



Home Office

Gender issues in the asylum claim

Version 3.0

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About this guidance

This guidance tells Asylum caseworkers how to consider asylum cases where gender-related persecution or serious harm forms all or part of the claim.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors, then email the Asylum Policy team.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email the Guidance Rules and Forms team.

Publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was published:

- version 3.0
- published for Home Office staff on 10 April 2018

Changes from last version of this guidance

- new sections on so called 'honour-based' claims, forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM)
- additional information about safeguarding and signposting to organisations that can provide support to victims of gender-based violence
- an updated section on how this guidance applies to claims involving children
- trafficking section updated in line with modern slavery guidance
- updated terminology and hyperlinks to sources of information and guidance
- new guidance template applied, including introduction and legislation sections, and section and paragraph numbering removed in line with guidance requirements

Related content

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Introduction

This guidance explains how you must consider gender-related issues in the asylum claim. Issues in relation to [gender identity](#) and [sexual identity](#) are covered in separate pieces of guidance. This guidance must be read in conjunction with the main asylum policy guidance, in particular:

- [Assessing credibility and refugee status](#)
- [Humanitarian protection](#)
- [Discretionary leave](#)
- [Asylum interviews](#)
- [Dependants and family members](#)
- [Processing children's asylum claims](#)
- [Gender identity issues in the asylum claim: transgender](#)
- [Sexual identity issues in the asylum claim](#)
- Domestic violence: responding to reports of domestic violence and abuse from asylum seekers
- [Exclusion \(Article 1F\) and Article 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#)

See [asylum decision making guidance](#) for further asylum guidance. You must also refer to the relevant [country policy and information notes](#) which includes gender specific guidance on individual countries of origin.

For family and private life applications see [family leave](#) guidance and [family modernised guidance](#).

Background

You may see asylum claims from women or men that raise gender-related issues and such matters must be carefully considered to identify whether they give rise to protection needs. Forms of persecution or serious harm relevant to women are often, but not always, very different from those experienced by men.

Violence against women can occur more commonly within the family or community but is also possible at the hands of state authorities. Some forms of gender-based harm happen exclusively to women and girls, for example female genital mutilation (FGM). The levels of discrimination experienced by women may amount to persecution in countries where serious legal, cultural or social restrictions are placed upon them.

Customs and traditions which are potentially harmful to women, although contrary to the law in some countries may be tolerated or the state may be unable or unwilling to enforce the law. In such circumstances, this can make recourse to protection more difficult for women.

It is important to ensure that the asylum process is gender sensitive throughout. All those who seek asylum must be treated with dignity and respect, including those who may have been affected by gender-based harm. A failure to do so may make it

even more difficult for claimants to disclose sensitive information relevant to their claim. You must carefully consider whether protection is needed because of gender-related persecution or serious harm and ensure your decision addresses such issues with appropriate sensitivity. This is an important part of the wider government strategy to tackle violence against women and girls.

Policy intention

The policy intention in considering gender-based asylum claims is to:

- treat all those who seek asylum with dignity and respect, including those whose fear is based on gender-related persecution or serious harm
- carefully and sensitively consider all claims in a gender-sensitive asylum process that encourages early disclosure of relevant information
- assist early identification of safeguarding concerns and where appropriate signpost claimants to appropriate support services
- ensure that protection is granted where it is needed without undue delay, whilst refusing those who do not have a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm on return to their country

Application in respect of children

[Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009](#) requires the Home Office to ensure that immigration and nationality functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the UK. This applies to children who claim in their own right and those who are dependent on their parents' claim.

The statutory guidance, [Every child matters – change for children](#), sets out the important principles to take into account in all actions. The best interests of the child are a primary consideration (though not necessarily the only consideration) when making decisions affecting children. Gender is one of the factors to take in account when working with a child and their family as well as ethnic identity, language, religion, faith and disability.

You must be aware that children may be more susceptible to particular forms of gender-based harm, such as FGM or forced marriage, and either being subjected to or witnessing domestic or sexual abuse is likely to have a significant adverse effect. You must carefully and sensitively consider such issues in cases involving unaccompanied children and be aware that there may be individual protection needs for children who are part of a family seeking asylum.

See the [Processing children's asylum claims](#) and [Dependants and family members](#) for asylum policy guidance.

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Safeguarding and signposting to support services

All asylum claimants receive the [information leaflet for asylum claims](#) which includes information about support services. Where the Home Office is made aware that a claimant has been subjected to gender-based harm or sexual violence, you should provide information on where further support can be accessed. Some asylum seekers may not be aware of the support that is available to them or how to access it, so the information you provide is important in directing potentially vulnerable people towards the help they may need.

Take the time to turn to the relevant page of the information leaflet and show the claimant the telephone numbers of services that can assist them (if they do not have the leaflet provide them with another copy). Explain that they are Freephone, confidential helpline services and they will speak to someone trained to help them. Do not mark or highlight this section of the leaflet unless the claimant asks you to as this could put them in danger, for example, if the perpetrator is a family member. You must update Home Office records when the claimant has been signposted to an appropriate support provider.

Where there is a safeguarding issue, you do not have to hold the asylum decision whilst this is investigated. However, you must speak to your senior caseworker to check whether decision service is appropriate, or if the safeguarding issue needs to be considered as part of the asylum claim to reach an informed decision on protection needs. If there is a specific safeguarding referral, for example to a doctor or social services, that must be made, you must liaise with your safeguarding lead and a 'Safeguarding Referral Process' Special Conditions flag must be raised on the Case Information Database (CID).

If at any point in the interview you become concerned that a claimant may be in danger, you need to take immediate action to ensure their safety. Explain to the claimant that the police in the UK take these crimes seriously and offer to contact the police on their behalf but ensure you have the claimant's consent before doing so. The case must immediately be referred to your local safeguarding team, whether or not the claimant consents to you contacting the police on their behalf.

Where there are child welfare or protection concerns that may involve safeguarding issues within the family unit (for example, a child being at potential risk of FGM or where a child has undergone FGM), the case must be referred immediately to your local safeguarding team. The local safeguarding team will refer the case to the relevant local authority. There is no requirement to obtain the consent of any adults involved as safeguarding the child is our primary responsibility. In an emergency, and out of normal working hours, the case must be referred to the police. The Office of the Children's Champion can also offer specialist safeguarding and welfare advice on all issues relating to children, including family court proceedings and complex child protection cases.

