

PRO BONO ASYLUM CASES: COUNTRY CONDITIONS RESOURCES



What is the purpose of submitting country conditions?

A client's testimony alone is usually not sufficient to prove an asylum case. Country conditions documentation provides objective evidence that your client's fear of persecution is well founded. It is also necessary when establishing a particular social group argument. Country conditions documentation provides much needed context for the adjudicator to place your client's fears in perspective. Country conditions documentations shore up your client's statements about arrest practices, dates of protests, government practices and political leaders. Finally, documentation helps demonstrate future persecution as well as the conditions faced by similarly situated persons.

How much do I need to submit?

While reasonable minds can differ regarding volume, in general you want to be able to support all of the elements of your client's claim for asylum with relevant documentary evidence, both primary and secondary. Country conditions evidence is considered secondary evidence (unless it specifically names your client). You want a mix of both broad reports addressing conditions in the country generally and newspaper articles or reports that address particularities relevant to your client. Five documents are probably too few, but five inches is probably too much and will not be read by your adjudicator.

What are reliable sources?

Reports from government agencies, major news agencies and independent NGO's are all reliable sources. Do review local news sources from your client's country, but research which are tabloid-type journals or state-run news sources compared with independent press. Global Journalist reports on press freedom around the world and may provide insight into reliability of local sources:

<http://www.globaljournalist.org/>. Be cautious using internet articles where you cannot verify the publication or whether the article is opinion or fact.

Where do I find country reports?

[This is not an exhaustive list, but merely a starting point.]

We always include the U.S. State Department Human Rights Reports, updated every year (usually in February/March) – found here: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/>. The State Department also publishes religious freedom reports, found here: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/rpt/index.htm>.

The Executive Office for Immigration Review recently created a county conditions page of its own, containing links to the Dept. of State and NGO resources:

http://www.justice.gov/eoir/vll/country/country_index.html

Amnesty International: www.amnesty.org reports on human rights issues globally and sometimes does specific issue reports in certain countries.

Human Rights Watch: www.hrw.org also reports on human rights issues globally and does topical reports.

European Country of Origin Information Network: www.ecoi.net

International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission: <http://www.iglhrc.org/cgi-bin/iowa/home/index.html>

Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada, Research Division: <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/eng/resrec/respro/Pages/index.aspx>

UNHCR Refworld: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/>

All Africa News: <http://allafrica.com/>
Committee to Protect Journalists: <http://www.cpj.org/reports/>
Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/> also a good resource to call and seek assistance tracking down foreign newspapers, if necessary.
UNIFEM Virtual Knowledge Centre on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: <http://www.endvawnow.org/>.
StopVAW: <http://stopvaw.org/> a resource on violence against women with a focus on central and eastern Europe.
The United Nations reviews country compliance with various human rights treaties periodically; these reports may be relevant to your case. Look to the UNHCR website: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/WelcomePage.aspx> under Universal Periodic Review.
The Advocates conducts some fact finding and has contributed to the Universal Periodic Review for countries where we work, our reports can be found at our website: www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org.

When do I submit country information?

Country conditions information should be submitted with the initial asylum application filing. Country conditions should be updated, if necessary, prior to the asylum interview or immigration court individual hearing. Particularly if there has been a long gap in time between the initial submission and the adjudication you will want to provide updated human rights reports (if available) and other sources to indicate current conditions.

How do I decide what to submit?

Always read everything you are submitting – if it's too long for you to read it then do not submit it. One sentence may be great, but a page later may be information that contradicts your client's statement. The key question is: "What does this add to my client's case?" Does the article or report support an element of your client's claim? If the answer is no, or if it contradicts your client, do not submit.

For very long reports, where only one chapter may be relevant, excerpt that chapter along with the cover page and table of contents for the full report so the adjudicator can see where the chapter came from, the context, and the source but does not have to dig through 75 pages of less-relevant document to reach the five pages that matter.

What format do I use for submission?

A table of contents should always be included with submission. If you are filing documentation with the immigration court, follow the Immigration Court Practice Manual for formatting, found at www.usdoj.gov/eoir. For filings with USCIS formatting is more flexible but it is recommended that you follow the practice manual in the event the case ends up at the court. Annotating the table of contents, including highlighting quotes from the materials is highly advisable. Samples are included in The Advocates Asylum Manual.

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