



PREPARING FOR YOUR ASYLUM INTERVIEW WITH THE GREEK ASYLUM OFFICE

The Greek Asylum Service will call you for an interview to decide whether your application for asylum will be accepted or rejected, and if accepted which type of international protection applies to you.

It is very important that you prepare for this interview, so that if you need international protection you have the best chance of getting it at the first instance decision.

At your interview, you will be asked to talk about your background, what happened to you in your country to make you leave, you may be asked whether you tried to internally relocate within your country to seek safety and if so what happened, and why you can't safely go back to your country

There are two main things you should understand before you go to your interview: the **criteria for eligibility** and how the interviewers will assess your **credibility**.

You have a duty, shared with the interviewer and the Greek Asylum Service, to substantiate your claims. Substantiating your claim means explaining the facts of what happened to you in detail, and if possible also with supporting evidence such as documents or photographs, so that the interviewers can decide whether what happened to you meets the eligibility criteria.

If you can get any documents or photographs which you think might be relevant to proving what happened to you and why you need international protection, or who your close family are, try to get copies printed in advance. If you only have digital copies on your phone that should also be ok, but it will be easier for both you and the interviewers if you have copies

printed and ready to submit in your interview.

The interviewer's role is to record your statement and then make an "individual, objective and impartial assessment" of whether your needs match the legal criteria for international protection. The interview is not an argument which you can win by repeating things more emphatically or with more emotion. The interview should be a cooperative process of substantiating your claim together, with the interviewer explaining to you how to substantiate your claim, asking helpful probing questions and having done prior research about your country of origin and possibly also afterwards about the general context of any potentially important facts which you mentioned. If you or the interviewer seems to be getting frustrated, try to be more specific in what you are saying and make sure you tell them everything which might be relevant.

Everything you say to substantiate your claim for international protection, from the moment you first declared your intention to apply for international protection, is absolutely strictly confidential and cannot legally be shared with your country's government or with anyone who might hurt you or anyone associated with you. If anyone involved in the official procedures was found to have shared confidential information that exposed you or anyone connected with you to serious additional risks, they would probably go to jail.

Some of what happened to you and why you need international protection may seem so obvious to you that it seems foolish to even ask, and indeed you may be right, and also the interviewers may have heard about the same kinds of experiences from hundreds of people of your background before and may already expect you to say certain things, but even so, the asylum procedures system requires that you have to substantiate your individual claim, so state the obvious too.

If, for example, your primary native language is Kurdish and you can also speak Arabic but not as confidently, don't take the risk of any possible misunderstanding, just ask for an interpreter in the language which you are most confident in. If you have a speech impediment, make sure you inform the Asylum Service in advance to ask for special assistance, and you can also ask to have a family member or friend who is familiar with your speech come with you into the interview to assist the official interpreter, but they must not interrupt or speak on your behalf except for simply repeating clearly exactly what you said.

Credibility factors¹

Tell the interviewer what happened to you and your family from the beginning in chronological order.

If you have a big family, it will make it easier for the interviewer to understand your story if you write a list of all your family members' names, ages, genders and their relationship to you, which can be in your own language and the interpreter can translate it for the interviewer if necessary.

Be as specific and detailed as you can in telling your story. The specific details you tell the interviewer are usually all they have to rely on to decide whether your claim is credible or not.

Credibility assessment means:

- 1) whether the specific details you tell the interviewer are internally consistent with everything else you have told them (including information you may have told other officials in your registration interview),**
- 2) whether the details are consistent with what your family members tell them, and**
- 3) whether the details are consistent with generally known facts (and they should have already thoroughly researched relevant and time-appropriate country of origin information), and**
- 4) if the details are plausible (plausible means what seems reasonable, likely or probable). If the interviewer finds a reason to reject or doubt a fact you claim, they should tell you and give you chance to respond to it.**

Don't add anything to your story which isn't exactly true or saying anything you're not sure about. Your credibility is your most valuable asset now, as you probably won't have sufficient independent reports or documents to prove your claims, so don't say or do anything which might risk the interviewer's perception

¹ This section is based on UNHCR, Beyond Proof: Credibility Assessment in EU Asylum Systems, May 2013. Accessed at <http://www.unhcr.org/51a8a08a9.pdf>. See especially pp.254-261.

of your credibility. If you have good enough reasons to need asylum, adding elements which are untrue in an attempt to make it a stronger case is not a risk worth taking.

