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Commission on Immigration



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Asylum Interview Prep Supplement

Sample Questions
for Mock Asylum Interview

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Sample Questions for Mock Asylum Interview

We include below a sample narrative for the beginning of an asylum interview, as well as topic-specific questions that an asylum applicant may expect to receive during their interview. These questions are not exhaustive, and an asylum officer will not follow this as a script. It is intended to help attorneys prepare asylum applicants for what to expect during their interview.

Note that there are groups of questions that are specific to different types of claims. Not all of the groups of questions below will be relevant to your client. When working with your client to prepare for the interview, only use the sections that apply to your client's legal claim.

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Introduction [Asylum Officer Narrative]

- My name is Officer X.
- How are you feeling today?
 - *Let client know it's OK to share if they are nervous, anxious, feeling sick, or didn't sleep well.*
- Purpose of the interview is for me to understand why you are seeking asylum, give me an opportunity to gather evidence to support your claim.
 - I'll be taking notes, those will be confidential.
 - Please speak in short sentences and pause so that I can take notes.
 - All of the evidence will be carefully considered to make a decision on your case.
- Oath:
 - I will explain the oath form to you. I will fill it out first with all your information.
 - It states that you must tell me the truth today, and states that you consent to the use of the USCIS interpreter we have on the phone today (if used).
 - Please sign here on the bottom.
 - I will now place you under oath, please stand up.
 - Do you swear to tell truth and nothing but the truth?
 - Telling the truth is very important and the consequences can be serious if you do not tell the truth during this interview.
- Swear in interpreter if applicable.
- The interview will proceed in three parts:
 - Review an application and make sure it is complete and true.
 - Understand why you applied for asylum.
 - I'll explain what happens next. There will be no decisions today. That's a normal part of the process.
- I will be asking a lot of questions and it's very important for us to understand each other.
 - You can say: "I don't remember, or I don't know."
 - It is OK to give an estimate if you don't remember the exact details.
 - Some things are difficult to talk about, so if you need a break, let me know.
 - It's important that we focus on the interview.
 - I will be taking notes as we talk. I am going to use a hand motion if I need to ask you to stop. I'm not trying to be rude. It just means that I want to make sure I write everything down before we proceed to the next topic.
 - I will give you an opportunity to add anything important at the end.
 - Do you have any medical issues or health concerns that affect your ability to speak to me today?
 - Are you comfortable proceeding with the interview?

Preliminary Questions Following Oath

The Asylum Officer may go through the I-589 questions one by one to confirm that everything is correct.

- Do you recognize the I-589 application and the written statement? Is this your signature?
- **Did someone else help you prepare it? (NOTE – make sure your client understands that they need to answer YES to this question and explain that they had a lawyer help them)**
 - How did you meet your attorney?
 - Can you walk me through how your asylum application was prepared?
- Is everything in your I-589 true and accurate?

- Did you require the use of an interpreter in preparing your application?
- Did you have a chance to review your application before its submission?
- You have also submitted a written statement as part of your asylum application. How did you prepare that statement? Did anyone help you? **(NOTE – make sure your client understands that if the attorney helped them prepare the affidavit, they need to explain that)**
 - Did you provide a written statement to your attorney (affidavit)?
 - Did anyone help you with translating your written statement?
 - Is everything in your statement true and accurate?
- Are the documents you submitted along with your application true and correct?
- Is there any information in this application that has changed since you filed it? **(NOTE – If there are substantial updates to the application, this would be a good time for the client to provide the asylum officer with the supplemental page with the updates)**
- Is this the only time you filed for asylum or refugee status?
- Have applied for any other immigration benefit in the U.S.?
- Have you ever used any other names or dates of birth?
- Has anyone else in your family applied for asylum?

Questions Going to the Heart of the Claim

The Asylum Officer will tailor their questions to the specifics of applicant's case. See below for sample questions that are relevant to specific types of asylum claims.

