

Finding Country Conditions Evidence for Asylum and Fear-of-Return Immigration Cases

Pro Se Manual

June 2020



CENTER FOR
Gender & Refugee
STUDIES

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Produced for the California Department of Social Services.
Provided as part of CGRS's Technical Assistance Program.

Acknowledgements

This pro se resource was written by Isaac Bloch at the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies – California (CGRS-California) with editorial contributions by Christine Lin. CGRS-California is grateful to the members of the Pro Se Immigration Working Group, including Melissa Chandler, Aida Farahani, Merry Hancock, Richard Kelley, Leora Mosman, Ariel Prado, and Rachel Zoghlin, for their close review and thoughtful feedback on earlier drafts of this manual.

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Introduction

Who should use this manual?

The information provided in this manual is intended for individuals who are in the United States, fear harm if they return to their country of origin, and are asking the U.S. government to protect them by applying for asylum, withholding of removal, or Convention Against Torture. This manual may be used by individuals in removal proceedings as a *defense* to deportation in immigration court or by those who wish to *affirmatively* apply for asylum at the asylum office. **Your immigration options and the arguments you make to apply for asylum or other immigration benefits will vary depending on your situation.**

The intended users of this manual are individuals who do not have a lawyer and are representing themselves on their own, which is called “pro se.” Specifically, this manual discusses how to find and evaluate documents about your country of origin to help explain why you fear returning there. These materials, such as certain news articles, human rights reports, and government publications, are referred to as country conditions documentation. You can provide these resources to the decision-maker, such as an immigration judge or asylum officer, to support your case. **In order to find these documents, you will need to be able to access a computer, phone, or tablet with an internet connection. You will also need access to a printer to print the documents.**

How can I find a lawyer?

We recommend consulting with a lawyer or other legal representative about your particular case if possible. Depending on your location, there may be organizations that offer free or low-cost legal representation.

Immigration courts are part of the U.S. Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), which maintains a list of free legal service providers at this link: <http://www.justice.gov/eoir/probono/states.htm>

You can also search the Immigration Advocates Network legal directory, which includes a list of free or low-cost representation at: <https://www.immigrationadvocates.org/legaldirectory/>

Certain organizations receive funding to provide free legal services; a lawyer that charges a fee may not necessarily be any more qualified than one providing free services. However, you can search for private lawyers, who typically charge a fee, through the American Immigration Lawyers Association: www.aialawyer.com

Forms of Protection for Individuals Who Fear Returning to Their Country of Origin

What are asylum, withholding of removal, and Convention Against Torture?

The U.S. government offers three related forms of protection for people who have been harmed or fear harm if they are returned to their country of origin: (1) asylum; (2) withholding of removal; and (3) Convention Against Torture (CAT) relief. The requirements for each form of protection are similar, but withholding of removal and CAT do not offer as many benefits as asylum. The same application and the same type of evidence is used for all three kinds of cases.

1. Asylum

Asylum is a form of protection offered by the U.S. government to individuals who have a “well-founded fear” of returning to their country of origin because they have been “persecuted” (harmed) in the past or may be persecuted in the future if they return. For asylum, this persecution must be because of the individual’s “race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”

Individuals who are granted asylum are allowed to remain and seek employment in the United States. They may obtain legal status for their children under age 21 or for a spouse to remain or join them in the United States. Those granted asylum can later apply for permanent residence (a “green card”) and, eventually, U.S. citizenship.

2. Withholding of Removal

Withholding of removal (referred to as “withholding”) is a legal protection that, like asylum, allows you to stay and work in the United States. Withholding may be a good option if you are not eligible for asylum, for example, because you are applying more than one year after you arrived in the United States and you do not meet one of the exceptions for the delay in filing, or if you have reentered the United States after having been deported.

In order to qualify for withholding, you must show it is more likely than not that you will face a “threat to your life or freedom” (in other words, persecution) in your country of origin. Like asylum, this persecution must have occurred because of your race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Unlike asylum, withholding does not provide a path to permanent residence or citizenship. It also does not provide a way for family members to legally stay or join you in the United States. It only allows you to live and work in the United States as long as the threat of harm in your home country remains. Individuals who are granted withholding will need to apply for renewals of work permits each year that they continue to live in the United States.