There is further information on safeguarding and links to posters and leaflets for use in public areas, and sources of information to help you to signpost claimants to the appropriate support services, see:

- [female genital mutilation \(FGM\)](#)
- [forced marriage](#)
- [domestic abuse](#)
- [modern slavery](#)

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

The mandatory e-learning course [Recognising and preventing FGM](#) must be completed if you may come into contact with FGM claimants or their case files. Whilst the FGM reporting duty only applies to regulated health and social care professionals and teachers, you still have a safeguarding duty and must report any potential safeguarding issues to your safeguarding lead, including where women or girls may be at risk of FGM or have already been subject to FGM.

The World Health Organisation defines FGM as ‘all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons’. Physical checks are not part of the asylum process but it is important to be aware that FGM or ‘cutting’ is referred to by different names and terms in different languages and that there are different types of FGM. Also, sensitivity is required when addressing FGM with claimants, the women and girls involved may come from a cultural background in which FGM is an accepted norm and they may be unaware that FGM is illegal in the UK.

An FGM Protection Order (FGMPO) is a civil order which may be made by a Family Court for the purposes of protecting those at risk of or who have undergone FGM. The Home Office may be contacted for information when an FGMPO has been requested. Contact may be received from the police or the courts, for example to provide immigration status information. Depending on the case the Home Office may become involved in proceedings as an interested party and in such cases appropriate legal advice must be sought.

Women and girls who have undergone FGM may experience numerous physical and mental health issues as a result of being cut, and so a referral to the local safeguarding team is vital.

For guidance on who to contact for help and advice as well as information on FGM support services postcode finder which sets out specific services available in local areas, see: [FGM help and advice](#). Further information can be found on GOV.UK including helplines, leaflets, posters and multi-agency guidance, see: [FGM](#).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have endorsed the [‘United to End FGM platform’](#). This is a free, online training tool to train professionals dealing with those affected by FGM.

Forced marriage

Forced marriage must not be confused with arranged marriage. In an arranged marriage, both parties consent to the union and can refuse to marry if they choose to. A forced marriage is one in which one or both spouses do not (or, in the case of someone who does not have the necessary mental capacity, cannot) consent to the marriage and various forms of violence and abuse, threats or other forms of coercion are involved. Coercion may include emotional, psychological or physical force or financial pressure or the threat of physical force.

If a child is at potential risk of a forced marriage, then children's social care must be notified without delay. If they are at immediate risk of a forced marriage, then the police must also be notified to ensure they are safeguarded without delay.

A Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO) is a civil order which may be made by the Family Court for the purposes of protecting someone at risk of or who has been subjected to a forced marriage. The Home Office may be contacted for information when an FMPO has been requested. Contact may be received from the police or the courts, for example to provide immigration status information. Depending on the case the Home Office may become involved in proceedings as an interested party and in such cases appropriate legal advice must be sought.

The joint Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) operates a public helpline to provide advice and consular support to victims of forced marriage as well as to professionals dealing with cases and can signpost to relevant support services. See: [forced marriage](#) for contact details as well as publications and resources including posters. It also includes multi-agency guidance.

Domestic abuse

Victims of domestic abuse should be directed towards the helplines detailed in the [information leaflet for asylum claims](#). If at any point you become concerned that a claimant and or their children may be in danger, you need to take immediate action to ensure their safety. Those exposed to domestic abuse are at risk of significant physical and emotional harm. Their welfare and safety is paramount and if information emerges that a child is living in an environment where they witness domestic abuse, then children's social care must be alerted without delay. See [Safeguarding and signposting to support services](#) for actions to take.

The [Three steps to escaping domestic violence](#) leaflet is aimed specifically at women in black and minority ethnic communities. It brings together such issues as so called 'honour-based' abuse (including FGM and forced marriage), dowry abuse, domestic and sexual abuse, and having no recourse to public funds.

The [Domestic violence campaign](#) poster is aimed at perpetrators of domestic abuse to encourage them to get help through the Respect phone line.

Modern slavery

For potential victims of modern slavery including trafficking you must refer to the [Victims of modern slavery: guidance for frontline staff](#). If you think that a person is a potential victim of modern slavery you must consider a referral into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Under the NRM, a trained specialist will investigate the matter further. You must also consider the potential victim's safety and any health considerations.

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Relevant legislation

The Refugee Convention

The [Refugee Convention](#) provides the framework for international refugee protection. It has been supplemented in the European Union (EU) by a subsidiary protection regime, and the progressive development of international human rights law. Gender is not mentioned specifically as a convention reason in the Refugee Convention but it must inform your assessment of whether one or more of the 5 convention grounds may be applicable.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees defined the concept of gender in its [Guidelines on International Protection: Gender-related persecution within the context of Article 1A\(2\) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#).

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

[CEDAW](#) (often referred to as the 'women's bill of rights') is an international human rights treaty that focuses specifically on equality between women and men in all areas of life and was ratified by the UK in 1986. This commits the UK to taking steps to end discrimination against women in all forms and this also applies to women seeking asylum. It includes a general recommendation (32) on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women.

European legislation

The [Council Directive 2004/83/EC \(the Qualification Directive\)](#) lays down provisions and criteria for interpreting the Refugee Convention to be adopted across the EU. It has been transposed into UK law through [The Refugee or Person in Need of International Protection \(Qualification\) Regulations 2006](#) and the [Immigration Rules](#).

The Qualification Directive (QD) articles most relevant to this guidance are:

- article 8- this concerns internal relocation
- article 9- sets out what is meant by persecution for the purposes of the Refugee Convention:
 - article 9 (2)(f)- refers specifically to acts of a gender-specific or child-specific nature and though not transposed into UK law by the 2006 Regulations or changes to Immigration Rules, it is accepted as Home Office policy that acts of a gender-specific nature may also constitute persecution in individual cases

The [Council Directive 2005/85/EC](#) (the Procedures Directive) sets minimum standards for member states for granting and withdrawing refugee status and has

been transposed into UK law through the [Asylum \(Procedures\) Regulations 2007](#) and the [Immigration Rules](#).