Background Questions [Applies to All Cases]

- What is your full name?
- What do you like to be called?
- How old are you? When is your birthday? Where were you born?
- Where do you live now? Who do you live with currently?
- Do you work? Where?
- Are you in school? Where?
- Where did you live in your home country? Who else resided there with you?
- What are your children's names? What is your spouse's name? Has anyone in your family ever applied for asylum before?
- Have you ever applied for visa to the U.S.? How many times you have traveled to the U.S. including your last arrival?
- After suffering harm/threats in your home country and fleeing, did you return there?
- After fleeing your country, before entering the U.S., did you enter any other country? How long did you stay there? What was your immigration status there? Did you apply for any permanent immigration status there? Why not? Did you feel safe?
- Have you EVER travelled outside of Afghanistan in your lifetime? If yes, where did you go? How long did you stay there? Did you apply for or receive immigration status there? When did you leave? Do you still hold immigration status there? Would you be able to return?
- Do you use any social media accounts? Have you ever used any social media accounts?
 - If yes, what usernames you have used?
 - Could you bring it up for me?
 - What kind of things do you post on your social media?
 - Does your spouse have a social media account?
 - What username do they use?

- Do you know what they like post?
- What is your life like now in the U.S.?
- Do you have any family in your home country? What is their life like? How is it different from before the Taliban took power, if at all?

Sample Questions [Re Association with U.S. Or Afghan Government]

- Why are you afraid to go back to your home country? *Expected answer* – I would be in danger because of my ties to the U.S. Government / former Afghan Government.
- *Anticipate questions regarding Particular Social Group formation:*
 - Where did you work in Afghanistan? When did you work there?
 - What was your position/title? was the nature of your / their work?
 - How do you think the Taliban would perceive this work? Do you consider yourself opposed to the Taliban? Do you think the Taliban would perceive you as opposed to them?
 - How does the Taliban treat people who worked for the Afghan government/have ties with the U.S.? How do you know that?
 - If you returned to Afghanistan, how would the Taliban know about your work with the former Afghan government or the US government? How would they know that you are opposed to them?
- Did you ever receive threats / face discrimination or violence because of your association with U.S. or Afghan government? What happened?
 - If yes:
 - *Ask additional questions about specific incidents of harassment, threats, discrimination, or violence, as relevant (see below – Establish Past Persecution Questions)*
 - *How do you know if the harm you experienced was because of your work with the government/ ties with the U.S.? Ask additional questions to establish Nexus when applicable (see below – Establish Nexus)*
 - If no – Why do you think the Taliban would harm you in the future, if they haven't in the past? *(see below – Future Persecution Only Questions and Fear of Harm Questions)*
- How would the Taliban know that you previously worked with the Afghan government/ have ties with the U.S.? Why would they punish you for this?
- **Is there anything else you want me to know and have not had a chance to tell me?**

Sample Questions [Re Association with Afghan/US military]

** Be sure to carefully review the persecutor bar questions for any client who worked with Afghan or U.S. military or military contractors**

- Why are you afraid to go back to your home country? *Expected answer* – I would be in danger because of my work with the Afghan military / US military contractors.
- *Anticipate questions regarding Particular Social Group formation:*
 - Where did you work in Afghanistan?
 - What was the nature of your work?
 - What did you do as part of your work with Afghan military / US military contractors?
 - When did you work there?

- How does the Taliban treat people who worked with Afghan military / US military contractors? How do you know that?
 - [If fear is based on family member's ties with the U.S. Government / Afghan Government] How does the Taliban treat family members of people who worked with Afghan military / US military contractors? How do you know that?
- If you returned to Afghanistan, how would the Taliban know about your work with Afghan military / US military contractors?
 - [If fear is based on family member's work with Afghan military / US military contractors] If you returned to Afghanistan, how would the Taliban know your family member worked with Afghan military / US military contractors? How would they know you are related? How would they know that your family member / you are opposed to them?
- Did you ever receive threats / face discrimination or violence because of your work with Afghan military / US military contractors? What happened?
 - If yes:
 - *Ask additional questions about specific incidents of harassment, threats, discrimination, or violence, as relevant (see below – Establish Past Persecution Questions)*
 - How do you know if the harm or threats you experienced was because of your work with Afghan military / US military contractors? How do you know that? *Ask additional questions to establish Nexus when applicable (see below – Establish Nexus)*
 - If no:
 - Why do you think the Taliban would harm or threaten you, if they haven't in the past? *(see below – Future Persecution Only Questions and Fear of Harm questions)*
- How would the Taliban know that you previously worked with Afghan military / US military contractors?
- **Is there anything else you want me to know and have not had a chance to tell me?**