3. Convention Against Torture (CAT)

The U.S. government may grant you CAT protection, allowing you to remain and work in the United States, if you can establish that it is more likely than not that you will be tortured if you are removed to your country of origin. CAT might be the best option for you if, for example, you are unable to show a connection between past or future harm and your race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

Like withholding, CAT does not provide a path for permanent residence or citizenship in the United States. It also does not provide a way for family members to legally stay or join you in the United States. However, if you are granted CAT protection, you will be allowed to work and live in the United States as long as the threat of torture in your home country remains. Like withholding, individuals granted CAT protection will need to apply for renewals of work permits each year that they remain in the U.S.

At the end of this manual, there are links to additional resources on immigration procedures, applications, and advocating for yourself before an asylum officer or immigration judge.

Why Country Conditions Evidence is Useful

Why is country conditions documentation important for my case?

To support your application for asylum, withholding of removal, or CAT protection, you are required to explain to the decision-maker the situation you faced in your country. You also must explain what it would be like if you had to return. A decision-maker may not understand the basic aspects of life and the danger that exists in your country of origin, even if they seem obvious to you. For example, the decision-maker may not understand why the police do not protect certain victims of crimes and you may be required to provide evidence that explains why law enforcement are not effective in your home country. In addition to expressing why you genuinely fear returning to your country, you are required to demonstrate why the conditions there would make any reasonable person in your similar situation afraid to return.

In addition to completing your Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal (Form I-589), it can be helpful, and in many cases necessary, to submit evidence demonstrating that:

- The reason you were harmed or will face harm is because of your race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or that you were or continue to be part of a certain group.
- Individuals in similar circumstances to you are harmed in your country of origin.
- The police do not typically assist victims of crime, including crimes such as domestic violence, child abuse, gang violence, and harm to certain groups of people, for example, females, children, indigenous people, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI) individuals.

- It can be dangerous in certain cases to make a report to the police, because:
 - the police may harm you, or
 - the police may inform the person or group who harmed you, and then take little or no further action to stop them.
- It is neither safe nor reasonable for you to live elsewhere in your home country.

What is “country conditions evidence?”

“Country conditions evidence” refers to written documents that help explain the danger and lack of protection in your country. The information in these documents supports the specific points listed at the beginning of this section. Reports from human rights organizations, newspaper articles, or government publications can be used to explain the circumstances that exist in your country of origin. Later sections of this manual describe how to find these materials. These types of documents can help demonstrate that it is reasonable for you to fear returning.

Example 1: A man from Country A was attacked because of his political opinion. He did not support the current government and belonged to a political organization where people discussed their criticisms of the government. When he attended a peaceful demonstration, police officers used violence to disperse the demonstrators. He also saw uniformed police officers taking pictures at the demonstration. Concerned that the government could identify him, he fled to the United States.

In this example, country conditions can help show that the police have attacked members of his political organization for speaking out against the current government. He may even be able to find an article or news report about the specific demonstration he attended where the police used violence. This documentation will help corroborate his testimony about being targeted. Although it would be helpful to include information about the specific demonstration he attended or the political organization to which he belonged, reports that explain how the police or government attack other individuals who criticize the government in other situations could also be useful. For example, if there are any human rights reports that discuss how state officials have persecuted or unfairly arrested other people who support reforms of the current government, that could help show he has a valid reason to fear returning.

There is no requirement that anyone applying for asylum needs to belong to a specific organization or have participated in protests. Even if an asylum seeker never openly spoke out against the government, they may be suspected to hold anti-government beliefs and be at risk for harm if they return to their country. In such a case, country conditions documentation showing that police target individuals who criticize the government could still be helpful to support their asylum claim.

Tip for Your Case

If you were harmed or fear harm from an individual or a group who is *not* associated with the government, police, or military, then you also need to provide evidence that:

- Your country's government is unable or unwilling to protect people in your circumstances.
- It is not safe or reasonable for you to move to another city or area of your home country.

Country conditions documentation can help show that law enforcement in your country does not adequately protect people who are in situations similar to what you experienced.

