

A guide to completing the Preliminary Information Questionnaire

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Introduction

The Preliminary Information Questionnaire (PIQ) is the current way in which the Home Office asks you to provide more information about yourself, your family and why you have claimed asylum

Alongside the screening interview (which comes before the PIQ) and the asylum interview (which comes after the PIQ), the PIQ is the main way in which the Home Office takes information directly from people claiming asylum

Most of it is not about actually the reasons that you have left your country or cannot return and some of it repeats what you have already been asked in the screening interview.

You should complete the PIQ but you do not need to complete every section as it is not all necessary to help the Home Office decide if you should be allowed to stay or if your family can join you

Information in these slides is intended to help you understand and complete the PIQ but it is not a substitute for individual legal advice (if available to you)

Introduction to completing the questionnaire

The Home Office informs people that it is necessary to complete the PIQ and submit by a date that they put on the front page of the questionnaire; failure to return it by that date **might** lead to your claim being treated as withdrawn; if you can't complete it by that date, write a letter to the Home Office to explain why – don't just ignore it

At the start of section 3 of the PIQ, it states:

“This form is to help you provide information about the reasons why you need protection in the UK. The information requested is to help the Home Office understand why you are afraid to go home ahead of your asylum interview.”

In fact, most of the questions do not relate to your fears on returning home; In addition, the PIQ does not ask all of the right questions and asks for information that, for many, is not relevant

So you have a choice about what information you give and you may need to give more information than the questionnaire asks you for

It is set out in 9 sections plus a declaration

Contents of the PIQ

1. Claimant information
 2. National Insurance Number
 3. Your reasons for claiming asylum
 4. Addresses in home country
 5. Education
 6. Employment in home country
 7. Medical information
 8. Family
 9. Documentation in support of your claim
- Declaration

Sections 1 and 2: About you

The first two sections ask for information about you and your National Insurance number; National Insurance (NI) numbers are issued to people who have permission to work (which includes foreign nationals in the UK with student visas)

The information that you need to give includes your Home Office reference – this will be on any document issued by the Home Office after you have claimed asylum; it might be the first letter of your family name followed by 7 numbers e.g. C1234567 or, if that hasn't yet been issued, it might be a reference such as ASC/12345678

It also asks for your email address and phone number

The section on the NI also asks if you have ever applied for an NI (even if it wasn't issued)

Both sections talk about the information being necessary if you are issued with a residence permit (i.e. granted permission to stay) but only name, nationality, date and place of birth, NI number appear on a residence permit

Section 3: Reasons for claiming asylum

The questions in the PIQ

There are four main questions in the section about why you have claimed asylum

They are:

- a. *“Why do you fear returning to your home country and what do you fear will happen if you were to return?”*
- b. *“Details of any specific events in which you were **personally** involved that relate to your asylum claim and any specific person, organisation or group you fear. Please include dates for these events, where you can.”*
- c. *“How did you travel to the UK including details of anything that happened to you on your journey?”*
- d. *“Details of anything that has happened **since** you arrived in the UK which has made you afraid to return home.”*

These questions are not necessarily helpful and they do not ask for information that is also important

There are some additional parts to this section if you have children with you.

Question 3a

The question in the questionnaire is: *“Why do you fear returning to your home country and what do you fear will happen if you were to return?”*

Try answering these questions instead:

- Has anything happened to you or to someone you know which made you decide to leave your country? If so, what happened? or
- Did you leave your country **before** something happened? If so, what did you fear was going to happen if you stayed? and
- If you claimed asylum because of something that has happened since you left, what was it that happened? And/or
- Has something changed in your country since you left that means it is no longer safe to go back?

Whatever you fear will happen, it doesn't have to be something that will happen immediately on your return; it might be that you are safe for a while but eventually someone will hurt or even kill you; this is particularly true for women who, for example, fear domestic violence from their own family rather from the government and for women who are lesbians who fear people within their community if this becomes known

Question 3b

*“Details of any specific events in which you were **personally** involved that relate to your asylum claim and any specific person, organisation or group you fear. Please include dates for these events, where you can.”*

- If something has happened to you already, **and if that is the reason that you are claiming asylum**, give as much detail as you can (avoiding dates if you do not remember them)

For example, if you were arrested and detained on suspicion of being involved in activities against the government, try to give details about what happened and also how this led to your decision to leave

But, sometimes, things can have happened to someone else and not to you; this is just as important and relevant

For example, your partner may have been beaten up or arrested or disappeared and you fear that this puts you at risk

In addition, things may have happened to you but that is not the reason that you left

For example, you may have faced years of abuse from your husband but that isn't the reason that you left

- If something has happened to someone else instead of you or as well as you (e.g. to your husband, your children, people in the same ethnic group), give as much detail as possible

For example, you may have left because your husband arranged a marriage for your 13-year-old daughter to an older man and you didn't want that to happen

Question 3c

The question in the PIQ is:

“How did you travel to the UK including details of anything that happened to you on your journey?”