If you can't remember exact dates, don't try to make them up or guess. If you can't remember something exactly, it is better to say so than to risk something being perceived as inconsistent later and casting doubt on your credibility. If you can't remember dates, you may be able to remember whether it was before or after generally known events, such as whether it was before or after Ramadan. If dates are not so important in your culture and you would never have noticed in the first place what date it was when something happened, mention that. If you know the date in a different calendar system, quote the date according to the calendar you can most easily remember reliably, or tell the interviewer when something happened relative to a specific fact, especially one that has a fixed and verifiable date, and explain your story around it, e.g two days before this or 5 days after that.

When the interviewer asks you to be more specific, it doesn't necessarily mean they don't believe you – it may mean they think there might possibly be something legally relevant and important underlying or implicit in what you just said, but they can't tell you what to say, so they have to ask you a more specific question to try to dig up the relevant thing. If it seems like they're asking you the same question repeatedly, please don't get frustrated or feel offended that they doubt your credibility or honesty, but just try to be more specific about exactly what happened, in more detail.

If you are Syrian, for example, the beginning of your story should be when the Syrian uprising began, or even before if you were affected by political oppression or violence before. Tell your complete story – you don't have to pick only what you think are the few most relevant events, the interviewers will decide what is

relevant and may ask you more about it, and you don't have to tell only the final events which made you leave, you should tell them everything that might possibly be relevant in case there is something you don't recognise as legally relevant to why you should receive international protection but they are more likely to recognise it as relevant because they are legally trained and experienced. You should have as much time as you need to tell your whole story and make sure you include everything that might be relevant, so don't worry about trying to be brief, but also don't repeat things much more than necessary.

If there's a reason why you can't remember some events completely clearly – for instance that you're psychologically traumatised or depressed or sleep-deprived and the memories aren't clear, say so. The interviewers should be trained to understand and recognise trauma psychology and memory deficits, stigma and shame attached to memories of abuse, and other kinds of difficulties you might have in communicating the facts which are actually the most important to your claim. If you need psychosocial support before, during or after your interview, ask for it, it should be available.

Supporting evidence – if you have any written, graphic, digital, visual materials, exhibits (physical objects, bodily scarring) or audio/visual recordings which you think might help substantiate your claim, make sure you take them to your interview and show them. You do not have to have supporting evidence for all of your factual claims, but if you have any relevant supporting evidence and you state sensible reasons why you could not obtain supporting evidence for other facts it shows that you have made a genuine effort to substantiate your claim.

Criteria for eligibility

You should think about the criteria when you are thinking about what happened to you and what you are going to tell the interviewers, but it is not relevant to substantiating your claim to recite the criteria to them, and sometimes interviewers might interpret applicants using technical legal terminology as an indicator you might have been coached to tell a story that passes the criteria, which might not be true, and that might adversely affect your perceived credibility with them. So, don't try to refer to the criteria in your interview, just bear the criteria in mind when you're thinking about what might be relevant to tell the interviewer.

In some asylum interview systems the authorities have asked applicants to come with a written statement prepared, but the Greek authorities have not asked for this. The interviewer will record a statement for you based on what you say in response to their questions. You do have the right to submit relevant evidence in any form, including a written statement, but it might harm your perceived credibility if you read from a statement in your interview. If you choose to write a statement, hand it in before or after, but respond directly to the interviewer's questions and try to look at them during the interview. If parts of your story are very distressing for you to talk about or you are not sure you will remember everything coherently when you are upset, it should be okay to write those parts down and especially if you say why you have done so. You may find it helpful to write a statement as part of your preparation for the interview even if you don't choose hand it in.

If you are a woman and you prefer to have a female interviewer and interpreter, you have the right to ask for them; and if you are a man and you have a serious reason to ask for a male interviewer and interpreter, you can also ask.

There are three categories of protection you can receive if you are eligible in European law:

Refugee Status – this is a legal status you can be recognised as having had from the point in time when the facts that made it true of you occurred; it is recognised, not granted. Refugee Status is based on having a well-founded fear of persecution.

Subsidiary Protection – if you are at real risk of serious harm in your country of origin for any reason other than the five reasons for persecution, then you are eligible for Subsidiary Protection.

Humanitarian Residency – if you do not need international protection but you are too vulnerable for reasons such as age, serious illness or disability to safely return to your country of origin, then you can be granted a Humanitarian Residency permit. If you are specially vulnerable and you need international protection, either Refugee Status or Subsidiary Protection, then you should receive the longer-lasting category of protection of the categories that you are eligible for.