Example 2: A gang member threatened a woman in Country B, approaching her and demanding that she be his “girlfriend.” She rejected the gang member because she does not want to be associated with the gang in any way. At a certain point, the gang member said there would be consequences if she did not do what he said. She interpreted this as a threat and she fled to the United States shortly afterwards.

Based on the facts of this case, country conditions documents can help demonstrate that this woman would likely be harmed if she returned to Country B. Reports can explain how people in her country who refuse to follow the gangs' orders are often harmed. News articles that discuss how women are harmed after they refuse to be the “girlfriends” of gang members would help show that the situation she experienced does in fact exist in her country. Sources that discuss how the police are corrupt, including that they take bribes from criminals, work with the gangs, and that they cannot fully protect victims of gang violence, can also support her case.

Even if a gang member never specifically approached an individual in the way that is described in Example 2, there may be other circumstances related to gang violence that qualify people for asylum. For example, if a person's family was harmed or threatened by gangs, news reports and articles could explain how the person could be in danger because they are the relative of someone who was targeted.

Additionally, asylum claims can be based on threats or harms from someone who was not affiliated with a gang at all, such as abuse by a family member. In such a case, country conditions documentation could still show that the police do not often provide effective assistance to individuals who experience violence at the hands of relatives.

Tip for Your Case

In general, country conditions evidence can help show that it would be dangerous if you had to return to your country since harms have occurred to people who are in situations similar to yours. If you experienced threats or violence at any time in your life, sources published from that time would help show that such harm happened to people in similar circumstances. Reports and news articles published any time after you came to the United States can help explain to the decision-maker that the harm could occur now if you had to return.

Example 3: In Country C, representatives from a company approached a man from an indigenous group because they wanted to build a road through his community. At one point, they offered to buy the land his family lived on, but he refused. A short time later, armed men came to his community and fired shots into his home, as well as the homes of other families who refused to sell their land. Since the shots were fired only at those who refused to sell, the man believes that the company who wanted to buy their land sent the armed men. He never went to the police, but shortly after that incident he and his family left for the United States.

In this example, news reports may document how this company or other businesses like it have harmed indigenous individuals in Country C in order to try to get them to sell their land and move. These reports would help demonstrate that situations like what the man experienced occur in Country C. Since the man is from an indigenous group, country conditions evidence may explain how indigenous groups are particularly vulnerable to this type of harm. Although the man did not report to the police, publications from human rights organizations may help demonstrate that the police would not have helped him even if he had reported what happened. Any sources that mention that the government is corrupt, that indigenous groups are often ignored, or that the police and military normally defend corporations, could also help his case. Information on how indigenous groups are mistreated in Country C would also help show the difficulties he may face if he moves to another part of his country.

Tip for Your Case

Country conditions evidence can help you meet the requirements of asylum, withholding of removal, and CAT protection by documenting the types of difficulties and harms that you face in your country of origin. Reports from human rights organizations, government agencies, and news outlets are often submitted as evidence in asylum applications. These documents can show that the type of harm or threats that you experienced are common in your country, that you would likely experience harm if you returned, that you cannot rely on your country's government to protect you, and that it is neither safe nor reasonable for you to relocate to another area in your country.

Finding Country Conditions Evidence

What materials do I need to find country conditions evidence?

The next page of this manual has suggestions for places to find country conditions evidence online. You will need access to a computer, phone, or tablet with internet access to find these resources. You will also need access to a printer to print documents to submit as evidence in support of your case.

Many public libraries have computers with internet access that are available for anyone to use. Some public libraries may also have printers, but may charge for printing. You can also ask non-

profit organizations who work with asylum seekers if they offer free printing services for “pro se” applicants who do not have a lawyer. You can find the phone numbers for nearby non-profit legal service providers by entering your zip code into the Immigration Advocates Network website here: <https://www.immigrationadvocates.org/legaldirectory/>

Private companies such as FedEx Offices may also allow you to use a computer and print documents for a fee. For private companies such as FedEx, the charge for computer usage is typically based on how long you use the computer. Printing fees are often based on the number of pages printed. It is important to ask in advance what you will be charged before using any computer or printing documents.