The first part of this question is asking for information that you have already been asked in your screening interview so you do not need to repeat it; you can say something like: “I have given this information in my screening interview”

But the questions that may be important to answer in this section are:

- When did you leave your country?

If this is a few years ago, it would be useful to say where you have been since and why you have been in those countries

- How did you leave your country?

Illegal departure from your country can lead to problems even if nothing else has happened to you before your left; so give as much information as you can about how you left (e.g. on foot across a particular border, on a false passport, etc.)

- Which countries have you lived in or travelled through before you got to the UK?

Did anything bad happen to you in any of those countries? If so, what? If you do not want to say because you don't want to remember it then say that e.g. if you travelled through or stayed in Libya you could just give the places you stayed but say that you do not want to talk about it but it is important that the Home Office understands a little of what you have experienced before you arrived in the UK because this can impact your health and make it harder for you to talk about other things

Even if nothing bad happened, you still need to say why you did not stay in the countries that you passed through

Question 3d

This section asks for: *“Details of anything that has happened since you arrived in the UK which has made you afraid to return home.”*

This question is relevant to you if you have, for example, become involved in activities here which either the government of your country or your family/community would not support and may take action against you; this might be your political activities or, for example, because you were finally open about being a lesbian

It also applies to women who have, for example, had a relationship and/or a child outside of marriage

For this to lead to risks if you went home, the government or your family/community would need to know about it either before you go back (by your government monitoring political opposition in the UK) or after you go back (because you wish to be open about being a lesbian) so you would need to explain how you think that they will know or find out

This question also applies to people who were already in the UK when they learned that something had changed in their country meaning that it was no longer possible to go home, for example, there was a change of government, or someone you worked with politically has been arrested and you fear that your name will be forced out of them

Important questions the
Home Office does not ask in
the PIQ

Decision to leave your country

Whose decision was it that you should leave your country?

If the decision was not yours, who made the decision for you?

Do you know why they made that decision?

If you didn't leave because it wasn't unsafe, why did you leave?

If it was safe when you left, what made you decide to claim asylum?

Why did you leave when you did?

What was the plan when you left the country?

If nothing happened before you left

If you had stayed in your country, what might have happened to you?

Why do you think this would have happened?

Could you have done anything to avoid something happening e.g. could you have moved to another part of the country

Why does that make you think that it isn't safe now to go back now?

Lack of evidence of identity/nationality

Why don't you have any documents?

Why do you say that you are a citizen of a country that you weren't living in for many years?

What can you say about the country of which you are a citizen?

If you don't know very much about it, why don't you know much?

If you don't speak the main language of your country of citizenship, what is your main language?

If your language is different from the main or official language of your country of nationality, how can you explain that you don't speak it?

If you were ever detained

When did this happen?

How many times did this happen (if it was more than once)?

Why were you released (if you know the reason)?

How soon after your release did you leave the country?

If you didn't leave the country when you were released, why did you stay?

How did you get out of the country if you had already been of interest to the authorities there?

If you were released, why are you at risk now?

If you were ill-treated in detention, do you have any visible scars or injuries?

If so, have you had any medical treatment for them?

Use of false documents

If you have ever used a false document (e.g. a passport in a false name) to either leave your country or enter any other (including the UK), then it is useful to say when and why you did this.

The Home Office may have this information anyway (e.g. from your fingerprints) so it is better to give an explanation for it

It is possible that you may even have presented a false passport when you claimed asylum e.g. because you entered on a domestic worker's visa on a passport used by your employer but which was not actually yours

Use of genuine documents and travel outside of your country

Why did you get a passport?

If you used that passport and then went back to your country, why did you go back?

If you travelled from your country on your own passport, why were you allowed to leave/why weren't you stopped?

Other family members or political allies

Are there any other members of your family/political allies who have been granted asylum in any country?

If so, were there reasons for claiming asylum similar to your own?

When and where did they get asylum?

Include information about them and, if possible, get proof of:

- their status where they live

- any evidence that their asylum claim related to the reasons that you are claiming asylum

Delay in claiming asylum

Why didn't you apply for asylum in the first European country that you arrived in?

If you did claim asylum in a European country, why did you leave it?

Why didn't you claim asylum as soon as you arrived in the UK?

How long were you in the UK before you claimed asylum?

Why did you wait until then to claim asylum?

Why did you wait and only claim asylum after you had been refused permission to extend your stay (e.g. as a student)?

Why didn't you apply for asylum until you were arrested by immigration?

Visa applications

If you have ever applied for a visa to come to the UK (even if it was not granted), your application and any supporting documents will be obtained by the Home Office

They will compare what has been said in the visa application form with what you say in any interview, statement or in your PIQ

It is therefore useful if you include some information in your PIQ about why you applied for a visa and whether any of the information you gave then was true

For example, if you lied in your visa application e.g. that you had a business/employment or were living with family members in your country when this was not true, explain why you gave that information, for example because you needed to get out of your country and this was the only way that you could do it.

Section 3:

Children dependent on your asylum claim

Section 3 also includes the following:

“You only need to complete this question if you are including a child / children who are under 18 years old on your claim for asylum.

