



Afghan Newcomer Interview Preparation Clinic

Session duration: 90 minutes

Introduction: Thank you for volunteering at today's Interview Preparation Clinic! Please use this document to guide your engagement with your assigned newcomer applicant. This is a meaningful opportunity for the applicant you are working with to understand the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (hereafter "USCIS") interview process and how they can most effectively prepare for their interview with an Asylum Officer.

How to use this document: If you are working in volunteer pairs, suggest alternating sections, or designating roles (Volunteer A provides explanation, Volunteer B asks questions, Volunteer A provides feedback on responses). **An appendix page is provided for any notes you'd like to send to HRF following the clinic about your applicant's application.**

Deliverables/next steps: Volunteers are not responsible for any deliverables from this session, but your feedback is appreciated!

Table of Contents

[STEP 1: INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO YOUR ASSIGNED INTERPRETER](#)

[STEP 2: INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE APPLICANT](#)

[STEP 3: EXPLAIN THE PURPOSE OF TODAY'S MEETING](#)

[STEP 4: PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF THE ASYLUM INTERVIEW & GUIDANCE ON INTERPRETER](#)

[STEP 5: REVIEW THE PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS RELATED TO IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENT REVIEW](#)

[STEP 6: REVIEW THE PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS RELATED TO APPLICATION PREPARATION](#)

[STEP 7: REVIEW THE COMPONENTS OF INTERVIEW PART ONE: FORM I-589](#)

[STEP 8: REVIEW THE COMPONENTS OF INTERVIEW PART TWO: PAST HARM AND FUTURE HARM](#)

[STEP 9: REVIEW THE COMPONENTS OF INTERVIEW PART THREE: SECURITY QUESTIONS](#)

[STEP 10: EXPLAIN WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER THE INTERVIEW & CONCLUDE SESSION](#)

[FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS](#)

[NOTE TAKING SECTION](#)

STEP 1: INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO YOUR ASSIGNED INTERPRETER

- Easing in
 - Exchange hello's, and introduce yourself
 - Thank the interpreter for joining today and you are happy to meet them, and appreciate their expertise
- Explain how you want to work together
 - Your shared goal is to make sure the Applicant is prepared and comfortable participating in their Asylum Interview with USCIS.
 - You will pause between statements to provide time for interpretation.
- Ask the Interpreter if she/he/they has any requests for how you will work together today.
 - xyz additional guidance

STEP 2: INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO THE APPLICANT

- Easing in
 - Exchange hello's, and introduce yourself, and that you are volunteering with Human Rights First and the Project Afghan Legal Assistance (this is how the applicant can most easily understand your connection!)
 - Thank the applicant for joining today and you are happy to meet them

STEP 3: EXPLAIN THE PURPOSE OF TODAY'S MEETING

- The purpose of our meeting today is to help the applicant prepare for their meeting with the USCIS Asylum Officer to discuss your asylum application.
- Remind the applicant that you are not a lawyer but you are here to help understand the asylum interview and prepare in advance
- Human Rights First Your is mailing your asylum application to USCIS out this month
- We are not sure when the interview will be. It could be later this month, next month, or in January
- USCIS has 150 days from day you submitted I-589 to give decision
 - Interview notice will be via mail to the address that they have listed on their applications.
 - Decision is either via mail or come back to the asylum office to pick up decision- officer will notify them which one at the end of the interview

STEP 4: PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF THE ASYLUM INTERVIEW & GUIDANCE ON INTERPRETER

Explain:

The interview tends to proceed in three parts:

1. Review an application and make sure it is complete and true
2. Understand why you applied for asylum: questions related to past and future harm
3. Security Questions and next steps

- If the applicant says she/he/they is fluent in English, the Asylum officer may want to proceed in English for the interview. If the applicant is not **fully** fluent/comfortable in English, we advise the Applicant proceed with an interpreter for the interview to avoid any inconsistencies.
- If there is an interpreter but the applicant speaks some English, the applicant should be careful to wait for the interpreter to interpret, then answer in Dari or Pashto. If the applicant starts to respond in English, the officer may switch to English.
 - *You may need to practice this with the applicant, and make sure s/he understands that answering in English is not in her/his best interests.*

STEP 5: REVIEW THE PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS RELATED TO IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENTS REVIEW

Explain:

- The asylum officer may review the applicant's supporting documentation at the beginning or the end of the interview
- The officer will ask the Applicant for original versions of anything the Applicant gave as a photocopy (e.g., ID Cards, birth certificates, marriage certificates, passports etc.)
- The officer may also ask where did the Applicant get this information, and/or if Applicant was only able to provide a photo of a document (such as a passport) but not the original. This is sometimes the case if the Applicant was not able to take their passport before the evacuation but only has a photocopy of it.