You can also submit articles and reports that are written in non-English languages. **Any source that you find in your own language needs to be submitted in the original language, along with an English translation and a certificate of translation from someone who is competent to translate accurately from your own language into English.** A sample certificate of translation has been included in the Appendix 1 at the end of this manual.

Where can I find country conditions evidence?

The websites listed below often publish reports and articles that can be used as country conditions evidence. However, before submitting anything, it is important to review the information contained in the source to make sure that they will help your case. **It is possible that a source with helpful information may also contain unhelpful information that can hurt your case, so it is essential to review any document before providing it to the decision-maker.** For example, if an asylum seeker fled gang violence and finds a report that discusses how the police arrested a gang member after they harmed someone, but the article does not explain that these types of arrests are rare or that the police are not effective at protecting people, then a decision-maker may think that the police generally protect individuals from gang violence. In the next section of this manual, there is a more detailed explanation for what information you want to look for when deciding what reports to submit.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This agency of the United Nations is dedicated to protecting the asylum seekers’ rights all over the world. UNHCR has compiled articles and reports which can be downloaded by entering this URL into a web browser: https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/1r0cGp1JLTqZiOc0RmBOZ8_2cwFyfPoT3 After opening the webpage listed above, you will see a list of countries in alphabetical order, and you can find articles and reports about human rights conditions by clicking on your country of origin.

The U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. These reports are created by the U.S. government and are often submitted to support asylum cases. You can enter the following URL into a web browser: <https://www.state.gov/reports-bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>

Once you are on the website, find the most recent report on your country by clicking on the link that says “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices” with the most recent year in the title. On the right hand of the side of the window, select your country’s report by clicking on “Select a Country.” Translations of some of these reports are available at:

<https://www.state.gov/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices-translations/>

Download and submit the English version of any document if you plan to submit it as country conditions evidence.

Human Rights Watch World Report. An international human rights organization called Human Rights Watch produces annual reports that describe abuses across the world. You can find the section of the report that discusses your country by entering the following URL into a web browser: <https://www.hrw.org/publications>

Once you are on this website, you can find the most recent information on your country by clicking on the link that says “World Report.” This will take you to a page that says “Browse Countries.” Select your country from a list by clicking on “choose.” In the upper right hand corner of the window, you can choose a different language by clicking on “Languages.”

Download and submit the English version of any document if you plan to submit it as country conditions evidence.

Amnesty International. Amnesty International produces reports, news releases, and other types of articles. Search for your country by entering the following URL into a web browser:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/>

Once you are on this website, find your country by clicking on the first letter of your country’s name. When the name of your country appears, click on it. By scrolling down the webpage, you will see different news articles and reports. If you would like to view the resources in another language, you can click where it says “EN” in the top right hand corner of the webpage. A different set of resources may appear if you change to a language other than English. Download and submit the English version of the document if possible when submitting it as country conditions evidence, or translate the document according to the instructions listed in Appendix 1 of this manual.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. This is an agency within the United Nations that releases reports on countries around the world. You can find these materials by entering the following URL into your web browser:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/pages/home.aspx>

Once you are on this website, you can find information on your country by clicking on “Human Rights By Country” near the top of the page. Begin typing out the name of your country, and click on your country once the name appears. A list of different reports will appear that you can download. You can change the language at any time by clicking on a different language in the upper right hand corner of the window. Download and submit the English version of any document if you plan to submit it as country conditions evidence.

The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada National Documentation Packages. The government of Canada organizes articles and reports about different countries. These documents are separated by topic. You can find a list of these materials by entering the following URL into a web browser:

<https://irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/country-information/ndp/Pages/index.aspx>

Once you are on this website, you can find information on your country by clicking on “Select a country,” choosing your country from the list that appears, and clicking “Go.” A list of dates indicating when the materials were last updated will appear. You can click on the most recent date that appears. You will be taken to a webpage with different article titles and URL addresses for other websites. Each of these URL addresses will take you to a different report that you can download. If you are more comfortable reading French, you can change the language to French at any time by clicking in the upper right hand corner of the window. However, download and submit the English version of that same document if you plan to use the report as country conditions evidence.

The Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation. This department of the Austrian Red Cross compiles human rights reports and publications for countries across the world. You can find your country by entering the following URL into a web browser: <https://www.ecoi.net/en/countries/>

After going to the website listed above, you can find your country of origin listed in alphabetical order. A list of reports and articles will appear after clicking on the name of your country.

Freedom House: Freedom in the World. Freedom House is a non-profit organization that produces reports on governments around the world. You can find these materials by entering the following URL into a web browser:

<https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>

Once you are to this website, you can find information on your country by typing in your country’s name in the box that says “Country Name,” or by scrolling down the webpage until your country’s name appears.

United Kingdom Home Office. The United Kingdom produces reports on a large number of countries. You can see if there is a report on your country by entering the following URL into your web browser:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/country-policy-and-information-notes>

Once you are on this website, search for your country by clicking on the first letter of your country’s name. If there is information on your country, your country’s name will appear and you can click on it for more information. By scrolling down the webpage that comes up, you will see different reports, which you can click on to view.

Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights is an international human rights agency that produces in-depth reports as well as briefer

press release updates about countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a focus on violations of political and civil rights. You can review the press releases that they have published at this URL here:

http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/press_releases.asp

Each press release will state the country that it covers in the title. On the right hand side of the website, you can review press releases from previous years.

Temple University and Washington Office on Latin America. For asylum seekers from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, Temple University's website offers sample country conditions documentation to support certain types of claims. You can find these resources by entering the following URL into your web browser: <https://www2.law.temple.edu/csj/atoc/>

You can request a password to view and download the resources by filling out a brief form. You can then enter the password in the appropriate location in the website above to gain access to country conditions documentation and a sample index for submitting these documents.

Searching with Google. For specific topics, you can look for articles and reports on Google, a search engine that allows you to find information on the internet based on key words. You can search for resources on different issues by going to Google here: [Google.com](http://www.google.com)

Enter any words into the website above and click enter. Google will then find a list of webpages that have articles and reports that contain the words that you entered. Not all of these reports will be suitable to submit as country conditions evidence, and you will need to spend time reading through these sources to find articles that will be useful.

To find the most information with Google, it is best to try multiple searches with different combinations of words. Effective searches often only have two to five words, and Google will work best if you do not enter entire sentences.

Example 4: A teenage boy from Country D fled from street gangs to the United States. Gang members tried to extort him for money, but he refused. Gang members then threatened to kidnap a family member and kill the boy. Country conditions documentation can demonstrate that this is common in Country D, that these threats are serious, that the police collude with gangs, and that the teenager cannot live in other areas of Country D because the gang is present throughout the entire country. To find articles that explain these factors, the boy can try each of the following searches on Google, and there are many other options for searches online that he can consider as well:

- Country D gang extortion
- Country D gang kidnap
- Country D gang homicide
- Country D gang corruption

Google only allows you to do one search at a time, so you will need to try each set of words separately. **To find recent articles, you can click on “Tools” near the top of the page, after you have entered a search. You can then click on where it says “Any time” on the left hand side of the window near the top. You can then select “Past year” and you will only see webpages and articles that have been updated in the last year.** You can also enter a specific range of dates to search for articles that were published during a particular timeframe.

Example 5: A woman fled Country E because her husband physically abused her. After she gave birth to a child, her husband neglected and abused the child as well, so she decided to come to the United States. In this case, to find information to support her case, she could enter the following searches into Google:

- Country E domestic violence
- Country E violence against women
- Country E child abuse

When reviewing webpages on Google, the most reliable sources will include a title and date near the top of the article or report. You can also identify strong sources if they use formal language, do not contain spelling and grammatical errors, are more than a few sentences in length, contain information that is accurate to the best of your understanding, and quote respected authorities or other experts to support the article’s analysis.

Evaluating and Submitting Country Conditions Evidence

How can I determine if I should include the articles and reports that I find?

In general, the most useful information are recent reports and news articles that show that people in circumstances that are similar to yours also experienced severe forms of harm. The most relevant reports may discuss how individuals in your country of origin with your same gender, approximate age, sexual orientation, and profession are often harmed by the same type of individual or group of people that harmed or threatened to harm you.

