly makes information hard to process.
- × A flat tone can sound mechanical or uninterested.

× Raising your voice too much can seem aggressive and increase tension.
× Long pauses or frequent hesitation can suggest uncertainty.

Practical exercise – How does tone change the message?

Instructions

1. The trainer introduces a neutral statement, for example:

"Your application is incomplete."

2. Participants say the sentence aloud using different tones and attitudes:

- **Calm and professional**
- **Irritated or aggressive**
- **Empathetic and friendly**
- **Bored or uninterested**

3. Discuss how the tone changed the way the message was received.

Reflection questions

- Which tone was most appropriate for a GIM staff member?
- How does the way you use your voice influence the beneficiary's reaction?
- What could give the listener the wrong impression?
- Effective communication depends on both the words staff choose and how they deliver them.
- Nonverbal signals such as gestures, facial expressions and eye contact can support or contradict spoken words.
- **Tone, volume and pace influence how the listener receives and interprets a message.**
- Recognising these effects and practising the techniques helps GIM staff communicate clearly, professionally and empathetically.

Helpful phrases and phrases to avoid

Opening activity – How does the beneficiary feel?

Simulation and discussion of the impact of communication

Purpose. Notice the effect of the phrases staff use. Explore how different expressions influence a person's mood and reaction, and how to adapt your wording to improve the interaction.

Instructions

1. The trainer reads or displays two versions of a statement, one rigid or inappropriate and one expressed professionally and with empathy.
2. Participants examine both versions and describe how the person might feel on hearing each one.
3. Group discussion

- How might the beneficiary react to each version?
- Which version creates a better experience, and why?
- What small changes could improve the conversation?

Sample phrases for discussion

Situation	Phrase to avoid	Suggested phrase
Refusing an application	"That's impossible. Those are the rules."	"Yes, the rules require this document before we can process the application. I can explain how to get it."
Someone is confused or unprepared	"You should have known that before you came."	"I can walk you through the steps and the list of documents you need."
Someone is impatient and agitated	"Wait like everybody else. You don't get priority."	"We're doing everything we can to process applications quickly. The next available appointment is at X."
Someone raises their voice and behaves aggressively	"If you shout, I'm not helping you."	"I'm listening and I want us to find a solution. It will help if we speak calmly."
Explaining a rule	"That's the law. There's nothing I can do."	"The rules require us to see this document before we can approve the application."

Discussion and reflection

How do you think the person would feel after each response?

How could these phrases affect the institution's reputation?

Which techniques could make the conversation a better experience for the beneficiary?

Helpful phrases and phrases to avoid

The words staff use influence how people experience the service. Clear, polite and empathetic language can improve communication. Rigid, vague or aggressive expressions can cause tension and dissatisfaction.

This section gives practical guidance on choosing professional, effective wording that fits the person's needs.

General principles for effective communication

- **Clarity.** Use accessible language and explain technical or administrative terms.
- **Empathy.** Show that you understand the person's concerns, even when the outcome they want is unavailable.
- **Calm and professionalism.** Keep your response measured even when the person is dissatisfied.
- **Objectivity.** Give precise information and keep personal interpretations out of the explanation.
- **Solutions.** Direct the conversation towards the actions that are available.

Helpful phrases and phrases to avoid

Situation	Suggested phrases	Phrases to avoid
Refusing an application	"Yes, the rules require this document before we can process the application. I can explain how to get it."	"That's impossible. Those are the rules."

Situation	Suggested phrases	Phrases to avoid
The person is confused or unprepared	"I can walk you through the steps and the list of documents you need."	"You should have known that before you came."
The person is impatient and insists on being seen sooner	"We're doing everything we can to process applications quickly. The next available appointment is at X."	"Wait like everybody else. You don't get priority."
The person raises their voice and behaves aggressively	"I'm listening and I want us to find a solution. It will help if we speak calmly."	"If you yell, I'm not helping you."
Explaining a rule	"The rules require you to present this document before the application can be approved."	"That's the law. There's nothing I can do."
Offering an alternative	"If you don't have the document now, you can bring it by date X."	"If you don't have the paperwork, there's nothing to discuss."
Responding to someone who is sceptical	"I can see you have questions. I can show you where the rules cover this point."	"Don't question me. That's how it's done."
Responding to a complaint	"I'm sorry you had that experience. If you wish, you can make a formal complaint to department X."	"It's not my job. If you don't like it, make a complaint."
Greeting a beneficiary	"Good morning. What would you like to discuss today?"	"Yeah, what do you want?" How can I help you?
Closing the conversation	"Are you clear about what to do next? Have a good day."	"That's it. Next!"

