



UK Visas & Immigration

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15 March 2018

Dear Mr Brawley

Thank you for your enquiry of 1 March, in which you requested a variety of information regarding asylum decisions reached on assessing convention rules. Your request is being handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Information Requested

- 1) What advisers or documents are available to assist caseworkers in determining what is plausible when assessing convention reasons, beyond that linked in the document Asylum Policy Instruction?*
- 2) Given that the section on religious conversion makes reference only Christianity, what advice is available to assessors to ensure this guidance is not inappropriately applied to conversions to non-religious or informal religious traditions?*
- 3) Can you confirm if you have engaged with any non-religious groups in developing guidance in the past?*
- 4) In what format is data on asylum claims outcomes held and how are overall outcomes for different cases measured and collated for quality control and review purposes? A brief explanation will suffice as I am surprised none of the above can be answered without manually checking all individual records.*

Response

1) What advisers or documents are available to assist caseworkers in determining what is plausible when assessing convention reasons, beyond that linked in the document Asylum Policy Instruction?

The reference to "document Asylum Policy Instruction" is understood to refer to the Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status Asylum Policy Instruction. This policy instruction provides guidance for decision makers in the assessment of credibility in an asylum claim. All salient domestic legislation, international law, associated policy and research is linked therein.

Every decision making unit contains Technical Specialists, at a ratio of one per 12 Decision Makers. Senior Caseworkers manage this function and make final technical decisions.

Senior Caseworkers can seek further advice from Asylum Policy advisors as required

Country advice is available on a case-by-case basis via a Country of Origin Request, which is answered by a country specialist. Country specialists may also be available to answer case-specific telephone queries.

Evidence provided by out-of-country bodies supports decision makers in assessing the credibility of an asylum claim, such as information gathered as part of the visa application process, travel movements requests, and FCO document verification.

2) Given that the section on religious conversion makes reference only Christianity, what advice is available to assessors to ensure this guidance is not inappropriately applied to conversions to non-religious or informal religious traditions?

The reference to "the section on religious conversion" is understood to relate to the section within the Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status Asylum Policy Instruction that relates to Religion (as a Convention reason) and Religious Conversion. Although the Guidance does refer to conversion from Islam to Christianity as this is the most often encountered scenario, it clearly states that the principles set out in the policy guidance apply to other faiths.

Asylum Policy and Country Policy Information Notes are produced based upon the identified frequency with which certain types of asylum claims are made. These trends are identified by decision makers, Technical Specialists and Senior Caseworkers. Should a new trend be identified, Asylum Policy and the Country Policy Information Team will consider production of associated guidance. The absence of Country Policy Information Notes (CPINs) and Country of Origin Requests on the topic of non-religious or informal religious traditions is indicative of the rarity with which such claims for asylum are encountered.

Should claims such as non-religious or informal religious tradition claims be encountered, decision makers are supported by the Technical Specialist/Senior

Caseworker advice provision described above. A Country of Origin Request may be required to obtain additional guidance.

Technical Specialists will advise that apostasy applies to non-religious or informal religious traditions as well as becoming apostate through conversion to an alternative formal religious tradition. The penalties for becoming apostate will be investigated, as it is on this issue that risk may be established.

3) Can you confirm if you have engaged with any non-religious groups in developing guidance in the past?

We consult with a number of different groups and organisations during the course of the development of guidance and when current guidance is updated. This is usually through the National Asylum Stakeholders Forum (NASF), but we also engage with faith groups and the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for International Freedom of Religion or Belief.

4) In what format is data on asylum claims outcomes held and how are overall outcomes for different cases measured and collated for quality control and review purposes? A brief explanation will suffice as I am surprised none of the above can be answered without manually checking all individual records.

Case outcomes available as searchable data are:

Granted asylum

Asylum refused - non certified

Asylum refused - certified s94

Asylum refused - certified s96

Asylum refused - grant humanitarian protection Asylum refused - grant discretionary leave Asylum refused - grant family life Asylum refused - grant private life

The Convention/non-Convention reasons that lead to individual cases being granted asylum/subsidiary protection or refused are contained only in the decision letters in the database document generator. This is not keyword searchable.

Quality control and review are distinct from case outcomes. Certain case types are subject to 100% second pair of eyes (SPOE) by a Technical Specialist. New decision makers are subject to 100% SPOE until Senior Caseworkers are satisfied that the quality of their work is such that SPOE is no longer necessary. Decision makers whose work is assessed as requiring improvement, or who request support, also have their work SPOEd. Casework undertaken by decision makers not on performance or support-related SPOE is established through periodic interview observation and decision assessment by Technical Specialists. 3.5% of all asylum casework is subject to a formal quality assessment process known as QATRO, wherein Technical Specialists assess randomly selected casework using a standardised framework and provide feedback. This is known as Stage 1 quality assurance. The Assurance and Compliance Team provides Stage 2 thematic QATRO assessments.

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting a complaint within two months to foirequests@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk, quoting reference **47563**. If you ask for an internal review, it would be helpful if you could say why you are dissatisfied with the response.

As part of any internal review the Department's handling of your information request would be reassessed by staff who were not involved in providing you with this response. If you were to remain dissatisfied after an internal review, you would have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the FOI Act.

Yours sincerely

C. Walls
Customer Performance & Improvement.

We value your feedback, please use the link below to access a brief anonymous survey to help us improve our service to you:

<http://www.homeofficesurveys.homeoffice.gov.uk/s/108105TAZNG>