For example, if a woman is seeking asylum because her husband abused her, reports that discuss how other women in her country experience violence from their partners could be relevant. If a man is seeking asylum because he is a taxi driver and was attacked by gang members for refusing to pay them an extortion fee, articles about how that specific gang has attacked other taxi drivers could support his claims. Which sources will be the most useful depends on the facts of your individual case.

Even if you only experienced threats, articles that describe how people in your country are harmed after they were threatened can help demonstrate that there is a likelihood that you would be in danger if you return. Articles and reports that describe severe types of harm, including physical violence or torture, are more likely to meet the standard of harm required to receive protection.

Articles and reports that explain high levels of violence against people in similar circumstances to yourself may be helpful. This analysis could include percentages of how many people are affected, the total number of people harmed, or other statistics about patterns of violence. It may also be useful to include news articles and reports that describe individual stories of people who were harmed.

It is important to pay attention to the publication date of a source. **Finding the most recent reports and articles can help demonstrate to the decision-maker that you may continue to face harm if you return.** This includes articles and reports that were published within the last two years. To provide additional evidence for the harms that you experienced, it may also be helpful to include older reports, or reports that describe the time period that you experienced harm in your country.

The following boxes provide general research suggestions for some types of claims that are related to fear-of-gangs, abuse by spouses against women, harm to LGBTQI people, and domestic violence against minors. **The items listed in the boxes are not requirements for asylum and are merely examples to help you understand the types of evidence that may be helpful for the type of claim discussed.** There are many other valid asylum claims that do not fit within the broad descriptions below. The specific facts of your case may be very different from the general claims discussed below. You should always look for country conditions information that is relevant to what you experienced.

Fear-of-Gang Violence
<p>If an individual fears returning to their country because of gang violence, it may be helpful for them to include reports and news articles that describe how:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The gang targets people who are similar in age to them (child, teenager, or adult).• The gang harms people who have the same gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation, as well as individuals who live close to where they lived in their country.• The gang typically threatens people with severe forms of harm.• The gang routinely carries out attacks, including those that involve torture and homicide.• Victims of gang violence have been harmed after reporting to the police.• The police and government often cooperate with the gang, or they are corrupt generally.• The gang maintains a presence throughout the country, and they have tracked other people down in the past after they moved to another part of the country.• People have to be careful when they travel through new neighborhoods, since different gangs maintain territorial boundaries and are suspicious of new arrivals.• Mobility is generally limited due to gang control.

Violence Against Women by Spouse or Partner

If a woman fears returning to her country of origin because she has been abused by her spouse or partner, it can be helpful for her to **include reports and news articles about her country that describe how:**

- Many women in her country experience threats and harm by their partners.
- Women in relationships are viewed and treated as subordinate to men.
- Women have been killed by their partners.
- There are discriminatory attitudes towards women.
- The police do not protect women who experience domestic violence. For example, police may say that it is a private family matter, and they do not want to get involved.
- Orders of protection from a court can be difficult to obtain and are not enforced.
- Courts have low prosecution and conviction rates against perpetrators of violence against women.
- The country lacks laws to protect women. Any laws that do exist are not enforced.
- There are few shelters where women can go to seek safety if they are abused.
- Women living or traveling alone or unaccompanied by men are at greater risk of harm.
- Women encounter difficulty obtaining education, employment, health, and other services, which makes it more challenging to live without familial support.

Harm Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression

If an individual was harmed or fears being harmed based of their sexual orientation or gender expression, it can be helpful for them to **include reports and news articles about their country that describe how:**

- People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex (LGBTQI) routinely experience violence at the hands of their family members or are forced to leave their families' homes.
- There is a high rate of hate crimes, violence, and murder against LGBTQI individuals.
- The police and military often ridicule or abuse LGBTQI individuals.
- The judicial system has low levels of prosecution and convictions against perpetrators of violence against LGBTQI individuals.
- Relationships, marriage, cohabitation, or sexual acts between same-sex partners is illegal.
- There are no laws to protect LGBTQI individuals from discrimination and violence, or the laws that do exist are not enforced.
- LGBTQI individuals who are open about their identity, or individuals who are perceived to be LGBTQI, cannot find employment or employment is severely limited.
- Articles and reports are more likely to be relevant to your case if they use language that you feel represents you (for example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex). However, including articles that describe the situation in your country of origin for other LGBTQI individuals can show how, in general, non-conforming individuals from LGBTQI communities face harm, which may provide support for your case.