How to avoid aggressive or authoritarian wording

- **Offer a practical alternative when explaining a limitation**

× *"I can't help you without the documents."*

✓ *"To move forward, we need these documents. I can tell you exactly what to bring."*

- **Keep your tone professional when explaining rules**

× *"Those are the rules. There's nothing I can do."*

✓ *"This is what the rules require. I can explain them in more detail if you'd like."*

- **Take a constructive approach**

× *"That's not my problem."*

✓ *"I can direct you to the department that handles this request."*

- **Show empathy even in difficult circumstances**

× *"That's not my problem. Sort it out yourself."*

✓ *"I can see that this is upsetting. Let's look together at the options."*

Practical exercise – Rephrasing messages

- The trainer gives participants a list of rigid or ineffective expressions and asks them to rephrase them in a more professional and friendly way.
- Phrases to rewrite

1. *"If you don't have the paperwork, we can't discuss it."*

2. *“I don’t deal with that.”*
3. *“You should have checked before coming.”*
4. *“That’s impossible. Those are the rules.”*
5. *“That’s not my problem.”*

- Each group presents its versions and the trainer offers feedback.

Five steps for an effective interaction

Opening activity – What comes first?

Build an effective interaction

Purpose: This activity helps participants see how the order and structure of a conversation affect the quality of service. By arranging statements into a coherent dialogue, they practise communicating clearly and logically with beneficiaries.

Instructions

1. The trainer prepares a set of statements from a typical conversation between a staff member and a beneficiary.
2. Give each participant or group the statements in a random order.
3. Ask participants to arrange the statements in a sequence that follows the five steps of an effective interaction:

- Greet the person and set a positive tone
- Identify what the person needs
- Explain the solution and provide relevant information
- Address questions and objections
- Close the conversation professionally

4. Each team presents its sequence and explains its choices.
5. The trainer gives feedback, discussing what each step contributes and why a clear sequence matters.

Sample statements to put in order:

- *Good morning. What brings you here today?*
- *Could you tell me which documents you already have?*
- *For this procedure, you will need to bring the following documents…*
- *If you need more information, you can call…*
- Yes, I understand that this is urgent. Under the rules, we need all the required documents before we can approve the application.
- *If I have understood correctly, you need information about…*
- *Thank you for your time. I hope we have covered all your questions.*

Reflection questions

What would happen if the steps were reversed or left out?

How might missing a step affect the person’s satisfaction with the service?

What are the advantages of following a clear sequence?

Five steps for an effective interaction

From greeting the person and identifying their needs to closing the conversation

An effective interaction follows a clear sequence that helps both parties understand one another and leaves them satisfied with the exchange. Having a structure helps staff keep the conversation on track, respond to the person's needs and prevent conflict.

This chapter describes the essential steps and provides techniques and practical examples for each one.

Steps in an effective interaction

1. Greet the person and set a positive tone

2. Identify what the person needs

3. Explain the solution and provide relevant information

4. Address questions and objections

5. Close the conversation professionally

Step 1. Greet the person and set a positive tone

First impressions matter. A professional greeting and an open, friendly manner can set the tone for the entire conversation.

Suggested phrases:

✓ "Good morning. What brings you here today?"
✓ "Welcome. Which service do you need?"
✓ "Good afternoon. I'm listening."

Phrases to avoid:

× "Yes? What do you want?"
× "How can I help you?"
× "Next!"
× "Hurry up. There are a lot of people waiting."

What should staff keep in mind?

- Make comfortable eye contact and use a calm tone.
- Keep an open posture and a neutral or friendly facial expression.
- Take time to greet the person naturally.

Step 2. Identify what the person needs

Find out exactly what the person is asking for and gather the information you need to respond appropriately.

Useful techniques:

- **Active listening – Let the person finish and repeat key information to clarify it.**
- **Open questions** – "Which service do you need?" or "Could you tell me a little more about your situation?"
- **Clarifying and paraphrasing** – "Have I understood correctly that you would like to know how to obtain this document?"