Criteria for Refugee Status²

To be eligible:

1. You must be outside the country you are from; and
2. You must be unable or unwilling to return to the country you are from;
3. Because you have a well-founded fear:
 - a. You must be afraid; and
 - b. There must be objective evidence from your country (e.g. newspaper articles, NGO reports, UN reports) that shows you have a good reason to be afraid;
4. That if you return to your country, you will be persecuted (e.g. there is a threat to your life, freedom, or other human rights);
5. Based on one or more of the following reasons:
 - a. Your race;
 - b. Your religion;
 - c. Your nationality;
 - d. Your political opinion; or
 - e. Your membership of a particular social group (this could be your family or persons with similar backgrounds, habits or social status, often with a characteristic which is innate, unchangeable or fundamental).

What is included in the five reasons for persecution? (referred to in the definition of Refugee Status)

(Article 10 of the Qualification Directive 2011)

10(1) Member States shall take the following elements into account when assessing the reasons for persecution:

1. the concept of race shall, in particular, include considerations of colour, descent, or membership of a particular ethnic group;
2. the concept of religion shall in particular include the holding of theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, the participation in, or abstention from, formal worship in private or in public, either alone or in community with others, other religious acts or expressions of view, or forms of personal or communal conduct based on or mandated by any religious belief;
3. the concept of nationality shall not be confined to citizenship or lack thereof but shall, in particular, include membership of a group determined by its cultural, ethnic, or linguistic identity, common geographical or political origins or its relationship with the population of another State;
4. a group shall be considered to form a particular social group where in particular:
 - members of that group share an innate characteristic, or a common background that cannot be changed, or share a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it, and
 - that group has a distinct identity in the relevant country, because it is perceived as being different by the surrounding society. Depending on the circumstances in the country of origin, a particular social group might include a group based on a common characteristic of sexual orientation. Sexual orientation cannot be understood to include acts considered to be criminal in accordance with national law of the Member States. Gender related aspects, including gender identity, shall be given due consideration for the purposes of determining membership of a particular social group or identifying a characteristic of such a group;

2. This paraphrase summary of the criteria of eligibility for Refugee Status, some sections below verbatim and the general method of this guide come from the Asylum Access Self-Help Kit originally written for refugees in Thailand from Indo-china in the 1990s. www.refugeelegalaidinformation.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Self_Help_Kit_English.pdf

5. the concept of political opinion shall, in particular, include the holding of an opinion, thought or belief on a matter related to the potential actors of persecution mentioned in Article 6 and to their policies or methods, whether or not that opinion, thought or belief has been acted upon by the applicant.

10(2) When assessing if an applicant has a well-founded fear of being persecuted it is immaterial whether the applicant actually possesses the racial, religious, national, social or political characteristic which attracts the persecution, provided that such a characteristic is attributed to the applicant by the actor of persecution.

Criteria for Subsidiary Protection

You are subject to a real risk of serious harm;

15 'Serious harm' means:

- a)** the death penalty or execution; or
- b)** torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or
- c)** serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person (includes rape) by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict.

6. Those who threatened you with serious harm may be:

- a)** the State;
- b)** parties or organisations controlling the State or a substantial part of the territory of the State;
- c)** non-State actors, if it can be demonstrated that the actors mentioned in points (a) and (b), including international organisations, were unable or unwilling to provide protection to you.

Criteria for Humanitarian Residency permit

Even if you are not found to need international protection, if you are specially vulnerable and it would not be safe for you to return to your country of origin at the time of the asylum decision, you may be granted a Humanitarian Residence permit, which will only be temporary but should last for as long as you need it.

- a.** Unaccompanied minors,
- b.** handicapped persons or suffering an un-cured or serious illness,
- c.** elderly persons,
- d.** pregnant women or who have recently given birth,
- e.** single parent families with children under 18 years old,
- f.** victims of torture, rape or other kinds of psychological, physical or sexual assault or exploitation, persons with post traumatic syndromes, especially survivors or relatives of victims of shipwrecks,
- g.** victims of human slavery or trafficking.

You can be recognised as specially vulnerable and as in need of international protection as well.

When, where, who did what, and how long for?