[The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (Istanbul Convention) is based on the understanding that violence against women is a form of gender-based violence committed against women because they are women. It is the obligation of the state to address it fully in all its forms and to take measures to prevent violence against women, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators. The UK is signatory to this Convention.

Article 60 on gender-based asylum claims is particularly relevant requiring signatory states to:

- take the necessary measures to ensure gender-based violence against women may be recognised as a form of persecution within the meaning of the Refugee Convention
- ensure that a gender-sensitive interpretation is given to each of the Convention grounds
- develop gender-sensitive reception procedures and support services for asylum seekers as well as gender guidelines and gender-sensitive asylum procedures.

UK legislation

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as implemented by the [Human Rights Act 1998](#) gives effect to the human rights set out in the ECHR and everyone in the UK is protected by the act regardless of their immigration status.

Section 8 of the [Asylum and Immigration \(Treatment of Claimants, etc.\) Act 2004](#) requires you to take into account the claimant's conduct when applying the benefit of the doubt to unsubstantiated material facts. You must provide the claimant with an opportunity to explain the reasons for such behaviour during the asylum interview.

The [Equality Act 2010](#) legally protects people from discrimination and replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single act. The public-sector equality duty was created under the Equality Act 2010 and applies to public bodies, and organisations carrying out a public function, across Great Britain. It means that as part of a public body you must consider all individuals when carrying out your day-to-day work, including delivering services. It requires you to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out your work.

The [Female Genital Mutilation \(FGM\) Act 2003](#) replaced the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which made FGM illegal in the UK. The 2003 act further made it illegal to arrange for a child to be taken abroad for FGM. The 2003 act was amended by sections 70 to 75 of the Serious Crime Act 2015:

- the [Serious Crime Act 2015](#) extended the scope of extra-territorial offences (of FGM committed abroad by UK nationals and those habitually (as well as

permanently) resident in the UK), granted victims of FGM lifelong anonymity and introduced a new offence of failing to protect a girl from risk of FGM- these sections, 70 to 72, came into force on 3 May 2015

- section 73 came into force on 17 July 2015 and introduced FGM Protection Orders (FGMPOs)
- section 74 came into force on 31 October 2015 and introduced a mandatory reporting duty which requires specified professionals to report known cases of FGM in under 18s to the police in England and Wales
- section 74 also provides for the issue of statutory multi-agency guidance on FGM

The FGM mandatory reporting duty does not extend to UK Visas and Immigration but you do still have a [safeguarding](#) responsibility. This reporting duty does not apply in Scotland or Northern Ireland where existing safeguarding responsibilities must be complied with.

The [Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation \(Scotland\) Act 2005](#) re-enacted the existing offences in the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985, and extended protection by giving those offences extra-territorial effect in order to protect those being sent abroad to have FGM carried out.

The [Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014](#) made it a criminal offence to force someone to marry. This includes:

- taking someone overseas to force them to marry (whether or not the forced marriage takes place)
- marrying someone who lacks the mental capacity to consent to the marriage (whether they're pressured to or not)

Immigration Rules

[Part 11 of the Immigration Rules](#) sets out the provisions for considering asylum claims and reflects our obligations under the Refugee Convention and EU law.

[Paragraph 339J of the Immigration Rules](#) requires the assessment of an asylum claim, eligibility for a grant of humanitarian protection (HP) or a human rights claim to be carried out on an individual, objective and impartial basis.

Violence Against Women and Girls strategy

The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy, published in March 2016, reflects the government's commitment to ending violence against women and girls, both in the UK and abroad. The theme of the strategy is that tackling violence against women and girls is everybody's business. The strategy involves working with local commissioners to deliver a secure future for rape support centres, refuges and FGM and Forced Marriage Units, whilst driving a major change across all services so that early intervention and prevention, not crisis response, is the norm, so that victims get the help they need when they need it. Ensuring the asylum system is gender sensitive forms a part of this wider strategy. This requires you to approach

such issues in a sensitive way and give serious consideration as to whether an asylum claimant is at risk of or has suffered gender-based violence.

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Gender-based forms of persecution

This section tells you how to consider asylum claims where gender-based forms of persecution or serious harm are raised and why you must always consider the individual's personal circumstances. This includes factors such as background, gender and age so that you can assess whether, based on their individual circumstances, the acts to which they have been subjected, or could be exposed to, amount to persecution or serious harm. If so, it is important to consider whether there is a risk of such treatment if they return to their country of origin or former habitual residence.

Country policy information

You must refer to objective [country policy and information notes](#) provided by the Country Policy and Information team (CPIT), particularly the sections or specific reports on gender-related issues. Where information is not available, you must consider, in liaison with your senior caseworker, whether to make a case specific research request to CPIT before deciding the asylum claim. Do not assume that lack of information means that someone has not been subjected to harm or that risk of harm in the future does not exist.

Convention reasons

Gender may inform an assessment of whether one of the 5 Refugee Convention grounds (race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion) is engaged, for example:

- the form of persecution experienced is gender-specific or predominantly gender-specific such as female genital mutilation (FGM), forced abortion or sterilisation
- the reason is gender-based, such as fear on account of gender or gender identity
- the reason for state protection being denied is gender-related

The ways in which gender is also relevant to the experience of persecution may include:

- gender-specific persecution directly because of gender, for example a woman or girl is subjected to FGM
- gender-specific persecution for reasons unrelated to gender, for example a person is raped because they hold or express a political opinion
- non-gender-specific persecution for reasons relating to gender, for example a person is flogged for not adhering to the codes of a religion or prosecuted for refusing to wear a veil

Please see the section on [Refugee Convention and gender](#) for more detailed information on gender and each convention reason.

Forms of harm

There are many forms of harm that are more frequently or only used against women. These can occur in the family, the community, or at the hands of the state. They include, but are not limited to:

- marriage-related harm such as forced marriage
- violence within the family or community, for example 'honour' killings or 'honour-based' violence
- FGM
- forced abortion
- forced sterilisation
- sexual violence, abuse and rape
- forced prostitution, trafficking, modern slavery, or servitude

Tolerance of gender-based violence

The fact that violence against women is common, widespread and culturally accepted in a particular society does not mean that international protection on an individual basis is inappropriate. FGM, for example, is widely practiced in some societies but it is a form of gender-based violence that inflicts severe harm, both mental and physical, and amounts to persecution. Each case must be considered on its own merits in the light of country policy information.