Prompting Questions: *(NOTE: be sure to ask the applicants the questions in **bold** - other questions are ones that the Asylum Officer will likely ask, so be sure to review)*

- 1. How did you get your national ID/tazkera?**
2. Did you receive it from any certain govt office?
3. Do you remember which one?
4. How did it get to the United States?
- 5. Do you have a passport?**
6. How many passports have you had in your life?
7. And where are they now?
8. How did you get your work IDs from your employer?
9. How did they get to the United States?
10. How did you get this documentation from the U.S. government addressed to you?
11. And what did you do for the U.S. government, to help them?
- 12. Did you review all the documents you submitted for accuracy?**
- 13. Are the documents True and correct?**

STEP 6: REVIEW THE PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS RELATED TO APPLICATION PREPARATION

Note: It's very important to practice this question with your applicant so that she/he/they knows it's coming and is ready to explain to the officer exactly how it was prepared. Otherwise, the applicant may feel worried that she/he/they is giving a "wrong" answer.

Explain:

- The Asylum officer will ask some variation on this question, "who helped you prepare this asylum application?"
- No matter how she/he/they asks, the applicant should be prepared to answer simply and truthfully.

- If the answer is “I explained my story and my lawyer wrote it down,” that is OK!
- If the answer is “I wrote it, then my lawyer asked me questions and made some changes based on my answers,” that is OK!
- Whatever actually happened is what the applicant should say.

Prompting Questions: *(NOTE: be sure to ask the applicants the questions in **bold** - in this section, all)*

- 1. Who helped you prepare the asylum application?**
- 2. Did someone review your application in your native language?**
- 3. Did you review it in English?**
- 4. Do you understand everything that it says?**
- 5. Is it true and correct?**
- 6. How did you write your declaration, your story?**
- 7. What language did you write it down in?**
- 8. After it was written down, did someone read it back to you in Dari or Pashtu?**
- 9. Do you understand what your declaration says?**
- 10. Is it true and correct?**

STEP 7: REVIEW THE COMPONENTS OF INTERVIEW PART ONE: FORM I-589

Explain: The Asylum Officer will ask the applicant to answer questions that are on their Asylum Application Form. The Officer will be looking to see if the spoken is the same as it was on the form. The applicant should answer the questions truthfully.

Prompting Questions: *(NOTE: for this section, the Officer does normally ask EVERY question. For the purpose of this session, make sure the Applicant understands they should be very familiar with the contents of their application, and provide Human Rights First with corrections if necessary)*

1. What is your current address?
2. Are you married?
3. Do you have any Children?
4. What is your Date of Birth?
5. What is the City and country of your birth?
6. What is your Race/ethnic or tribal group?
7. What is your Religion?
8. Have you ever been to immigration court in front of a judge?
9. When did you last leave Afghanistan?
10. You entered the US with parole, right?
11. Where did you enter the U.S.?
12. What is your Native language?
13. Are you fluent in English?
14. Do you speak any other languages fluently?
15. Which languages?
16. Where did you last live in Afghanistan?
17. Where did you live before you moved to [current city]?
18. What was your address?
19. Where did you go to school in Afghanistan, starting with the most recent school, first?

20. Did you go to university anywhere?
21. Where do you go to primary school?
22. Have you been going to school since you've been in the U.S.?
23. Where is that school located?
24. When did you start in the United States, what month and year?
25. Are you currently working?
26. What month and year did you start working there?
27. What do you do?
28. What are your Parents' names?
29. How many siblings do you have?
30. What are their names and where they're living now?
31. Are there any other changes to your application that you know of?
 - a. *Note: let Human Rights First know if the application needs to be adjusted*

STEP 8: REVIEW THE COMPONENTS OF INTERVIEW PART TWO: PAST HARM AND FUTURE HARM

Explain:

- If the applicant has experienced past persecution by the Taliban, the Asylum officer will ask detailed questions about incidents of harm.
- These will include questions about how the applicant knew the persecutors were Taliban. In some cases the applicant will know this. In others, she/he/they may have guessed based on the circumstances that the persecutors were Taliban.
- Either way, the applicant should be prepared to answer this question fully.

[IMPORTANT:]

- If the applicant has experienced past persecution, expect the Asylum officer to ask why the Taliban wanted to hurt the applicant **specifically**.
 - This part of the interview is very important because it connects the applicant's legally *protected characteristics (such as her/his/their race, religion, political opinion, ethnicity, nationality, and /or particular social group) and the persecution he or she endured or might endure.*
 - *It is important for the applicant to expect this question and be able to articulate this connection.*
 - *For instance, the applicant might say "they beat me because my brother worked for the U.S. forces, and they thought he was opposed to the Taliban, and they thought I was too because we are siblings."*

Prompting Questions:(NOTE: be sure to ask the applicants the questions in **bold**)

1. **Why are you asking for asylum?**
2. **Were you harmed or threatened in Afghanistan in the past?**
3. **What harm did you or your family members experience in Afghanistan?**
4. **If yes, how many times?**
5. **When were you first harmed or threatened in Afghanistan? Provide dates of each incident**
6. **What was said to you in each incident?**
7. **When was the last time you were harmed or threatened in Afghanistan before you left the country? Month/year.**
8. **Can you explain the harm or threats you suffered in Afghanistan?**
9. **What is the reason someone harmed you in the past or wants to harm you in the future?**