Suggested phrases:

✓ “Could you tell me more about your situation?”
✓ “To give you accurate information, I need a few details.”
✓ “If I have understood correctly, you need… Is that right?”

Phrases to avoid:

× “I don’t understand what you want.”
× “That’s not my job. You have to go somewhere else.”
× “I don’t have time for all the details.”

Step 3. Explain the solution and provide relevant information

Once you have identified the person’s need, explain the solution in terms they can readily understand.

What should staff keep in mind?

✓ Give a brief, structured explanation tailored to the person.
✓ Use everyday language and explain each step clearly.
✓ Check that the person has understood.

A suggested structure for the explanation:

1. **Overview:** “To obtain this document, you need to…”
2. **Detailed steps:** “The first step is to… Then you need to…”
3. **Checking understanding:** “Can you remember the steps? Have you written them down? What other questions do you have?”

Suggested phrases:

✓ “I’ll explain what you need to do, step by step.”
✓ “Here is the list of documents you need and where you can get them.”
✓ “I can write the information down for you, or you can make a note so you have it to hand.”

Phrases to avoid:

× “Read the regulations. It’s all in there.”
× “Those are the rules. You have to follow them.”
× “You’re on your own. We don’t deal with that.”

Step 4. Address questions and objections

People may have doubts, questions or objections about the information they receive. Stay calm and respond professionally.

Useful techniques:

- **Empathy** – “I understand that this can seem complicated. I can reassure you that…”
- **Offering alternatives** – “If you are unable to obtain the document now, option X is also available.”
- **Clarifying objections** – “Is there a point that is unclear? I can go over it again.”

Suggested phrases:

✓ “I understand your concern. Let’s look at the options.”
✓ “I can go over that again to make it clearer.”

✓ “The rules set out this procedure so that everyone is treated fairly.”

Phrases to avoid:

× “I don’t care if you’re unhappy.”
× “That’s the rule. If you don’t like it, file a complaint.”
× “There’s nothing I can do for you.”

Step 5. Close the conversation professionally

The end of the interaction matters as much as the beginning. A clear, courteous close leaves a positive impression and makes it less likely that the person will need to return with the same questions.

What should staff keep in mind?

✓ Summarise the main points.
✓ Provide any further information the person needs.
✓ Close the conversation in a friendly, professional manner.
✓ Ask the person to describe their next steps so that you can check understanding.

Suggested phrases:

✓ “If you need more information, you are welcome to come back.”
✓ “If questions come up along the way, you can contact us at…”
✓ “I hope you have the next steps written down or clear in your mind. Have a good day.”

Phrases to avoid:

× “That’s it. Next!”
× “We’re finished. You can go.”
× “If you have no more questions, don’t stand there.”
✓ **Following a clear sequence helps staff work efficiently and professionally.**
✓ **A courteous greeting, a clear understanding of the person’s needs, an explanation of the solution and a helpful close all contribute to a positive experience.**
✓ **Staff can use this model to improve satisfaction and prevent conflict.**

Handling objections and complaints

Opening activity – Objections we hear most often

Purpose: Participants identify the objections and complaints they hear most often and prepare to practise the acknowledgement technique.

Instructions

1. Individual work. Give each participant a card or sheet of paper. Ask them to write down the objections or complaints they hear most often in their daily work. Allow 3–5 minutes.
2. Small groups. In groups of three or four, participants compare their notes, identify common patterns and sort their examples into categories such as:

Waiting times (e.g. “I’ve been waiting for an hour and it’s still not my turn!”)

Rules and documents (e.g. “Why are you asking me for so many documents?”)

Attitude and perceptions (e.g. “You’re rude to people like me!”)

Decisions and restrictions (e.g. “It’s unfair that my application was refused!”)

Opening hours (e.g. “Your opening hours don’t work for me!”)

3. A shared list. Each group presents its findings. The trainer records the most common objections on a flipchart or a shared screen.

4. Reflection and discussion

Which types of objection do you hear most often?

Which are hardest to handle?

How do they affect staff emotionally?

Handling objections and complaints

Responding to objections and finding solutions – The acknowledgement technique

Handling objections and complaints is an essential part of working with beneficiaries. An objection may stem from a misunderstanding, frustration with the rules or the strong feelings people experience when dealing with administrative procedures.