Discrimination based on gender

A discriminatory measure, in itself or cumulatively with others, may, depending on the facts of the case, amount to persecution. This would be the case, for example, if the discrimination has consequences of a substantially prejudicial nature for the person concerned such as but not limited to:

- serious legal, cultural or social restrictions on rights to earn a livelihood
- serious legal, cultural or social restrictions on rights to private and family life
- restrictions on political enfranchisement
- the ability to practise or choose not to practise a religion
- restrictions on access to public places
- the ability to access normally available educational, legal, welfare and health care provision

For example, a woman may have limited property rights or face restricted access to healthcare. Women may also be subjected to discriminatory treatment that is enforced through law or through the imposition of social or religious customs that restrict her opportunities and rights. This can include, but is not limited to, dress codes, employment or education restrictions, restrictions on freedom of movement and activities or political disenfranchisement.

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Refugee Convention and gender

Convention reasons

Gender is not mentioned specifically as a convention reason in the Refugee Convention, but it must inform your assessment of whether one or more of the 5 convention reasons may be applicable. In considering this you must also refer to the [Assessing credibility and refugee status](#) guidance and the relevant [country policy and information notes](#) which include gender specific guidance.

It is important to consider whether a claimant may be persecuted not only in terms of their activities or beliefs, but because of a convention ground which is attributed to them. For example, in many societies a woman's political opinion, race, nationality, religion and social affiliations are often seen as aligned with those of their male relatives or associates or with those of her community.

It is also important to be aware that in many gender-related claims, the persecution feared could be for one, or more, of the convention grounds. For example, a claim based on transgression of social or religious norms may be analysed in terms of religion, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. It is not the responsibility of the claimant to specifically identify the convention reason that applies to them.

If there is no convention reason, you must go on to consider whether the return of the claimant would be contrary to UK obligations under the [European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#). Particular attention must be paid to articles 2, 3 and 8, and whether a grant of humanitarian protection (HP) or discretionary leave (DL) outside the Immigration Rules would be appropriate if there are exceptional circumstances.

Race

Whilst actual or attributed racial identity is not specific to women or men, gender may affect the form that persecution takes and the ability to access state protection in race related cases. For example, whilst the destruction of ethnic identity and or prosperity of a racial group may be through killing, maiming or incarcerating men, women may be viewed as propagating ethnic identity through their reproductive role. This may result in persecution through, for example, sexual violence or control of reproduction. In racially motivated conflicts women and children may therefore be in a particularly vulnerable position.

Religion

A claimant may face harm for adherence to, or rejection of, a religious belief or practice. Religion as the ground of persecution may include, but not be limited to the freedom to hold or not hold a particular belief system and the freedom to practise or not to practise a prescribed religion.

Where the religion assigns particular roles or behavioural codes to men and women, those who refuse or fail to fulfil their assigned role or abide by the codes may establish a well-founded fear of persecution on the ground of religion. For example, a woman who does not adhere to certain dress codes, such as wearing a veil, may be subject to a level of discrimination and harassment that may be sufficient to amount to persecution.

Failure to abide by behavioural codes may be perceived as evidence of holding unacceptable religious opinions regardless of what the individual actually believes about religion. For example, a woman who refuses to marry or engages in certain professions. Religious identity may be perceived to be aligned or shared with that of other members of a claimant's family or community. Imputed or attributed religious identity may therefore be important in assessing the risk of persecution.

There will often be an overlap between religious and political persecution. An example of this is where the state supports or favours a particular religious belief, or tolerates or otherwise fails to provide protection against the activities of non-state agents who are supporters of a particular religious belief.

Nationality

The term nationality does not only mean citizenship. It can include membership of an ethnic or linguistic group and may often overlap with race. Whilst actual or attributed national identity is not specific to women or men, it may link with gender to explain why someone fears persecution. For example, women may be deprived of full citizenship rights in certain circumstances if they marry a foreign national. Women may be prevented from passing their nationality to their children. In such circumstances, it may be necessary to consider what harm results from this loss and whether it amounts to persecution on the basis of nationality.

Many women suffer persecution because people have more power over them as they are 'only women'. For example, in many countries, nationality can only be passed down the male line. Women who do not know their father's identity may be discriminated against to such a degree that it amounts to persecution.

Membership of a particular social group (PSG)

In some cases, gender may be a factor in recognising membership of a PSG or an identifying characteristic of such a group. In some cases, for example, women, or a sub-category of women such as unmarried women, may form a particular social group (PSG). Whether or not an individual forms part of a PSG can be complex and you must refer to guidance in the [Assessing credibility and refugee status](#) and the relevant [country policy and information notes](#) before reaching a decision.

A definition of what constitutes a PSG is provided in article 10(d) of the [Qualification Directive](#), which states that:

A group shall be considered to form a particular social group where, in particular:

- members of that group share an innate characteristic, or a common background that cannot be changed, or share a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it, and
- that group has a distinct identity in the relevant country, because it is perceived as being different by the surrounding society

The PSG guidance in the [Assessing credibility and refugee status](#) guidance sets out how you must approach identifying the existence of a social group which is in line with judgments in the UK courts, most significantly in the House of Lords in [Shah and Islam \[1999\] UKHL 20](#) and [Fornah v SSHD \[2006\] UKHL 46](#).

In *Shah and Islam*, it was found that women in Pakistan formed a PSG. This was because women shared the same immutable characteristic of gender, they formed a distinct group in society as evidenced by widespread discrimination in respect of their fundamental rights and the state did not give them adequate protection as they were not seen as entitled to the same rights as men. In *Fornah*, in an example of a 'sub group' of women, the House of Lords did not consider that 'young women in Sierra Leone' constituted a PSG but accepted that 'uninitiated' or 'intact' women did form such a group.