“We understand that your child(ren) also want to claim asylum. If that is not the case please provide details below”

You do not need to complete this section **unless you do not wish your child(ren)** to be included

Asylum claims from a family (spouse/partner and children under 18) are now treated as a family application but it usually only the parent (and possibly only one) who is the main applicant

Children can have their own claim for asylum but are often simply included as a dependant.

Unless your child(ren) has a separate issue to yourself and is old/mature enough to understand what asylum is about, it would usually be your decision, not your child(ren)’s about whether they claim asylum themselves.

It is not unusual for an adult to claim asylum even though the greater risk is to their child(ren) rather than themselves; in addition, the child(ren) may be unaware of the risk (e.g. of FGM, forced marriage, association with opposition politics)

If your claim is primarily because of a risk to your child(ren), make that clear in the section about reasons for claiming asylum

Section 4:

Addresses in your home country

“Please tell us all the places you have lived in your home country over the past five years and how long you lived there”

This question is only relevant if you moved to another part of your country before you left

If this applies to you, why did you leave the country rather than either staying there or going back to where you used to live?

In addition to answering this question, if you have lived in other countries, it is useful to add this information, especially if it relates to your reasons for not being able to return safely to your country

For most people, this part is not relevant and can be left blank

Section 5: Education

“How many years have you spent in education? Please name the schools that you attended, and years spent at those schools”

If you have, e.g. completed education to a degree level, you should consider adding this in this section

For most people, this is not relevant to their asylum claim (especially the details of the schools attended) and doesn't need to be completed

You might also like to add details of what languages you speak if this indicates a level of education above what most people in your country would have

Section 6:

Employment

“What was your last job role before you left your home country? Who was your employer and what was their address?”

This section is only relevant if your asylum claim relates to your employment

For example, if, as a member of the military, you have disclosed information that your government has acted illegally or you worked for a government and might disclose information which is not in their interests

It is useful, however, to include details of any work that you have done in your country if that shows that you were well-established and did not leave for ‘economic reasons’ e.g. you were a lecturer, doctor, ran for your own company

For others, it can be left blank

Section 7:

Medical information

“Tell us about any medical conditions that you have and any treatment you have been receiving. Please include evidence of your conditions, where possible. You should include details of any mental health conditions or support you are receiving.”

If nothing has changed since your screening interview, this can be left blank

If you are having tests to identify what is wrong, or waiting for an appointment e.g. for scans, x-rays, counselling, put this information down

Include information about how your own or your family member's ill health is impacting you (and them)

You should include information about health and disabilities both for yourself and any family members who are part of your claim e.g. a deaf child who is in a specialist school

Section 8:

About your family

This section contains boxes in which they ask for details (including names, dates of birth, contact details, your last contact with them, etc.) of your spouse/partner and children under 18; this is whether they are with you in the UK or not

It also asks for information about any social services department that is involved with your family and the school(s) that your children are attending

If you have already given this information in your screening interview, you can just refer back to that

It is important to include family members who are not with you because, if you are granted asylum, this information will be reviewed when you apply for them to be issued with visas to join you

Section 9:

Documentation

The section on documents contains the following information:

“Any documents you submit must be original documents, not photocopies...If the documents are not in English ... You must enclose a certified English translation as well. If you do not have a certified English translation, we may not be able to accept them. If you submit photocopies, please explain why you do not have the original.”

“You must provide all documentation at your disposal regarding your age, background, identity, nationality, previous places of residence and travel routes.

“Please list all documents you wish to submit providing the following:

- *What the document is*
- *How the document relates to your asylum claim*
- *What language(s) it is written in*

If not currently in your possession, when will you be submitting it?”

Documents

Can you get any evidence to confirm that anything you are saying is true, particularly as it relates to your nationality and reasons for fearing to return to your country?

Documents regarding nationality are particularly important if there is a possibility that the Home Office will dispute your nationality

In addition to the questions that the Home Office want answering about documents, it is also important to say how you got the document e.g. Did you bring it with you? Did someone send it to you? What is the proof of how you received it (post? email? through someone who collected it for you)? Send that proof with the document

If you try to get a document but you don't succeed, give that information to the Home Office in this section and give them the proof of your attempt(s) e.g. you emailed a hospital which treated you when you were released from prison; you asked for confirmation that your husband had divorced you

It is not essential (or even possible) to submit documents with the PIQ. They can be submitted at a later date e.g. at your asylum interview but it is important to try to confirm what you have said

Declaration

The declaration reads:

*“You must now read the declaration below and sign it. **You are responsible for the accuracy of the statements in this form.** The declaration must be signed by you.*

“I believe the information I have given to be true.

“I am aware that making false statements could be considered a criminal offence under immigration legislation.

Signed

Date”

DO NOT SIGN ANYTHING IF YOU ARE NOT SURE WHAT HAS BEEN WRITTEN IN THE PIQ. MAKE SURE SOMEONE READS IT BACK TO YOU SO YOU CAN ADD OR CORRECT ANY PART OF IT

If anyone else has helped you complete the PIQ, they also have to sign in the sections which follow your declaration

Thank you!

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