Child Abuse

If an individual was harmed or fears returning to their country of origin because a parent or other adult abused them when they were under 18 years of age, it can be helpful for them to **include reports and news articles about their country that describe how:**

- Children are viewed and treated as inferior to adults.
- Child abuse is common in their country of origin.
- People outside of the family resist getting involved in family matters.
- There is no good support system for orphans or individuals who have fled abusive situations.
- The police and judicial system have failed to protect children who have been abused.
- There are no laws to protect children from certain forms of harm, such as corporal punishment.
- The laws that do exist to protect children are not enforced and children's shelters are not effective.

How do I submit country conditions evidence for my case?

When submitting country conditions evidence, it is easier for the asylum officer or immigration judge to review the documents if you create a typed index that lists each item that you have printed out (this is sometimes called a "table of contents"). For example, type the title of each article or report on its own separate line, along with the publication date. The order of the documents in the index should match the order of each printed document in the packet of materials that you file. Each article or report can be separated by a cover sheet or a tab so that the decision-maker can easily review these sources. Fasten the packet that you are filing by punching two-holes on the top of each page (the shorter-edge). Postal offices or office supply stores (such as the Office Depot or FedEx Office) may be able to assist with two-hole punching and fastening your documents for a fee.

The information below provides general guidance for filing country conditions evidence.

However, there are multiple steps to the asylum process. This manual only provides guidance on country conditions documentation. You must file a completed form I-589 application before or at the same time you submit the country conditions evidence. For more information on this process and the requirements for your I-589 application, please refer to the guidance in the Additional Resources section at the end of this manual. You can also review the Form I-589 instructions, which are available for download here: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-589>

Affirmative applicants (asylum office): Affirmative applicants are individuals applying for asylum who do not have any pending court dates before an immigration judge, and are applying before an asylum office, which is part of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). There are asylum offices throughout the country, but the asylum office that reviews your case depends on your home address. Each office may have special instructions for filing. You can find out which

asylum office will interview you and its contact information by entering your zip code here:
<https://egov.uscis.gov/office-locator/#/asy>

After entering your zip code at the above website, click on the name of the city that appears. This is the asylum office that will interview you, and you can review the specific contact information for that location online. For further guidance on how to file your application, you can call the asylum office at the phone number listed on the website. You can let the person you speak with know that you are a pro se applicant. You will need to submit your country conditions documentation in advance of your interview for it to be fully considered. Each asylum office has different requirements for when you need to submit additional evidence. If the filing deadline is not specified on your interview notice, contact the asylum office reviewing your case to find out when you need to submit your documents.

Before submitting your country conditions packet to the asylum office, make at least one copy for your own records.

Defensive applicants (immigration court): If you are submitting your application to an immigration court because you are in removal proceedings, your materials will need to be filed with the immigration judge who is hearing your case.

There are immigration court locations throughout the country, and an immigration judge will be assigned to your case. If you do not know where your immigration hearing will be held, you can call 1-800-898-7180 and enter your A# (or Alien Registration Number) when prompted. Your A# is an eight or nine-digit number issued by the Department of Homeland Security and it is listed on your Notice to Appear. The Notice to Appear is the document that informs you that you have been placed in immigration proceedings, and it may have been given to you in-person, mailed to you, or sent to the address of your prior lawyer if you had one. Although your Notice to Appear will list an immigration court on the document, your case may have been changed to a different location. Before filing any documents, it is important to verify the current status of your case by calling the number listed above and entering your A#.

Once you know which immigration court will hear your case, you can find the contact information on this website: <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/eoir-immigration-court-listing> After selecting the immigration court's webpage, you can call the number for the court clerk and ask the specific procedures for submitting documents. You can let them know that you are a pro se applicant and would like information on how to submit supplementary documentation before your immigration hearing. You will need to submit a copy of your country conditions documentation in advance of your individual hearing for it to be fully considered, which will go to the immigration judge.