As set out in *Fornah*, women who may be subject to female genital mutilation (FGM) have been found by the courts in some circumstances to constitute a PSG. Whether a PSG exists depends on conditions in the 'society' from which the claimant comes. It is frequently the way in which society perceives the group as having a distinct identity and being different from the surrounding society that helps to define a PSG. If there is a well-founded fear, which includes evidence, for example, that FGM is knowingly tolerated by the authorities or they are unable or unwilling to offer effective protection, and there is no reasonable possibility of internal relocation, a claimant who claims that she would on return to her home country suffer FGM may therefore qualify for refugee status.

The fact that a PSG may consist of large numbers of the female, or male population in the country concerned is irrelevant; race, religion, nationality and political opinion are also characteristics that are shared by large numbers of people. Also, there is no requirement that a PSG be cohesive or that members of it voluntarily associate or that every member of the group is at risk of persecution. Persecution cannot, however, be the only factor which defines the group, the group must exist independently of the persecution it suffers.

If you consider that a claimant may form part of a PSG which has not yet been recognised within existing case law and country policy information you must discuss the case with a senior caseworker. Similarly, where representations from the claimant or legal representatives seek recognition of a PSG, you must first discuss the arguments with a senior caseworker.

Protection orders

In cases where there is a protection order the detail of the individual protection order must be carefully considered, for example you may see cases which involve an FGM Protection Order (FGMPO) or Forced Marriage Protection Order. The fact that a protection order has been made by the Family Court may provide strong evidence of risk of persecution or serious harm. However, the order may not provide evidence about risk on return to their country, so does not in itself mean that refugee status should automatically be granted. The asylum claim must still be considered on its individual merits, taking into account that the Family Court has made an order and the reasons for it doing so. Such orders must be considered in the round and given appropriate weight in reaching your decision on future protection needs.

The fact that an order has been granted by the Family Court, which may state that the individual concerned should remain in the UK, does not mean that the person cannot be removed from the UK if after careful consideration the asylum claim is to be refused and you have concluded that the individual is not in need of international protection. [GD \(Ghana\)](#) highlights that whilst the Home Office is not bound by Family Court Orders they must be taken into consideration.

So-called 'honour-based' claims

So-called 'honour-based' claims may include practices used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural, religious beliefs and or so called 'honour'. 'Honour-based' abuse may be gender-based and is often perpetrated against women and girls, though can also be inflicted on men. This may result in serious harm to the perceived offender due to a perception that they have shamed the family and or community by breaking their 'honour' or 'moral' code. For example, but not limited to perceived adultery, premarital sex or running away (leaving home without permission) may result in various forms of harm including domestic and or sexual violence, imprisonment or death.

You must refer to relevant [country policy and information notes](#) to assist in considering whether the claimant may form part of a PSG and to establish the availability of any potential protection or internal relocation possibilities.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

FGM is a form of violence against women and girls which is in itself both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. FGM is a traumatic and violent act performed on women and girls and can cause serious physical and mental harm. Whilst FGM may be an isolated incident of abuse, it can be associated with other behaviours that discriminate against, limit or harm women and girls. For example, FGM can be a precursor to child marriage, forced marriage and domestic abuse. It is important to be aware that an individual who has been subject to FGM in the past may not be aware of the type of FGM she has been subject to and depending on her community she may be at risk of deinfibulation and reinfibulation in the future (for example, they may be deinfibulated to open up the vagina for sex or child birth and then reinfibulated to close up the vagina).

The question of whether a PSG exists and the extent to which members are potentially at risk depends on the country in question. What constitutes a PSG in one country may not in another. You must consult the relevant [country policy and information notes](#) which provide information on PSGs, the level of state protection and whether internal relocation would be unreasonable. For example, the practice may be illegal in the country of origin, however, if the woman or girl returns and refuses to be cut or hasn't been cut she may be ostracised from her family, social or tribal group and therefore considerations into return as a lone woman would also need to be considered.

When considering claims from individuals who claim to have carried out FGM you must consider the case on its individual merits and be mindful that they are likely to have undergone FGM themselves. FGM is illegal in the UK and therefore you must also be familiar with the [Exclusion \(Article 1F\) and Article 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#) guidance and seek senior caseworker advice if exclusion may need to be considered.

More information on FGM and FGMPOs can be found in the [Multi-agency statutory guidance on female genital mutilation](#).

Accompanying parents

Parents cannot be dependants on a child's asylum claim. You must therefore consider whether, on the basis of the facts in the individual case, accompanying parents qualify for refugee status on the basis of a well-founded fear of persecution in their own right. This may be either as a member of a PSG (accompanying parents of a daughter at risk of FGM) or for other reasons in the country of return.

You must consider the relevant [country policy and information notes](#) and each case must be considered on its individual merits. You must establish whether the parents are opposed to FGM, explore why they would not be able to protect their daughter from a real risk of enforced FGM and consider whether there is sufficiency of protection or if internal relocation is reasonable.

The case of [K and others \(FGM\) Gambia CG \[2013\]](#) established that where claimants are granted refugee status the accompanying parents may also be eligible for a grant of leave. If the accompanying parents do not qualify for protection you must consider whether [discretionary leave](#) is appropriate.

For guidance on those who are dependent on the main asylum claimant you must refer to the [Dependants and family members](#) instruction.

Second pair of eyes (SPoE) process and updating CID

All decisions involving FGM or 'cutting' must be reviewed in accordance with the SPoE process. This may include cases where the individual fears they and or their dependants may be subject to FGM, or claims based on a fear that they will be forced to practise FGM as a cutter.

All cases involving FGM (either in relation to the main claimant, a dependant or fear of being forced to practice FGM as a cutter) must be flagged on CID, at the earliest opportunity, with the Special Conditions flag 'Female Genital Mutilation' to enable effective monitoring of these cases. In all cases the flag must be raised on the main claimant only. The correct application of the flag is something that the SPoE officer must check and CID must also be noted that the SPoE process has been completed.

Forced marriage

Forced marriage may involve various forms of violence and abuse, threats or other forms of coercion. Coercion may include emotional, psychological or physical force or the threat of physical force or financial pressure. Relevant [country policy and information notes](#) must be referred to in particular to assist in considering whether the claimant may form part of a PSG and to establish the availability of any potential protection or internal relocation possibilities.