Sample Questions [Re Real/Imputed Political Opinion]

- Why are you afraid to go back to your home country? *Expected answer* – I would be in danger because of my political opinion/affiliation, or my beliefs/views.
- Questions regarding political opinion / political affiliation/beliefs or views *[see below for imputed political opinion questions, for individuals whose actions or general beliefs might make others believe they hold a particular political opinion]*
 - Have you ever been part of an organization or group, like a political party?
 - Do you hold a particular belief, or do you live your life in a way that makes others believe that you hold a particular belief, which could make you a target for persecution? *[please note, this question is aimed to solicit information about a less obvious or imputed political opinion. E.g., women who want to work/study, men who support their wives/daughters pursuing education or work outside the home. Ask more follow-up questions if needed. See below – Questions Regarding Imputed Political Opinion]*
 - What is your particular political opinion / belief / view for which the Taliban targeted you (or will target you)?
 - When did you first join the political party / develop this opinion?

- Were your family members involved in the political party, or did they also hold these opinions or beliefs?
- What made you decide to become a member of this political party? What inspired you to hold these particular beliefs? Was there a specific incident?
- What does your community think about this political party / people who hold these beliefs?
- Did you ever openly acknowledge or show your membership in the political party / your beliefs? How?
- Did others in your community know about your membership in the political party / your beliefs? How?
- *Ask additional questions establishing political opinion/beliefs, as relevant*
- Questions regarding imputed political opinion:
 - Do you think others believe, or would believe, that you hold a particular political opinion or political belief, which would make you a target for persecution? Why?
 - What does your community think about people who are affiliated with this political party or who hold these particular political beliefs?
 - *Ask additional questions establishing imputed political opinion, as relevant*
- Did you ever receive threats / face discrimination or violence because of your membership in a political party, or due to your beliefs, or because others believed that you were a member of a political opinion or held certain beliefs? What happened?
 - If yes:
 - *Ask questions about specific incidents of harassment, threats, discrimination, or violence, as relevant (see below – Establish Past Persecution Questions)*
 - How do you know that the harm or threats you experienced was because of your political opinion/beliefs, or a political opinion or belief that has been imputed to you? *Ask additional questions to establish Nexus when applicable (see below – Establish Nexus)*
 - If no – Why do you think you would be threatened or harmed in the future, if you weren't harmed or threatened in the past? *(see below – Future Persecution Only Questions and Fear of Harm Questions)*
- Did other members of your political party / people who hold same beliefs as you, or who are believed to have the same political opinion/beliefs as you receive similar threats? How were they treated? How do you know about these incidents?
- **Is there anything else you want me to know and have not had a chance to tell me?**

Sample Questions [Re Religion/Ethnic group/other Particular Social Groups (PSGs)]

- Why are you afraid to go back to your home country? *Expected answer* – I would be in danger because of my religion / ethnic group/ membership in PSGs.
- Ask questions specific to protected ground, for example:
 - Do you belong to an ethnic group? Which one? What makes your ethnic group distinct from other groups in your country? How would someone know that you are a member of this ethnic group? Is your ethnic group listed on your tazkera?
 - What is your religion? Are you religious? How would other people in your community know that you belong to this religion/sect?

- What other group are you a member of? Can/do others identify you as a member of that group? How? How are members of this group different/distinguishable from others in your community? How would the Taliban recognize you as member of that group?
- Why would Taliban want to harm you and/or other members of this group?
- *Ask additional questions establishing membership, as relevant*
- Did you ever receive threats / face discrimination / face incidents of violence because of your religion / ethnic group / membership in other PSG?
 - If yes:
 - *Ask additional questions about specific incidents of harassment, threats, discrimination, or violence, as relevant (see below – Establish Past Persecution Questions)*
 - How do you know the harm or threats you experienced were on account of your religious / ethnic group/ membership in the PSG? *Ask additional questions to establish Nexus when applicable (see below Establish Nexus)*
 - If not: Why do you think you would be threatened or harmed if you were not threatened or harmed in the past (*see below – Future Persecution Only Questions, Fear of Harm Questions*)
- **Is there anything else you want me to know and have not had a chance to tell me?**