10. Why were you at the [location of harm]?
11. Who beat you at the [location of harm]?
12. **How do you know it was them [The Taliban]?**
13. **If weapons were used, what kinds of weapons were they?**
14. **Why do you think this happened to YOU instead of someone else?**
15. **Are the people who harmed you or want to harm part of the government in Afghanistan or to the Taliban?**
16. **If the people who want to harm you are not connected to the prior government in Afghanistan or to the Taliban, why can't you get protection from the government?**

Explain:

- If the applicant ever experienced past harm, the Asylum officer will ask this question.
- It is not necessary that the applicant have reported any past harm, but he or she should be prepared to answer the question, and to describe what happened – if she/he/they didn't report it, why not, and if she/he/they did report it, what happened.
 - [Note: It is important to prepare the applicant to expect this question so that s/he will not worry that she/he/they did something wrong.]

Prompting Questions: *(NOTE: be sure to ask the applicants the questions in **bold** - in this section, all)*

1. **Did you ever try to report the harm and threats you suffered to the police or govt of Afghanistan?**
2. **If no, why not?**

Explain:

- The Asylum Officer may ask the applicant some questions about their fear of returning to Afghanistan.

Prompting Questions: *(NOTE: be sure to ask the applicants the questions in **bold** - in this section, all)*

1. **What will happen to you if you have to go back to Afghanistan? Why?**
2. **Why can't you go somewhere else in Afghanistan to be safe?**
3. **Why are you afraid to return to Afghanistan?**

STEP 9: REVIEW THE COMPONENTS OF INTERVIEW PART THREE: SECURITY QUESTIONS

Explain: In this part of the interview, the Asylum Officer will ask questions about security.

Prompting Questions: *(NOTE: be sure to ask the applicants the questions in **bold** - in this section, all)*

1. **Have you ever been accused or convicted of a crime?**
2. **Have you ever been a Member of govt or police?**
3. **Have you ever been a Military member?**
4. **Have you received Military training?**
5. **Have you ever helped an armed group even if you didn't want to?**
6. **Have you Threatened to do terrorist activity?**
7. **Have you participated in terrorist activity?**

8. Have you given money or funds for terrorist activity?
9. Have you ever said in public that you approve of terrorist activity?
10. Have you ever had citizenship in another country or applied for asylum in another country?
11. Have you ever been a member of a terrorist group or a group that uses violence, or have you ever helped an organization that uses violence?
12. Have you ever harmed someone or helped harm someone?
13. Have you ever committed any crime or been arrested or detained?
14. Have you worked for the military, police, or security forces, or received training from them?

STEP 10: EXPLAIN WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER THE INTERVIEW & CONCLUDE SESSION

Explain:

- The Asylum officer will not provide a decision on the applicant's case at the end of the interview. The Asylum Officer will advise the Applicant that the decision will either 1) come by mail to their listed mailing address on their Form I-589 or 2) the Asylum Officer will ask the Applicant to return to the Asylum Office to pick up their decision in some weeks' time.
- USCIS has 150 days from the day their asylum applicant is submitted to give final decision.
- **There are 2 different possibilities as a decision:**
 1. Asylum approval or
 2. Notice of intent to deny.
- If **approved**, applicant can apply for a green card one year after approval of asylum. Applicant can also immediately apply for "follow to join" petitions for any spouse or children (unmarried and under 21) who are abroad to get them legal admission to the US. Human Rights First can assist with both green card applications and follow to join applications.
- If **Notice of intent to deny** is issued, Applicant will have 30 days to respond to allegations made by USCIS as basis of denial.

Wrap Up:

- Those are all the materials that you wanted to review today
- Ask the Applicant if they have any questions
 - *Common Questions:*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

"When is my interview?"

A: Human Rights First is seeing USCIS schedule interview 1-2 months after applications are filed.

"Will an attorney attend the interview with me?"

A: No, but Human Rights First is available for more one on one guidance if needed before your interview date.

"What if I need to reschedule my interview?"

A: Please let your contact at Human Rights First know and they will guide you through the reschedule request process. You must reschedule it immediately.

"What if my relative (parent or sibling) receives a different interview date than me?"

A: Human Rights First can request to consolidate the interview dates so that you can travel together and possibly even have the same officer. Please notify HRF asap once you receive your interview dates if this is something you want.

- Thank both the interpreter and the applicant for joining today's session.
- Remind the applicant
 - Human Rights First is submitting their Asylum Application
 - Any questions should be directed to Human Rights First

NOTES

Use this space to share any clear, succinct notes with Human Rights First from your conversation with the Principal Applicant. Example items to flag:

- Change of personal information from the Application I-589 (spelling, address, phone, etc.)
- Inconsistencies between responses and answers provided in the Application I-589
- If the applicant would sincerely benefit from legal representation in the interview

Please email text below the horizontal line to hewadwaln@humanrightsfirst.org, with the subject line “Notes from Interview preparation clinic with [APPLICANT FN LN]”

Fill in below:

Volunteer Name:

Applicant Name:

Date of Interview Preparation Clinic:

[Insert notes here]