Specific response techniques can help staff keep conversations constructive and professional. Acknowledging the person’s feelings is particularly effective. It helps them regain their composure and steers the discussion towards a solution before the conflict escalates.

General principles for handling objections and complaints

Keep the objection in perspective. The person is challenging a procedure or expressing dissatisfaction. Treat the concern as a question about the service.

Avoid confrontation. A neutral tone and a calm manner can keep tension from escalating.

Focus on solutions. Even when the person’s preferred outcome is unavailable, explain their options clearly.

Show empathy. Acknowledging the person’s feelings helps them feel heard while you maintain appropriate boundaries around aggressive behaviour.

How to use the acknowledgement technique

The technique has two essential steps:

1. Identify something factually true in what the person has said and acknowledge it calmly.

2. Ask a question that brings the conversation back to solving the problem.

What does this technique achieve?

- ✓ **It reduces emotional tension.** The person feels heard and understood.
- ✓ It helps prevent escalation by avoiding defensive responses and direct confrontation.
- ✓ **It redirects attention towards resolving the problem.**

Examples of the acknowledgement technique in practice

Example 1 – A person is unhappy about the wait

- **Beneficiary:** *"You're so disorganised! We've been waiting here with our children for two hours!"*
- **Staff member (acknowledgement):** *"Yes, waiting for two hours is difficult."*
- **Staff member (redirection):** *"Do you have all your documents ready? I'll process them as quickly as I can."*

Example 2 – A person is frustrated by the difficulty of obtaining a residence permit

- **Beneficiary:** *"My family is here. Why is it so complicated to get a residence permit?"*
- **Staff member (acknowledgement):** *"Yes, it's natural to want to be with your family."*
- **Staff member (redirection):** *"Which documents have you prepared so far for the permit?"*

Example 3 – A person is upset about opening hours

- **Beneficiary:** *"Your hours are impossible! When are people who work supposed to come?"*
- **Staff member (acknowledgement):** *"Yes, our opening hours don't suit everyone."*
- **Staff member (redirection):** *"Which day would you prefer for an appointment?"*

Words to avoid when handling objections

× "Help" can create unrealistic expectations or suggest that the staff member will solve the problem personally.

× "Sorry" may be heard as an admission of fault and may increase the person's frustration.

× **Lengthy justifications can sound defensive and frustrate the person.**

× "But" or "however" can undo an earlier expression of empathy.

× Starting with "no" can put up a barrier and make the person more resistant.

Practical exercise – Using the acknowledgement technique

Instructions

1. The trainer presents several objections that staff frequently hear from beneficiaries.

2. Participants practise the acknowledgement technique by formulating a response that includes:

1. A calm acknowledgement of something true in the person's statement to reduce the intensity of their feelings.
2. A question that directs attention towards a solution and helps the person move from an emotional reaction to practical thinking.
3. Discuss the suggested responses and consider the effect each one might have.

Sample objections for the exercise:

"I can't believe you need so many documents! What is the point of all this paperwork?"

"You're taking so long! Do you think I have all the time in the world to wait?"

“These rules are absurd! Who came up with them?”

“I don’t understand why you turned down my application! It’s unfair!”

Reflection questions

Which responses were most effective?

How did using the acknowledgement technique change the response you would normally give?

How can we use this technique in our daily work?

V. Managing your stress and emotions

Relaxation and breathing techniques for managing stress

Managing stress when working with beneficiaries

Why relaxation and breathing matter in communication

Staff who serve people every day can experience high levels of stress, particularly when handling tense situations, objections, complaints or persistent dissatisfaction.

When stress builds up, it can lead to:

Greater irritability and more defensive responses.

Difficulty listening actively and concentrating.

Difficulty maintaining a calm, professional tone.

Ongoing fatigue and reduced effectiveness at work.

Persistent stress and burnout.

Breathing exercises and simple relaxation techniques can help staff:

✓ Stay calm and composed during difficult conversations.
✓ Manage emotions and pause before reacting impulsively.
✓ Think clearly when making decisions.
✓ Prevent tension from building up over time.

Simple breathing techniques to reduce stress

Paying attention to your breathing is one way to manage emotions and ease tension. Slowing your breathing can help calm your nervous system and regulate your heart rate.

