

What Happens During an Asylum Interview

What to expect during your personal meeting with an Asylum Officer in the United States.

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When you apply for asylum affirmatively by [preparing and submitting Form I-589](#), within 21 days after you submit your asylum application to U.S.

Citizenship and Immigration Services ("USCIS"), it will schedule you for an interview with an Asylum Officer ("AO") at your local asylum office. Here, we'll describe exactly what takes place at that interview. For more details, see [Timing of the Affirmative Asylum Application Process](#).

During the interview, the AO will ask you questions about your identity, information you had provided in your asylum application, any applicable bars to your eligibility for asylum, and any [documents you had submitted in support](#) of your application. The idea is to make sure that you're believable, and to evaluate whether you merit a grant of asylum.

Can I Postpone My Asylum Interview?

if you are unable to go at the specified date and time, you can request that the interview be rescheduled. If you are sick with any contagious illness, [USCIS definitely prefers you cancel the appointment](#), for others' sake.

You must either mail a letter to the Asylum Office where you were scheduled to go for your asylum interview or go to that Asylum Office in person to complete a form to request to reschedule the interview. Make sure to do this as soon as possible. At the latest, your request must be received by mail or made in person within 15 days after the date the interview was supposed to happen.

If this is your first request to reschedule and you submit your request in writing prior to the interview date, the Asylum Office will grant your rescheduling request. You will likely be given the next available interview date, since your application now falls into the first priority of asylum cases being scheduled.

If you do not make your rescheduling request until the date of your interview or 15 days thereafter, or if this is your second or third request to reschedule, you must provide information showing that you have a "good cause" reason for needing to postpone. Good cause could include such reasons as an illness, a death in the family, or an inability to travel to the Asylum Office on the date of your interview. Try to present evidence for your reason, such as a doctor's letter.

The only time you will not have to provide an explanation for your rescheduling request is if the interview notice was not mailed to the current address you most recently provided to USCIS.

If your rescheduling request is granted, you will receive a notice about four weeks before your new interview date. Typically, rescheduled interview dates are within a month or two after the original interview date.

What to Wear and Bring to Your Asylum Interview

How you dress should not influence an asylum officer. However, it is possible that what you wear could have some subconscious effect on how the officer feels. Treat the interview as an important event and dress in a respectful manner. Don't show up in torn jeans or dirty cutoffs, unless that's all you have. Bathe before the interview, and do not wear strong perfume or smoke, so that you don't distract the officer with odors to which he or she might be physically sensitive.

You must bring *originals* of all the documents you relied on in your asylum application—such as your identity documents, travel documents, birth certificate, affidavits and declarations, photographs, and medical records. If any of the documents are not in English, make sure to bring their translations, and translation certificates. (See [Translating Non-English Documents for Immigration Applications](#).)

Who Can or Should Accompany You to an Asylum Interview

If your spouse or children under the age of 21 were included in (and named on) your asylum application, they must accompany you to the interview. They should also bring original copies of their own (1) identity documents, (2) documents showing their relationship to you (such as birth or marriage certificates), and (3) any other documents supporting their asylum application. Make sure you bring any identity documents you have for your children, including passports, birth certificates or national identity cards.

After identifying each of your children, the officer will most likely suggest that they wait for you in the waiting room. For that reason, it's a good idea to bring a friend with you, who can either take the children for a walk or wait with them.

You are allowed to bring witnesses to the Asylum Office. Consider doing so if the person can testify about the harm you suffered or fear, or about other important parts of your asylum claim. Witnesses can be any age and can be in the United States with or without lawful immigration status. Witnesses can be family members or anyone who has firsthand knowledge of the story. The only people who cannot be witnesses are interpreters and representatives that the applicant brings to the asylum interview.

Bringing an Interpreter to an Asylum Interview

If you do not feel comfortable speaking in English, you *must* bring your own interpreter. This is a change from COVID-era procedures, in which the government would provide telephonic interpreters in some cases. Now, failure to bring an interpreter without good cause can be viewed by USCIS as equal to failing to appear for the interview at all. The agency can then dismiss your asylum application or refer your case to immigration court for [defensive deportation proceedings](#).

Any person over the age of 18 who is not either your attorney, a witness for your asylum claim, a representative of your country's government, or also an asylum applicant can act as your interpreter.

Although family members are allowed to interpret for you, it is better to bring a professional. Family members are likely not to interpret word for word, and often add their own information. Also, the AO is likely to ask you about very personal issues, and you might be uncomfortable discussing them openly in front of your family.

Although not required, it is a good idea to have your attorney come with you. The attorney can help make sure that your interview is conducted appropriately and that any legal issues that might arise get clarified. If your attorney is running late or is unable to attend on the scheduled day, and you ask the AO to reschedule your interview for when your attorney is available,

the AO might deny your request and conduct the interview as scheduled or refer your case to an Immigration Judge.