Sample Questions [Re Family Ties/Family Particular Social Groups (PSGs)]

- Why are you afraid to go back to your home country? *Expected answer – I would be in danger because of my family ties to [x-person].*
- What is your relationship with [x-person]?
- Does the community know that you are family? How?
 - Do you have the same last name?
 - Do any government documents list you as family?
 - Do you (or did you) live at the same address? Did others in the greater community see you together?
- Does the Taliban know that you are family, or could they find out that you are family?
- Why would the Taliban want to harm you because of your family ties to [x-person]? What did [x-person] do, or what would the Taliban presume they did? Would they want to harm you as a means of further punishing [x-person]?
 - Did the Taliban ever say anything to suggest that they would want to harm you because of your family ties to [x-person]?
- Did you ever receive threats / face discrimination / face incidents of violence because of your family ties to [x-person]?
 - If yes:
 - *Ask additional questions about specific incidents of harassment, threats, discrimination, or violence, as relevant (see below – Establish Past Persecution Questions)*
 - How do you know the harm or threats were because of your family ties to [x-person]? *Ask additional questions to establish Nexus when applicable (see below Establish Nexus)*
 - If not: Why do you think you would be threatened or harmed in the future, if you were not threatened or harmed in the past (*see below – Future Persecution Only Questions, Fear of Harm Questions*)?

- **Is there anything else you want me to know and have not had a chance to tell me?**

Persecution Questions

Past Persecution Questions [Applicant Suffered Harm/Threats in the Past]

- *Establish Persecution:*
 - Were you ever harmed or threatened in your home country? What happened? When?
 - Who threatened you? Why do you think they harmed or threatened you?
 - How do you know it was them that harmed or threatened you?
 - How do you know the reason they were motivated to harm or threaten you?
 - After that incident, did they ever bother you again?
 - When? Where were you? Who were you with? Was it the same people? How many? How do you know why they were motivated to harm or threaten you?
 - About how many times did they harm or threaten you in that way?
 - Were you always in the same place? If not, where else?
 - What did you do after they threatened you?
 - When you received these threats, how did you feel? Why were you afraid?
 - What did you think that they would do? Why did you think that they would do that?
 - What, if anything, did you do to try to protect yourself, to try to prevent that from happening?
 - If past harm or threat of harm, how many times you were harmed or threatened to be harmed?
 - Have your friends, family, or colleagues ever been harmed or threatened in your home country?
 - If so, what happened? When? What – if anything – did they do about it?
 - What did you do when you were harmed or threatened to be harmed? Did you report it to the law enforcement? If so, what happened? If not, why not?
- *Establish Nexus to Protected Ground*
 - If the Taliban was the perpetrator, how do you know it was the Taliban?
 - Why did the Taliban or the extremist group behind the harm or threat of harm choose you to attack rather than others?
 - What makes you believe that the Taliban harmed or threatened to harm you because of [the protected ground]?
 - How would the Taliban know that you belong to [the protected group]?
 - How does the Taliban view individuals that belong to [the protected group]?
 - What does the Taliban do to individuals that belong to [the protected group]?

Future Persecution Only [Applicant Has Not Suffered Harm/Threats in Past]

- Why do you fear the Taliban if the Taliban never contacted you, harmed you, or threatened you the past?
- How would the Taliban know who you are? How would they know where to find you?
- How do you know that the Taliban would want to harm you because of your [protected ground]?

- *Potential expected answers* - I have friends who are similarly situated to me and the Taliban has arrested/detained them OR I see news articles where people similarly situated to me have been arrested, tortured, or killed OR Other people I know that are also [protected ground] have been forced to live in hiding.