In writing a statement or thinking about what you want to say in your interview, it may be helpful to think through When, where, who :

- **Dates and Times:** When things happened. For example, "On 16 June 2005 at about 6pm...". If you don't remember exact dates and times, then you should try to remember approximate dates and times or things that happened around the same time. For example, you could say something like, "One day in March 2006, late at night...", "One day, about two weeks before New Year in 2007, early in the morning...", "Soon after my 30th birthday...", "When I was about 20 years old...", or "During the summer of 2006...". You can also say things like "Soon after the [last event]..." or "Around the same time as the [last event]...".
- **Places:** Where things happened. If you can't remember the exact place, then you should try to give as much detail as possible or try to describe what the place was like. For example, you could say, "I was kidnapped when I was walking from Town A to Town B", "I went to a large brick house which was about 5 minutes walk from my house" or "I was taken to a small village about 30km south of my village".
- **People:** If you can remember the names of people, you should always include this information. If you don't know people's names or you can't remember them, then try to describe the people, especially if you're scared of them, they're people who hurt you, they're the reason why you left your country or if you think they're important to what happened to you. When describing people, you can explain what they were wearing, whether they had weapons, what language they spoke, etc. You should also explain who you think the people were and why you think that.

- **Duration:** When you're describing things that happened to you, include how long these things lasted. For example, you could say, "I was kept in prison for two days" or "I was in the hospital for two weeks".

If there are things you don't remember, don't make something up. It is fine to say that you don't remember.

If there is something you are not sure about, especially why someone else did something to you or someone like you that made you afraid or think there was a risk of serious harm to you, then you should say something like, "I believe that ..." or "I think that ..." but don't say, "I know that..." Also explain why you are not sure.

Explain how the problems made you feel and what you were worried or scared about.

Explain why you think these problems happened to you. Was it because of your race? Was it because of your nationality? Was it because of the language that you spoke? Was it because of your ethnicity? Was it because of your culture or cultural things that you did? Was it because of your clan? If it was for one of these reasons, explain why you think that. Was it because of your religion? Was it because of the way you practised your religion? Was it because of something that you believed in? Was it because other people thought you had a certain religion or supported a certain religion? What made these other people think that you had this religion or supported it? If it was for one of these reasons, explain why you think that.

If the area you were living in was bombed, were all areas of the city you were in bombed too, or if not why were some areas targeted and others not? If the people in your area of the city were targeted, why were you targeted?

Was it because of your opinions or political views? What were your opinions or political views? What did you do to show your opinions or political views? How did other people find out about your opinions or political views? Was it because other people thought you had

certain opinions or political views? What made these other people think you had such opinions or political views? If it was for one of these reasons, explain why you think that.

Was it because of a group/organisation that you were part of? Was it because you supported a group/organisation? What was the name of the group/organisation? Who was in the group/organisation? What did you do with the group/organisation? Why did you join or support the group/organisation? Was it because other people thought that you were part of or supported a group/organisation? What made these other people think that you were part of or supported the group/organisation? If it was for one of these reasons, explain why you think that. Was it because of problems that other people had? What problems did they have and how did their problems cause you problems?

Were these people part of your family or a group that you belonged to? What was the relationship between you and these people? How did it impact you? If it was for one of these reasons, explain why you think that.

Was it because you were different to other people? What was different about you? Was it because other people thought that you were different? Was it because of something that you had done in the past? Was it because of what people thought you had done in the past? Was it because of a job you had? Was it because of your sexual orientation? What made these other people think these things about you? If it was for one of these reasons, explain why you think that.

If you know of other people who have also had similar problems to yours, include brief information about those other people and what happened to them. Explain how you know this information.

If you have committed a serious crime in a country other than the one that you are in now, explain what you did, where and when you did it and why you did it.

Explain why you thought you had to leave your country and what you thought would happen to you if you stayed any longer in your country.

If you left your country in the past but had to come back to your country then explain what happened. Also explain if you tried to leave your country but couldn't and what stopped you. If you tried to relocate within your country to seek safety, explain what happened. If you found you still weren't safe when you tried to relocate internally in your country, explain why.

Explain what you did to leave your country and who helped you. If you came straight to the country you are in now from your country and registered quite soon after, then explain.

If you passed through other countries before coming to the country you are in now, then explain which countries you went to, how long you stayed and whether you tried to get help in those countries. Similarly, if you waited more than one month after arriving in the country you are in now to register, explain why.

Did you try to do anything to stop the problems that happened to you in your country and what happened? Did you try to get help from your government, the police or anyone else? When? What did they say and do? Did they help? Did you try to move to another part of your country to avoid your problems? Where did you move to and when? Did that help?

What do you think will happen to you if you return to your country and what you're scared about. Include information about who you think will hurt you and what you think they will do to you and also explain why you think those things will happen to you.

If anyone in your country has received threats about you or had problems because of you after you left your country include this information as well.

If there is any information about your security or your medical, physical or psychological situation that you have not already said, then you can mention that briefly.