4–7–8 breathing (a quick calming exercise)

How to practise

1. Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds.
2. Hold your breath for 7 seconds.
3. Breathe out slowly and fully through your mouth for 8 seconds.
4. Repeat 3–4 times.

Benefits

✓ Can ease anxiety and stress quickly.

✓ Can improve concentration and mental clarity.
✓ Helps you maintain a calm, relaxed tone during tense conversations.

Diaphragmatic breathing (deep breathing)

How to practise

1. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen.
2. Breathe in deeply through your nose and feel your abdomen rise while your chest stays relatively still.
3. Breathe out slowly and fully through your mouth.
4. Repeat for 1–2 minutes.

Benefits

✓ Increases oxygen intake and can ease muscle tension.
✓ Can help you manage emotions in stressful situations.
✓ Supports clearer, more controlled speech.

Rhythmic breathing (box breathing, 4 × 4 × 4 × 4)

How to practise

1. Breathe in deeply through your nose for 4 seconds.
2. Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
3. Breathe out through your mouth for 4 seconds.
4. Pause for 4 seconds before breathing in again.
5. Repeat the cycle 4 times.

Benefits

✓ Can help you settle your nervous system and stay calm.
✓ Particularly useful before responding to a difficult complaint.
✓ Can help you regulate your emotions.

Quick relaxation techniques to ease tension

Progressive muscle relaxation

How to practise

1. Tense each muscle group for 5 seconds, working through your shoulders, neck, arms and legs.
2. Release the muscles and notice the tension easing.
3. Repeat for 2 minutes.

Benefits

✓ Can quickly release accumulated tension.
✓ Helps you regain your composure in tense situations.
✓ Can be used at any time of day.

The “stop and relax” technique

How to practise

1. **STOP – Pause for 5–10 seconds before responding in a difficult conversation.**
2. **NOTICE – Pay attention to tension in your body and to what you are feeling.**

3. **BREATHE – Take 2–3 deep breaths to settle yourself.**
4. **CONTINUE – Respond calmly and deliberately.**

Benefits

✓ Helps you pause before acting impulsively during conflict.
✓ Helps you manage emotions as they arise.
✓ Helps you stay professional during tense interactions.

Practical exercise – A quick reset

Instructions

1. Invite participants to role-play a stressful situation, such as an encounter with an irritated beneficiary.
2. After the role play, each participant practises a relaxation and breathing technique for 2 minutes.
3. Discuss what participants noticed and how useful the technique might be in everyday work.

Reflection questions

- How did you feel before and after the exercise?
- Which technique worked best for you?
- How could you fit these techniques into your daily routine?

Personal reflection exercises

Why does personal reflection matter?

Reflecting on how you communicate helps you improve your work with beneficiaries. Reviewing everyday interactions helps you identify what you do well and what needs attention. It also develops professionalism and empathy and helps you handle difficult situations more effectively.

This chapter offers two tools for personal reflection:

- **A communication journal for recording and reviewing everyday interactions.**
- **Personal improvement goals that turn reflection into action.**

Communication journal (self-assessment questions)

What is a communication journal?

It is a tool for reviewing everyday interactions, identifying what worked well and deciding what to improve. Use it daily or weekly to make steady progress.

How do I use the journal?

After an interaction, especially a difficult or unusual one, consider the following questions.

Self-assessment questions

Before the interaction:

What did I expect from this conversation?

How did I feel before speaking to the person?

What do I intend to improve in the way I communicate?

During the interaction:

Did I listen actively? Did I ask open questions and paraphrase what I heard?

Did my tone and body language remain professional?

Did I give clear, structured explanations?

How well did I respond to the person's feelings, including dissatisfaction or frustration?

After the interaction:

What worked well in this conversation?

What could I have done better?

How could I handle a similar situation differently in future?

What did I learn from this interaction?

Sample journal entry:

Date	Situation	What went well?	What could I improve?	Action plan
10.02.2025	An impatient beneficiary was unhappy about the wait.	I kept my tone calm and used the acknowledgement technique.	I spoke too quickly, and the person asked me to explain again.	I will slow down and check that the person has understood my explanation.

Recommendation:

Keep the journal for at least two weeks to spot patterns in the way you communicate with beneficiaries.