Arriving at the Asylum Office

First, you'll want to make sure to arrive at the location and the time specified in the interview notice. (If you need to reschedule your interview, see [What to Do If You Can't Make Your Asylum Interview.](#))

After getting there, you should report to the receptionist or clerk. If you bring any *new* documents supporting your asylum application that you had not already submitted, provide them to the receptionist. The AO will review them before interviewing you.

You will then be asked to wait for your interview. Depending on the other interviews and the AO's schedule that day, you might have to wait several hours. If you are bringing children along, make sure to bring toys and snacks for them. (But check in advance whether the office lets you bring in food.)

What Will Happen During the Asylum Interview

The AO assigned to your case will take you into a private office. Your attorney and interpreter (if any) will also come along. No other officials will be in the

room where you are interviewed. Everything you discuss with the AO will remain confidential, and will not be recorded (other than the officer's note-taking).

You will be asked to take an oath stating that you will only tell the truth. Your interpreter will also be asked to take an oath. If your religion does not allow you to "swear" or take oaths, you can explain this to the officer and ask that you be allowed to "affirm or promise" that your testimony will be truthful.

If you have any additions, changes, or corrections to your asylum application (for example, correcting a factual mistake or adding new supporting documents), make sure to tell the AO at the beginning of your interview. In fact, you might want to prepare a written list of these to give to the officer, particularly if the changes are extensive. (With many applicants waiting years for their interviews, it's common to need to update the officer about things like a new job, new child, or marriage or divorce.)

The AO will have reviewed your asylum application and your immigration file before interviewing you. AOs are trained to conduct asylum interviews, and are familiar with country conditions in your country.

The AO will most likely begin by asking you about your identity and background, and will review your original identity documents that you have brought with you.

Then, you will be asked to explain why you are applying for asylum. The AO might ask you a general question about it (such as, "So, tell me, why are you

seeking asylum?") or might ask specific questions about information you had included in your asylum application or in any supporting documents.

If any [bars to eligibility for asylum](#) might apply to you (such as the possibility that you were involved in the persecution of others or have a criminal record), the AO will also likely ask questions about them.

If you do not understand a question, whether because of language or other issues, it's better to ask for clarification than to attempt to answer. For instance, you can:

- ask the officer to repeat any question you are not certain you understand, or
- ask the officer to speak more slowly.

Do not be concerned if the AO asks you the same question several times or in several different ways. This is done to test your credibility (that is, believability).

Also, the AO might act like he or she does not believe you, and might even be unpleasant. Do not let that affect you, and do not get aggravated. The AO's role is to test your credibility and your legal claim to asylum.

Always be honest, detailed, and consistent with what you had stated in your application. Do not exaggerate. In order to be granted asylum, you must be found credible. For details, see [Chances of Winning a Grant of Asylum](#).

Some of the information you will be asked about will be very personal, and you might find it hard to discuss. You can ask for a short break to compose yourself, and then try your best to tell the AO all the important facts. Your ability to obtain asylum depends on that.

The entire interview will likely take at least an hour, depending on the particular facts of your case, and on what questions your AO decides to ask. The more facts your asylum application and your personal declaration contain, the longer your interview will probably last. The length of the interview, however, is *not* indicative of whether or not you will be granted asylum. Answer only the questions that you are asked.

Your attorney will also have a chance to make a short statement to the AO, and to clarify any concerns that the AO might have.

What Will Happen After Your Interview

The AO will not reach a decision on your asylum application at the time of your interview. (In rare cases, you might even be asked to return for a second interview, for example, if the officer who interviewed you left, and another is taking over your case.)

Your decision might be mailed to you after your interview or you might be asked to return in person to pick it up. Although decisions are normally made within a few weeks of the interview, a combination of delayed security checks

and lack of supervisors staffing asylum offices has led to much longer delays as of early 2024.

What If You Miss Your Asylum Interview

If you don't show up for your interview, you have valid immigration status in the U.S., and you do not provide an explanation of why you missed your interview within 15 days after the date on which it was scheduled, your asylum case will be administratively closed. The Asylum Office Director might reschedule your interview instead of closing your case, but only if you provide a reasonable explanation for your failure to appear.

If you have no legal status in the U.S., your case will be referred to the Immigration Court, where you will have to present your case for asylum (and any other defenses you might have) in [removal \(deportation\) proceedings](#).

Getting Legal Help

A good attorney can help you prepare your application and accompany you to the interview, thus improving your chances of obtaining asylum. Fortunately, asylum is an area where you'll find a lot of [help from volunteer attorneys](#) or nonprofit (charitable) organizations serving immigrants and refugees.