Political opinion

Political opinion must be understood in a broad sense, to incorporate any opinion on any matter in which the mechanics of the state, government, society or policy may be engaged. Holding political opinions different from those of the government is not in itself grounds for refugee status. A claimant must show that they have a well-founded fear of persecution for holding such opinions or that they are unable to access protection or relocate to a different part of the country because of that fear.

Persecution for reasons of political opinion implies a claimant holds an opinion that either has been expressed or has come to the attention of the authorities. There may, however, also be situations in which the claimant has not given any expression of their opinions but the state nonetheless believes they hold such an opinion and therefore a political opinion is imputed.

Persecution for reasons of political opinion is typically seen in terms of male experiences and direct involvement in conventional political activity, such as membership of a political organisation. Claims on these grounds will often involve an openly expressed opinion, which is directed against and is not tolerated by the state.

Whilst women may be involved in such conventional political activities and may raise similar claims to those made by men, this does not always correspond to the experiences of women in some societies. The gender roles in some countries may mean that women are often involved in so-called 'low level' political activities, for instance hiding people, passing messages or providing community services, food, clothing or medical care. You must beware of equating these lower-profile political activities with low risk. The response of the state or the wider community to women who engage in such activities may be disproportionately persecutory because it may be considered inappropriate for women to be involved at all. So-called 'low level' activities may be the outward expression of a political opinion, although it is not necessary for a person to have formed a specific opinion in order for their actions to imply that they hold a political opinion.

Furthermore, a person may be attributed a political opinion that they do not actually hold, for example, women may be attributed the same political views as their male relatives. In these circumstances, you must consider the motivation of the persecutor and that the claimant may not be aware of the reasons for the abuse. For example, a woman who is forced to provide food for a rebel group may be treated as an opponent and attributed a political opinion by the state even though she does not support the group through choice. While this may be analysed in the context of an imputed political opinion, it may also be analysed as being persecution for reasons of her membership of a PSG, their family. These factors need to be taken into account in gender-related claims.

It is important not to underestimate or overlook the political dimensions of women's experiences of persecution even though a woman may not regard herself as making a political statement. Non-conformist opinions or behaviour may, in certain circumstances, be an expression of political opinion or may result in a woman having a political opinion attributed to her whether she holds one or not. For example, opposition to institutionalised discrimination against women in society or expressing views in opposition to the predominant social or cultural norms may be seen to constitute a political opinion. Non-conformist behaviour in certain cultures such as refusing to wear a veil, refusing FGM, pursuing an education or choosing a partner could also lead to a woman having a political opinion attributed to her.

Each case must be considered on its individual merits and will depend on the facts and the context on which it is based. For example, in a moderate Muslim society a woman who chooses not to wear a veil may be frowned upon by certain sections of society but her action is not necessarily perceived to be political. In a strict Muslim society, where all women are required by the state to wear a veil, a woman who refuses could be attributed a political opinion due to her actions and may be persecuted for this reason.

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Sufficiency of protection

You must refer to [Assessing credibility and refugee status](#) guidance for full guidance and the relevant [country policy and information notes](#) when considering whether there is sufficient protection available in the country of origin on a case by case basis.

State responses to persecution

Persecution may be perpetrated by the state. However, acts of violence and serious discrimination committed by the local population, within a specific community, the family unit, or by individuals, may amount to persecution, and in such cases, you will need to assess whether there is sufficient protection in the country of origin.

Protection is generally considered effective when the state takes reasonable steps to prevent persecution or serious harm being inflicted on its citizens, and the individual has access to such protection. It is generally accepted that no state can offer every citizen 100% protection. However, seriously discriminatory or other offensive acts committed by the local population may constitute persecution and give rise to the need for international protection if they are knowingly tolerated by the authorities, or if the authorities are unable or unwilling to offer effective protection.

State protection failure or inadequacy

Women in particular may be subject to gender-related abuse resulting from social customs or conventions because there is no effective means of legal recourse to prevent, investigate or punish such acts. Such failure of state protection may include but are not limited to:

- legislation, for example marital rape exemptions in law
- lack of police response to pleas for assistance
- reluctance, refusal or failure to investigate, prosecute or punish individuals
- encouragement or toleration of particular social, religious, customary laws, practices and behavioural norms or an unwillingness or inability to take action against them

For example, the state may make illegal an act that can amount to persecution, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), but continue to condone, tolerate or ignore the practice or be unable to put an effective end to the custom because of its widespread cultural acceptance and reluctance of the local population to report incidents or support police investigations.

It may not always be reasonable, or even possible, for the claimant to have alerted the authorities of their need for protection. This may be because they know protection would not be forthcoming or because by requesting protection they would risk further violence, harassment or rejection by their society or even further persecution without recourse to effective protection. In some societies, it may not in

fact be possible for a woman to approach the authorities, for example, without being accompanied by a male relative.

The ways in which particular laws, social policies or practices (including traditions and cultural practices) are implemented may constitute or involve a failure of protection. For example, a law, policy or practice may have a legitimate goal such as the maintenance of law and order out of respect for genuine religious or social sensitivities. However, the administration of this law may involve persecution, such as penalties for non-compliance with the law or a policy which may be disproportionately severe against certain women or other groups. Alternatively, the law or policy may not be enforced in practice and therefore fails to deter or prevent the banned behaviour. For example, laws criminalising domestic abuse or FGM in some countries may not be enforced in practice.

You must carefully assess the available country policy information together with the individual circumstances of the claim to decide whether state protection is accessible and effective for the claimant and as part of this assessment you must consider what the claimant has said about their previous experiences in seeking such protection.

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Internal relocation

In accordance with [article 8 of the Qualification Directive](#) and [paragraph 339O of the Immigration Rules](#) an asylum claim will be refused if there is a part of the country of origin to which the claimant can relocate, where they would not have a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm. You must consider whether an individual can reasonably be expected to relocate having regard to the general circumstances prevailing in that part of the country and the personal circumstances of the claimant.

You must refer to the section on internal relocation in the [Assessing credibility and refugee status](#) guidance for full guidance and to the relevant [country policy and information notes](#).

Individual assessment

In certain countries, financial, logistical, social, cultural and other factors may mean that women face particular difficulties. This may be particularly the case for divorced women, unmarried women, widows or single parents, especially in countries where women are expected to have male protection. Women may also face discrimination in the place of relocation and therefore be unable to work so that they cannot reasonably be expected to live there.