Revisit your notes regularly to track progress and adjust your approach.

Setting personal improvement goals

Why set goals?

A communication journal is useful when it leads to action. Clear, measurable goals help staff make progress and improve the way they communicate.

How do we set realistic goals?

An effective goal is SMART:

- **S – Specific.** What do I want to improve?
- **M – Measurable.** How will I know I have made progress?
- **A – Achievable.** Is this realistic for me?
- **R – Relevant.** Does it matter to my work?
- **T – Time-bound.** When do I want to achieve it?
- **Examples of SMART goals**

✓ **Example 1:** "Over the next week, I will practise the acknowledgement technique at least three times a day and record how it worked in my journal."

✓ **Example 2:** "For one month, I will ask clarifying questions in every conversation with a beneficiary to make sure I give a complete answer."

✓ **Example 3:** “For two weeks, I will practise responding to objections using positive language that focuses on solutions.”

Questions for setting your own goals:

Which aspect of my communication do I want to improve?

What specific actions can I take?

How will I measure progress?

How much time will I allow myself to see results?

Practical exercise – My development plan

Instructions

1. Each participant writes one personal SMART goal for communication.
2. Participants share their goals in small groups and give one another feedback.
3. The trainer leads a discussion about how to sustain work on these goals over time.

Reflection questions

Which goal did I choose and why?

What specific steps will I take to reach it?

How will I track my progress?

VI. Self-assessment and peer feedback

Why do self-assessment and peer feedback matter?

Staff who regularly meet beneficiaries need opportunities to keep developing their communication skills. Self-assessment and peer feedback give them a clearer view of how they interact with people and what they can improve.

Main benefits of self-assessment and peer feedback:

✓ Identify strengths and areas for improvement.
✓ Build confidence in your communication.
✓ Change unhelpful habits in a supportive working environment.
✓ Keep learning by observing and discussing different communication styles.

Peer observation and assessment

What is peer observation?

Colleagues observe one another at work and provide constructive feedback on how they communicate and handle interactions with beneficiaries. This helps staff see their own performance more clearly and identify practical ways to improve.

Peer observation methods for staff:

1. Observing one another in real time

How does it work?

- Two colleagues take turns observing each other as they work with beneficiaries.

- After each interaction, the observer gives feedback using agreed criteria.
- The discussion covers strengths and areas for improvement.

Sample observation criteria:

- Clarity of the information given to the person.
- Tone of voice and body language.
- Handling of objections and complaints.
- Empathy and patience during the conversation.

✓ **Why is it effective?**

✓ Staff receive immediate feedback that they can put into practice.

✓ They become more aware of how they communicate.

✓ It creates a supportive working environment where colleagues can develop together.

2. Recording and reviewing conversations

How does it work?

- A staff member records a conversation with a beneficiary in accordance with confidentiality requirements.
- After the interaction, they review their own communication style.
- They can also ask a colleague to comment on strengths and areas for improvement.

Questions for reviewing your own practice:

- Were my explanations clear and concise?
- Did I keep my tone calm and professional?
- Did I respond effectively to the person's feelings?
- What could I improve about the way I communicate?

✓ **Why is it effective?**

✓ It gives you a realistic picture of your communication style.

✓ It allows you to practise specific improvements.

✓ It helps you understand how beneficiaries may perceive you.

3. Structured feedback sessions (reflective feedback)

How does it work?

- A staff member describes a difficult situation they handled.
- A colleague gives constructive feedback using three prompts: "What went well?", "What could improve?" and "What do I recommend?"
- Together they discuss other approaches to try in future interactions.

Example of structured feedback:

✓ **What went well:** "You kept your voice calm and explained the rules clearly."

✓ **What could improve:** "You could rephrase some of your answers so they sound less rigid."

✓ **What I recommend:** "You could practise acknowledging people's feelings to make conversations with frustrated beneficiaries easier."

Why is it effective?

✓ It supports continued improvement through analysis and reflection.
✓ It builds a culture of learning and mutual support.
✓ It helps colleagues identify more effective communication strategies.

Benefits of team discussions and mentoring

Why do team discussions matter?

Colleagues' experiences offer opportunities for professional learning. Reflecting together helps staff improve their communication by sharing ideas, experiences and practical solutions.