You will also need to submit an identical second copy of your country conditions documentation either by mail or in person to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which will go to the lawyer working for DHS's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). A complete list of all ICE offices to submit documentation can be found here: <https://www.ice.gov/contact/legal> You need to attach a completed Proof of Service to the documents you file with the immigration court and provide to DHS. A sample Proof of Service is at Appendix 2.

Always remember to make a third copy of the country conditions documentation to keep for your own records.

For more guidance on immigration court filings, see the complete immigration court practice manual, which is available here:

<https://www.justice.gov/eoir/office-chief-immigration-judge-0>

Additional Resources

Providing supporting documentation is a key part of a successful application. However, this documentation is just one part of an asylum, withholding of removal, or CAT claim. For a guide on other requirements of an asylum case and how best to advocate for yourself, you can download a manual prepared by the University of Maine School of Law and the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project here:

<https://mainelaw.maine.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/asylum-self-help-guide-ENGLISH.pdf>

A Spanish-language version of the manual can be downloaded here:

<https://mainelaw.maine.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/asylum-self-help-guide-SPANISH.pdf>

A French-language version of the manual can be downloaded here:

<https://mainelaw.maine.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/asylum-self-help-guide-FRENCH.pdf>

This video series from the University of Maine School of Law discusses the elements of asylum in English and French:

<https://mainelaw.maine.edu/academics/clinics-and-centers/clac/refugee-and-human-rights/advocacy-and-outreach/asylum-video-series/>

This video from Innovation Law Lab discusses the elements of asylum in Spanish:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayJ7cm1b4eY&feature=youtu.be>

UNHCR's website provides information, guidance and additional links to materials for individuals with affirmative asylum applications before an asylum office: <https://www.unhcr.org/58595c754>
In Spanish: <https://www.unhcr.org/585ae9354>

UNHCR's website provides information, guidance and additional links to materials for individuals with defensive applications in immigration court: <https://www.unhcr.org/585ae9354>
In Spanish: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/asilo-defensivo.html>

For guidance on asylum claims based on domestic violence and how to advocate for yourself, you can download a manual prepared by the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole here: <https://cgrs.uchastings.edu/our-work/pro-se-materials>

Appendix 1: Sample Certificate of Translation

Below is a sample certificate of translation. To submit a translated document, you can copy the text below into a separate document. Substitute the *[italicized words and brackets]* with the correct information, and have the translator sign and date the form. Submit a certificate of translation with each non-English document. Both the document in the original language and the English translation must be submitted.

Certificate of Translation

I, *[Translator First Name]* *[Translator Last Names]*, am competent to translate from *[Original language]* into English, and certify the translation of the attached *[article / report / document]*, *[Title of article / report / document]*, the original of which is in *[Original language]*, is true and accurate to the best of my abilities.

[Translator Original Signature] _____

[Date] _____

[Translator First Name] *[Translator Last Name]*

Date

[Translator address]

[Translator phone number]

Appendix 2: Sample Proof of Service

Below is a sample Proof of Service. You are required to attach a Proof of Service to the documents that you submit to immigration court. You can copy the text below into a separate document. Substitute the *[italicized words and brackets]* in the form with the correct information, and attach the dated and signed form as the last page of the documents that you submit to immigration court.

In the matter of:

[Applicant First Name] [Applicant Last Name], A[XXX-XXX-XXX]

Proof of Service

I, *[Applicant First Name] [Applicant Last Name]*, hereby declare that I served the attached documents in Support of Asylum, Withholding of Removal, and Protection under the Convention Against Torture to:

Office of the Chief Counsel
Department of Homeland Security
[Address]

[In Person / By mail] on _____ *[Date]* _____.

[Signature]
[Full First and Last Name of Applicant]



The Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS) provides legal expertise, training, and resources to attorneys representing asylum seekers, advocates to protect refugees, advances refugee law and policy, and uses domestic, regional, and international human rights mechanisms to address the root causes of persecution. CGRS-California, the California-focused arm of CGRS, provides legal technical assistance, training, and litigation resources throughout the state.

To request technical assistance from CGRS, please visit <http://cgrs.uchastings.edu/assistance/>.

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