You must consider whether the claimant, and any dependants, would face a well-founded fear of persecution or real risk of serious harm in the place of relocation, and whether it is reasonable to expect them to travel to, and stay there. Even where country policy information suggests that relocation is possible, the ability of the individual to relocate in practice must be assessed and this must be explored at the interview for an informed decision to be reached. While it remains the responsibility of the claimant to establish their claim, you need to demonstrate, if refusing asylum on these grounds, that internal relocation is reasonable, having regard to the individual circumstances of the claimant and the objective country policy information.

This means carefully considering factors relevant to the individual and the country concerned. This includes, for example the means of travel and communication, cultural traditions, religious beliefs and customs, ethnic or linguistic differences, health facilities, employment opportunities, supporting family or other ties (including childcare responsibilities and the effect of relocation on dependent children), and the presence and ability of civil society (for example non-governmental organisations) to provide practical support.

Where the fear is of family members, relocation is not reasonable if the situation the individual would be placed in would be likely to leave them with no alternative but to seek their family's assistance and so re-expose them to a well-founded fear of persecution or a real risk of serious harm.

You must consider whether the claimant, in particular for women who would be unaccompanied, would be able to safely access the proposed relocation area, without for example the risk of being subjected to sexual violence.

As explained in the section on internal relocation in the [Assessing credibility and refugee status](#) guidance. If the claimant has a well-founded fear of persecution or real risk of serious harm in one part of the country of return, and they are unable to seek the protection of the state and it is not reasonable to expect them to live in another part of that country, they should be granted refugee status or humanitarian protection.

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Modern slavery and trafficking

Whilst many victims of modern slavery are identified before the asylum interview you may encounter potential victims of modern slavery during an asylum interview. See [Victims of modern slavery: guidance for frontline staff](#) for full guidance.

Modern slavery encompasses:

- human trafficking
- slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour

You must be mindful not to confuse human trafficking with smuggling or illegal migration and that this may not always be clear. For example, someone may start out believing they are being smuggled but may later become a potential victim of modern slavery.

Human smuggling occurs when an individual seeks the help of a facilitator to enter the UK illegally, and the relationship between both parties ends once the transaction ends. Many of those who enter the UK illegally do so by this route. Human smuggling is not a form of modern slavery. The purpose of human smuggling is to move a person across a border illegally. The purpose of modern slavery is to exploit the victim for gain or other benefit and is regarded as a violation of that person's freedom and integrity.

A claim for international protection presented by a victim or potential victim of modern slavery can arise in a number of circumstances. The victim may have been taken abroad, may have escaped and may seek the protection of the state where they are now. The victim may have been taken within national territory, may have escaped and have fled abroad in search of international protection. The individual concerned may not have been a victim but may fear becoming a victim of modern slavery and may have fled abroad in search of international protection. In all instances, the individual concerned must be found to have a well-founded fear of persecution for a convention reason to be recognised as a refugee.

The fact that a person has been a victim of modern slavery does not, in itself, mean that they qualify for refugee status or humanitarian protection (HP). However, some may be able to establish a well-founded fear of persecution for a convention reason, such as a membership of a particular social group (PSG) and have valid claims to asylum. It may also be possible to establish a need for HP depending on the individual circumstances of the case. To qualify for protection someone needs to demonstrate they are at risk of persecution or serious harm on return to their country of origin.

Forced recruitment for the purposes of forced prostitution or sexual exploitation is a form of gender-related harm and may amount to persecution. Individuals may face serious repercussions on their return to their country of origin, such as reprisals or retaliation from criminals involved in trafficking rings or individuals, or discrimination

from their community and families. They may also face being re-trafficked or becoming a victim of modern slavery again.

For information on considering asylum claims and carrying out asylum interviews when an individual is in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) see the [Victims of modern slavery: competent authority guidance](#) and [Victims of modern slavery: guidance for frontline staff](#).

You must consider each asylum case on its individual merits and assess the evidence in the [country policy and information notes](#) on the current country specific situation. You must consider sufficiency of protection and available support. For example, in the country concerned, is support available for victims of trafficking and are the authorities able to protect them from being re-trafficked. This needs to be looked at in light of the claimant's ability to relocate or seek protection.

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Taking gender into account: asylum interview and decision

Asylum interview

You must refer to the [Asylum interviews](#) guidance and, where relevant, the guidance sections on asylum interviews in the [Victims of modern slavery: guidance for frontline staff](#) and [Exclusion \(Article 1F\) and Article 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#) guidance before conducting an asylum interview. You must also be familiar with [country policy and information notes](#) on the role, status, and treatment of women and men in the country from which they have fled. Establishing the material facts of a claim, the credibility of past experiences and the reasons why protection is sought is essential in assessing the merits of the claim. It is particularly important to conduct interviews sensitively and thoroughly, and that relevant issues are clarified with the claimant.

Requests for a male or female interviewer or interpreter

Claimants are asked at the screening interview if they would like a male or female interviewer and interpreter and they can also request this later. The letter sent inviting them to their asylum interview repeats this option and explains why it is important. You should normally expect to meet the interviewer requirement and if it cannot be met on the scheduled day, the interview should normally be re-arranged. When requested in advance of the interview, you must also make every effort to meet the request for a male or female interpreter as far as operationally possible.

Childcare during asylum interviews

You must not expect parents to give an account of past persecution in front of their children in their own interests and those of the child, in particular, bearing in mind the statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. For those who are unable to arrange childcare on the date their interview has been booked, you must be as accommodating as possible. This could be either by rescheduling the interview for a day when the claimant can arrange childcare, if that is their preference, or by providing childcare at or near Home Office premises, if this is available at the office concerned. You must provide information on this in the invitation letter.

Interview conduct and considerations

All claimants are normally interviewed alone or in the company of a legal representative. However, with advance notice, where a claimant wishes to bring a friend or other companion to their interview to provide emotional or medical support they may do so at the discretion of the interviewer on condition that they are there to provide emotional or medical support and will not intervene during the interview.

