

10

The Substantive Asylum Interview

Preparing for the "Big Interview"

UK

**What is the Big Interview?**

The Home Office will usually interview you before they decide whether you will be allowed to stay in the UK and whether you will be granted asylum. During the interview, they will ask you questions about your **reasons for claiming asylum** and **why you cannot return to your home country**. The interview is one of the most important parts of your asylum process, and so it is **very important that you prepare for your interview**.

**How will I know when my interview is?**

The Home Office will send you information about the place, time and date of your interview. You may get a letter, an email or SMS message. They will usually tell you 7-14 days before your interview. Most interviews are held at an interview centre, usually by video. If you had an interpreter for your screening interview you will be given an interpreter in the same language.

**What if I cannot attend the interview?**

If you cannot attend the interview, **you must tell the Home Office as soon as possible**. You must give a good reason for not being able to attend. If you are sick, you will be asked to send evidence of this, e.g a letter from your doctor. If you do not attend and do not give a good reason, then your asylum application will be treated as withdrawn and you will be treated as an absconder.

**What should I do once I receive my interview invitation letter?**

As soon as you receive an invitation to interview, you should:

- Check how you will travel to the interview. If you receive asylum support, the Home Office will pay for your travel. If you need an interpreter in a different language, send an email to the Home Office to ask for this.
- You can also ask to have a man interpreter or a woman interpreter, if that is important to you.
- Ask for your interview to be audio recorded.
- Gather documents in support of your case. You can send them by email to the Home Office before or after your interview

**How should I prepare for my interview?**

The interview is your chance to explain to the Home Office why you should be granted asylum. Before your interview, you should think about how you will explain important parts of your story, including:

- why did you leave your country? Was there a specific event which made you leave? who you are in danger from and what is the reason for this.
- Is it because of politics, religion, ethnicity, nationality or another reason
- whether your family are also affected?
- how you travelled to the UK?
- who arranged this and who paid for this
- were you were tortured or forced to work in your home country or on your journey to the UK
- do you have any health problems as a result of these events?
- You should try to remember the names of places and people who are important in your claim and the dates of important events. If you cannot remember the date, you might be able to remember other information about when something happened, for example, that it was cold because it was the winter, or that you were travelling during a religious holiday.

You can prepare for the interview by practising answers to these questions by writing them down or speaking out loud.

**What should I bring with me?**

You must bring any documents that you have to prove your identity. This includes your ARC card, your passport or birth certificate, and the letter of the Interview Invitation you received from the Home Office. Unless the interview is being held in person, you will not be able to give any documents to the interviewer. You should gather any documents you have that show that your story is true if you have them, so that you can send these to the Home Office by email or by post. eg, you might have photographs or newspaper articles or a threatening letter or messages that were sent to you

10

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**Who can come with me to the interview?**

Unless you have mental health or physical support needs you will not be allowed to bring a friend with you to your asylum interview but you may bring a lawyer. The people who will be in the room will be the interviewer or interviewers, and then the interpreter, if you have asked for one.

**What will happen in the interview?**

The interviewer will ask you questions about why you are claiming asylum. They may ask you about your family and your life in the past. They will also ask you questions about your home country, about its history, geography, politics and culture.

**How should I answer the questions?**

You should try to give a clear and detailed picture of your life and your journey. You should listen carefully to the question. You must tell the interviewer if you don't understand the question and ask for it to be repeated or simplified.

Some questions may seem repetitive or unnecessary. If you don't know the answer to a question, you should say that you don't know.

You do not have to give long answers. Sometimes 'yes' or 'no' may be the best answer. However do not expect the interviewer to know anything about you or your home country.

You should be ready to explain things that seem obvious to you. It is important that you tell the truth. This is because it can harm your overall claim if the Home Office decides that you are lying about a small part of your story.

In the interview, the Home Office interviewer may doubt what you are saying or say that your story is not believable. This can be upsetting, so you should be prepared for this and try to stay calm.

If you think the interviewer missed something, didn't understand you, or didn't give you time to explain something, you should tell your interviewer this. You can do this at the end of the interview, when they ask if there is anything you want to add

**What if I need to take a break?**

You can take a break during the interview. This might be because you are tired or because a question is making you upset, or because you do not feel well. The interviewer will usually offer you a break but you can also ask for a break.

**What if I don't understand?**

If you don't understand a question, then you should ask the Interviewer to repeat it. If you don't understand the interpreter, **you should tell the interviewer as soon as possible** so that a new interpreter can be arranged.

**What should I do after the interview?**

After the interview, you should ask again for the written transcript of your interview to be sent to you. This is a record of everything which was said to you during the interview.

You can also ask for an audio recording. You should try to read the transcript and make sure that it is correct. If there is a mistake, you should tell the Home Office as soon as possible. If the Home Office asks you to provide them with some documents or you remember other documents/evidence that would prove your story, then you should send them to the Home Office as quickly as possible. You must usually do this within 5 days.

Try to take time to relax after the interview. It can be an overwhelming experience .

**What if I forgot something important?**

If you forget something important, **you should tell the Home Office as soon as possible**. You should give them as much detail as possible and show them any documents that you have that prove what you have to say.