1. Regular team feedback meetings

How are they organised?

The team meets weekly or monthly to discuss specific situations.

Colleagues share challenging experiences and approaches that worked.

They identify practices that everyone on the team can use.

Questions for team feedback sessions:

- What challenges have we encountered when communicating with beneficiaries?
- Which approaches have we tried, and what results did we see?
- What can I learn from my colleagues' experiences?

Why is it effective?

✓ It strengthens team cohesion and collaboration.
✓ It enables colleagues to learn from one another.
✓ It gives the team a broader perspective on effective communication.

2. Peer mentoring and coaching

What is mentoring?

Experienced staff support newer colleagues by providing guidance, making time for reflection and feedback, and helping them identify solutions.

How does mentoring work?

New staff can observe experienced colleagues during interactions.

They can ask for feedback and work together to find ways of responding to people with different needs.

They agree on learning goals and hold regular discussions about progress.

Why is it effective?

✓ It speeds up learning through observation and example.
✓ It offers individual support for developing skills.
✓ It helps create an organisational culture based on trust and mutual support.

VII. Quick assessment checklist

Why use a quick assessment checklist?

A quick checklist helps staff review the quality of each interaction with a beneficiary. It provides a structured, objective way to assess communication and identify areas to improve.

Benefits of the self-assessment checklist:

✓ It gives you a quick way to review an interaction.
✓ It helps you recognise patterns in your own communication.
✓ It supports ongoing improvement through small, purposeful adjustments.
✓ It can be used individually or for peer feedback.

Indicators for reviewing an interaction

After a conversation, use these simple indicators to note what went well and what you could improve.

How do I complete and use the checklist?

Method 1. Daily self-assessment

- At the end of the day, review one or two interactions. Tick the indicators you met and those that need attention.
- Add a personal observation about what went well and what you would change.

Method 2. Peer feedback

- A colleague can use the checklist to observe another staff member's interaction.
- Together, discuss what worked and what could improve.

Method 3. Monthly review

- Look for patterns in the results and set improvement goals.
- If you often mark the same indicators as "To improve", plan specific exercises to practise them.

Practical exercise – Using the checklist

Instructions

1. Each participant uses the checklist to review a recent interaction.
2. Identify one aspect you handled well and one you could improve.
3. In small groups, discuss your observations and exchange suggestions.

Reflection questions

What was my strength in this interaction?

What could I do differently to improve the conversation?

How can I use the checklist in my daily routine?

- ✓ The self-assessment checklist is a simple, effective way to improve communication.
- ✓ Using it regularly helps you recognise both strengths and areas to work on.
- ✓ Complete it on your own or with a colleague for a more objective perspective.
- ✓ Small improvements that you notice each day can lead to meaningful results over time.

Interaction self-assessment worksheet

After a conversation or role play, tick one response for each question.

Date _____ Situation observed _____

Observed behaviour	Very well	To improve	Not applied
1. Active listening			
Did I give the person time to explain their request without interruption?	☐	☐	☐
Did I ask clarifying questions to understand what they needed?	☐	☐	☐
Did I paraphrase or restate their request to check that I had understood?	☐	☐	☐
2. Empathy and a positive attitude			
Did I use a calm, friendly tone?	☐	☐	☐
Did I acknowledge the person's feelings without adding to the conflict?	☐	☐	☐
Did I avoid sounding mechanical or distant?	☐	☐	☐
3. Clarity of expression			
Did I avoid administrative jargon?	☐	☐	☐
Did I give a simple, structured explanation?	☐	☐	☐
Did I check that the person had understood my answer?	☐	☐	☐
4. Respect and professionalism			
Did I speak to the person politely and respectfully?	☐	☐	☐
Did I respond calmly to any dissatisfaction?	☐	☐	☐
Did I avoid expressions that might sound defensive or rigid?	☐	☐	☐
5. Managing the interaction effectively			
Did I stay focused on a solution and use the time well?	☐	☐	☐
Did I give the person the information they needed in manageable amounts?	☐	☐	☐
Did I close the conversation professionally?	☐	☐	☐

Rating scale. Very well – I demonstrated this behaviour. To improve – I can adjust my approach. Not applied – the behaviour was absent from this interaction.

What will I practise in my next conversation?

_____

_____