A reassuring environment will help to establish trust between the interviewer and the claimant, and should help disclosure of sensitive and personal information relevant to the claim. It can be very difficult for claimants to disclose some parts of their account as they may be difficult to talk about or sensitive in nature. How you respond may affect whether they disclose further relevant information. You must not ask intimate or insensitive questions during an interview and it is important to:

- recognise the disclosure by acknowledging what you have heard (for example, I'm sorry to hear that) or clarifying if needed (for example, are you saying that...?)
- respond to the disclosure by establishing if their immediate safety is at risk, referring the claimant to specialist services and, if appropriate, asking if they want you to contact the police, see [Safeguarding and signposting to support services](#)

You must be responsive to the trauma and emotion of claimants and offer to stop the interview for a break where the claimant is becoming emotionally distressed. In some cases, particularly of sexual violence or other forms of trauma, to establish trust and obtain all the necessary information a subsequent interview may be required.

[Section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration \(Treatment of Claimants, etc.\) Act 2004](#) requires you to take into account certain behaviours when assessing general credibility. It is essential to provide the claimant with an opportunity to explain the reasons for such behaviour during the interview.

Difficulty in providing information relevant to a protection claim may not of itself undermine credibility. For example, in certain cultures men do not share information about their political, military or even social activities with their female relatives and you must consider whether this might account for gaps in a woman's knowledge. See [Credibility and gender issues](#) section for further guidance on disclosure of information.

You must consider any gender-related issues in relation to dependants as well as the main claimant when considering the claim. You must also refer to the [Dependants and family members](#) guidance when you consider whether it would be appropriate to interview a dependant as well as the main claimant. For example, women who have suffered persecution due to their political or religious beliefs may have suffered additional problems based on their gender. The additional information that they provide could be useful in considering the claim. You must also be aware that there may be reasons why family members may not be able to or may not wish to disclose information, for example, there may be protection needs within the family unit due to domestic abuse or forced marriage. See [Credibility and gender issues](#) for further guidance on disclosure of information.

If you think the claimant and or their family members may be in danger, you need to take immediate action to ensure their safety see [Safeguarding and signposting to support services](#). Any physical or mental health concerns, or experience of trauma that requires input from the local safeguarding team must be referred as soon as possible.

Credibility and gender issues

You must refer to [Assessing credibility and refugee status](#) for full guidance on credibility assessment.

While the substantive asylum interview represents the claimant's main opportunity to disclose all relevant evidence, disclosure of gender-based violence at a later stage in the asylum process should not automatically count against their credibility. There may be a number of reasons why a claimant, or dependant, may be reluctant to disclose information, for example feelings of guilt, shame, and concerns about family 'honour', or fear of family members or traffickers, or having been conditioned or threatened by them.

When interviewing, you must be sensitive to the fact that gender and cultural norms may play an important role in influencing demeanour, for example, how a woman presents herself physically at interview for example whether she maintains eye contact, shifts her posture or hesitates when speaking. Therefore, demeanour alone is an unreliable guide to credibility.

Those who have been sexually assaulted and or who have been victims of trafficking may suffer trauma that can impact on memory and the ability to recall information. The symptoms of this include persistent fear, a loss of self-confidence and self-esteem, difficulty in concentration, an attitude of self-blame, shame, a pervasive loss of control and memory loss or distortion. You must be alert to this and how such factors may affect responses during interview. For further guidance see the [Asylum interviews](#) guidance.

For those who claim to have suffered rape or sexual violence, it is not necessary to obtain precise details about the act itself. However, information should be obtained about the events leading up to and following the assault, the context in which it took place as well as the motivation of the perpetrator, if known. A victim may not always be aware of the reasons for the assault or the identity of attackers. It is important not to re-traumatise the individual during the interview and to recognise the emotional impact the interview may have during, and after this meeting. You may, where necessary, allow claimants a reasonable time to submit psychological or medical evidence where trauma may affect their ability to recall events consistently or to otherwise support their claim, where a claimant's account is doubted.

A woman, for example, may initially decide not to make an asylum claim in their own right for various reasons such as that official matters are generally dealt with by the man in the family or for fear of disclosing information which could bring the family into disrepute. Where a person is registered as a dependant in an asylum claim, they are informed in private at their screening interview of the right to make an independent asylum claim.

Where, despite earlier possibilities a claimant makes an independent asylum claim after the claim in which they were listed as a dependant has been refused, the consideration and interview of claimants in this position will require careful enquiries to establish why they did not claim in their own right earlier. Guidance on the

handling claims made by former dependants of principal claimants is available in the [Dependants and family members](#) guidance. Under [section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration \(Treatment of Claimants, etc.\) Act 2004](#) you must consider cultural, religious and other factors in assessing whether the claimant's credibility is damaged as a result of the timing of the claim.

Visa application and registration of births checks, where relevant, must be made as these may provide relevant information in support of a claim, for example, having a child out of wedlock or being a lone woman.

Asylum decision

Once you have established the facts and assessed the credibility of the claim you must then consider whether there is a future risk of persecution or serious harm. In assessing risk on return, you must be aware that the claimant's gender may put them at greater risk of persecution, for example, women and girls may face greater risk of being subjected to sexual or gender-related violence in civil disturbance or armed conflict. See [Assessing credibility and refugee status](#) and [Humanitarian protection](#) guidance and the relevant [country policy and information notes](#) which include gender specific guidance.

You must assess objectively whether there are reasonable grounds for believing that the claimant, and any dependants, would face persecution or serious harm on return to the country from which they sought refuge. It is important to properly consider all of the evidence, including where appropriate, that provided by dependants as well as relevant objective evidence, medical evidence and country policy information. The absence of objective information to corroborate a claimant's account may be an important factor, but must not necessarily be taken to mean that human rights abuses do not occur. For instance, systematic abuse of a certain group would usually be documented, but isolated acts of ill-treatment perpetrated by one person on another would not.

Where relevant information cannot be obtained from available country policy information you must consult a senior caseworker and consider whether to make a case specific research request to the Country Policy and Information team (CPIT). When assessing credibility, you must consider all evidence in the round, taking into account the interaction of factors such as lack of documentary evidence, difficulties in disclosing traumatic experiences and the ability of a claimant to provide evidence of particular forms of gender-related persecution that may take place within a domestic setting.

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