Fear of Future Harm Questions [For Both Future Fear and Past Persecution Cases]

- Why are you afraid to return to home country? What do you think would happen to you if you returned? Who would harm you?
- What made you decide to leave your home country?
- What is the worst harm that could happen to you?
- How would the Taliban know you returned to the country? How would the Taliban be able to find you? Why do you believe the Taliban would be able to find you? Is there anywhere you could go in your country and live safely away from the Taliban?
- What have you seen or heard about the Taliban harming or threatening others who are similarly situated to you [same protected ground, e.g., ethnic group, religious sect, etc.]? Do you know anyone else who is similarly situated to you, who was harmed or threatened because of [the protected ground]? How do you know it was the Taliban who harmed or threatened them?
- Do you think the government in your country would be able to protect you? Or is there anyone in your country that can protect you?
- Besides the Taliban, do you fear being harmed by someone else in Afghanistan? If yes, why do you think they would harm you?
- Since you've been in the United States, do you still have contact with family in home country? How often do you speak with them?
 - How is your family doing in Afghanistan? Are they safe? Are they able to leave the house? Are they able to go to school or work outside the home?
- To your knowledge, has the Taliban looked for you since you left? If yes, how do you know?
- What makes you think the Taliban still wants to harm you now?

One Year Filing Deadline Questions

- When did you enter the US?
- What is your current immigration status? When does/did it expire?
- Did you know that asylum applications generally must be filed within one year of arriving in the US?
- *If the applicant filed for asylum after the OYFD:*
 - Why did you not file your application within one year of arrival in the US?
 - When did you first speak to a lawyer? When did you start working with the lawyer you have now?
 - Did something happen to you or your family member that prevented you from filing your application within one year?
 - Were there any other circumstances outside of your control that prevented you from filing within one year?
 - Did something change in your country, or in your personal life, after you arrived in the U.S. that made you decide to file for asylum?

Mandatory Bar Questions for Afghan Asylum Seekers

If any of the below questions are “yes,” please ask the client for additional information. If you have additional concerns, we recommend watching the training on [Asylum 201: Bars to Asylum and Common Issues](#), and/or attending an upcoming HIAS/ABA Office Hours session. If your question is urgent, reach out to the HIAS pro bono team directly at probono@hias.org.

Questions for the Principal Applicant

- Regarding prior travel/firm resettlement:
 - Have you ever received or been offered a permanent immigration status, like refugee status or permanent residence, in any other country?
 - Ask about specific immigration statuses that the client had in other countries.
 - After leaving your country, did you travel to or through any other country before arriving in the U.S.?
 - If so, where, and what status (if any) did you have there? Did you apply for any permanent status? Why not? How long did you stay there? What were the circumstances of your stay there?
 - Have you traveled outside the U.S. since you came here?
 - Have you ever been to the US before your recent entry?
 - If so, why did you not apply for asylum at that time?

- Regarding criminal issues:
 - Have you ever been arrested, in the U.S. or your home country or anywhere else in the world (even if you were not charged with a crime at that time)?
 - Have you ever committed any crime in any country (even if you were never arrested)?
 - Have you ever been charged with a crime in any country (even if you were not present to be charged formally before a court)?
 - Have you ever been convicted of a crime in any country?
 - Have you ever done something against or violated the law and order of your country?
 - Have you ever been questioned by police or law enforcement in your country?
 - Have you or your family members ever been accused of, charged, detained, interrogated, convicted, sentenced, or imprisoned in any country?
 - Do you have any plans to engage in any illegal activities in the United States?
 - Do you have any plans to engage in bigamy or polygamy in the United States? (Being married to more than one person at a time)? *Even though having more than one spouse at the same time is common, culturally acceptable, and lawful in Afghanistan, it is not permissible in the U.S.*

- Regarding misrepresentations/ fraud:
 - Have you ever lied to the U.S. government to obtain a benefit?
 - *If the client had previously been in the U.S. be sure to prepare the client to answer questions about when they visited, what type of visa they came with, and whether they were entirely truthful about the content of the prior visa application.*

- Regarding potential persecutor bar issues:
 - Have you ever served in the military, police, or other law enforcement organization (including the Afghan/US military)?

- If yes:
 - Please provide a chronology of what branch of the military you served in, your unit number, your location, and the approximate dates of service.
 - what was your rank/position? What was your day-to-day job?
 - Were you ever involved in combat? Where were your missions located and when? What were your targets? Were you ever directed to shoot at civilians, or areas that were mixed with civilians and enemy targets?
 - Have you ever been part of a group (including military, police, or other law enforcement organization or government armed force) that used weapons?
 - If yes, how often did you carry weapons? How often did you use your weapons?
 - If yes, who were your targets?
 - Have you ever received any military or weapon training?
 - If yes:
 - What kinds of weapons were you trained to use?
 - What kind of specialized training did you receive? Were you ever trained in enhanced interrogation techniques or espionage?
 - Have you ever worked in a detention facility (or did your work ever involve capturing and detaining people)?
 - Were you ever personally involved in detaining anyone?
 - If so, what was your role? What happened after you detained them?
 - While you were in Afghanistan, did you do anything for the government that made you uncomfortable?
 - Did you ever help gather or share information about anyone based on their race, religion, political opinion, nationality or membership in a particular group?
 - *Outside of your official duties* with the military/police, did you harm or threaten anyone?
 - Did you ever violate the rules of engagement?
- Regarding terrorism/espionage:
 - Did you ever help in gathering or sharing information about the U.S. government or its interests?
 - Have you ever been required to submit to compulsory military service, in your home country or anywhere else in the world?
 - Have you ever committed acts of terrorism? Have you ever been accused of belonging or supporting a violent or terrorist organization?
 - *“Terrorist activities” may include using a firearm or explosives or other weapons, hijacking, kidnapping, or assassination.*
 - Have you ever supported a group that advocated violent means to overthrow a government?
 - Have you ever helped anyone to do any of these things?
 - Have you ever encouraged anyone to do these things?
 - Have you ever attempted or planned to do these things?
 - Have you ever been accused of doing any of these things?
 - Have you ever provided money, food, housing, or other support to a person or group involved in terrorist activities (including the Taliban)?
 - Have you ever recruited members or raised money for a person or group involved in terrorist activities (including the Taliban)?

- Where were you, and what were you doing when the Taliban was previously in power in Afghanistan (approximately 1996-2001)? Do you have family members in Afghanistan who are working for, or previously worked for, the Taliban-run government?
- Has any member of your family been involved in violent or terrorist organizations?
- Did any members of your family live or reside in areas controlled by any terrorist organizations, including the Taliban? Did you ever have to pay utility bills to the Taliban or any other terrorist organization?
- Did any members of your family ever provide indirect or direct support to a violent or a terrorist organization?
 - *“Support” may include providing money, goods, services, or posting on social media in support of the terrorist organization.*
- Have you ever been in direct contact with Taliban or other armed groups in Afghanistan?
 - Did you ever pass through a Taliban checkpoint? Did you have to pay a bribe or a toll to pass?
 - Were you ever forced to provide Taliban members with money or supplies?
 - Have you ever attended a Taliban-run school, or a Taliban-run weapons training?
 - Did you ever live in an area controlled by the Taliban or any other terrorist group? If yes, did you ever provide support such as transportation, food, housing, or financial support, even if it was against your will?
 - Have you ever sold or given anything, or have you ever done any favor to the Taliban or any other terrorist group?
 - Have you ever been asked to do a favor for the Taliban or any other terrorist group?
 - If not, how were you able to avoid direct contact with Taliban or other armed groups in Afghanistan?

Derivatives [includes children over 14]:

- Briefly prepare the client’s derivatives about the principal applicant’s main asylum claims and the general mandatory bar questions. Derivatives may be asked about why the applicant is applying for asylum.
- Spouse and each dependent are interviewed separately for up to 30 minutes.
- Interview touches on basic details (name, address in U.S., last address in Afghanistan), trips taken abroad, educational experiences, and work experiences.

Wrap Up [Asylum Officer Narrative]

- Do you have anything else to add about why you are afraid to go back to your home country?
 - *Advise the client that if they provide new additional information, that it may affect their asylum claim (e.g., the client explains to the asylum officer that they are questioning their sexuality and are afraid they may face harm because of it if they return to Afghanistan) that they may be asked why they did not provide the information earlier.*
- Have you understood all my questions today?
- Did you understand the interpreter?
- Did you understand my questions?
- Your decision will be mailed to you. If you change your address, please let us know as soon as possible. This paper explains the mail out process. Please sign both copies – one copy is for the asylum office and one copy is for you.