

What to Expect at your DOHA Interview

After you have lodged your application for a protection visa with the Department of Home Affairs (the Department), you will generally wait a few months to a few years before receiving a letter inviting you to an interview.

This fact sheet provides information on what you should do before the interview and what happens during the interview for an application for a Protection visa.

What to do before your interview

Read over your application for a Protection visa very carefully. Most importantly you should read your statement of claims which explains why you fear returning to your country of origin.

If there are events relevant to why you can't return to your country that you forgot to mention or which have occurred in your country of origin, or in your own life *since you have submitted your application*, and this is not included in your application, ensure that you write this down and state it clearly to the Department officer at the interview.

If you have noticed any mistakes in your application since it was submitted, or if you want to add anything new, also write that down.

During the interview, you will be shown the definition of a refugee and asked if you have any questions about it. You need to understand this definition, as you may be expected to explain how you meet this definition. To prepare for your interview, you may want to write down how a lawyer believes you meet this definition and remind yourself about this before the interview.

Do I need to bring anything to the interview?

You should bring your letter inviting you to the interview.

You will also need to bring your photo identification.

You may also want to bring any original documents you may want to have considered with the application.

How do I attend the interview?

Check your letter inviting you to the interview for details of when, where and how your interview will be held.

Who will be at the interview?

An officer from the Department will be the person interviewing you. Normally they will be making the decision in your case. They will need to decide whether or not you are owed protection obligations by Australia. There should also be an interpreter if you have requested one.

There will also be any other person you have requested to attend the interview with you, for example, a lawyer/migration agent or support person. Please note, you must inform the Department officer before the interview if you wish to bring someone.

How can a lawyer/migration agent assist with the interview?

Only lawyers and registered migration agents can assist a person or give a person advice about applying for a visa – including in the course of attending an asylum seeker’s interview with the Department.

A lawyer/migration agent can:

- Give you migration advice about the case before and after the interview;
- Make oral submissions (short comments about your evidence and your claim for protection) to the Department officer at the end of the interview;
- Make written submissions (reasons why you should be granted the visa and evidence supporting your application) to the Department after the interview.

How can a support person assist with the interview?

People who are not lawyers or registered migration agents can provide limited assistance to help asylum seekers at a Departmental interview.

A support person can:

- Provide practical and emotional support;
- Help you attend the interview, observe and take notes;
- Suggest a break if it looks like you need one;
- Help you collect any general country information which may help your case to provide to the Department after the interview.

What happens during the interview?

At the beginning of the interview, the Department officer will go through some formalities, for example, you will be asked to show him or her your photo identification.

You will be asked if you know the interpreter and if you object to that interpreter. If you don’t understand the interpreter, you should let the Department officer know as soon as possible.

You may be asked to make an oath or take an affirmation. This is an important promise to tell the truth. If you have an interpreter, you will have to repeat the words of the promise in your own language. It is important that you look at the officer, not at your representative, support person or the interpreter, as it is a special promise that what you are about to tell that officer will be the truth.

The Department officer could ask you any question. Generally, they will ask you some questions about why you fear returning to your country of origin. The Department officer will ask you questions about the events which you have detailed in your statement and also discuss other information with you that they may have obtained.

Towards the end of the interview, the Department officer will put to you any information the Department has which the decision maker may rely on to refuse your application. It may seem as though the Department officer does not believe your evidence, but this is not necessarily the case. The Department officer is raising these issues with you to be fair and to allow you to respond to the information.

You may respond to this information either at the interview, or at a later date in writing. If the issues are quite complicated, it may be best to have more time to consider your response. If you wish to do this, you may want to ask the Department officer where s/he obtained that information and tell the Department officer that you would like to have time to respond after the interview.

At the end of the interview, you should ask the Department officer what issues arise in your case so that you may have an opportunity to address them. You will then be asked if there is anything else you wish to add. It is very important that you have put all of the important parts of your case to the Department officer.

During the interview: Tips

- It is important to be clear in your interview so you can help the officer understand your story.
- Try to answer questions as fully as possible, and *provide details* if you can.
- If you don't know details such as the exact date of an event, give as much detail as you can – for example between which years an event would have happened, based on where you were living at the time.
- If there are problems with the interpreter during the interview, you should raise this immediately with the Department officer. At the end of your interview it may be too late to do much about it.
- Ask for a break if you need one. You can ask for a 5 minute break at any time that you need one to go to the toilet, get some fresh air outside, or just collect your thoughts.
- Try to answer each question you're asked directly, without discussing unrelated topics.
- Only answer what you've been asked. You can have time at the end to raise anything else you think may have been forgotten. If you feel you need to explain your answer, then ask if you can do so.
- If you have made a mistake in your answer, it's best to correct it as soon as you can.
- Listen carefully to the question you are asked, and don't start answering until you're sure you understand that question. If you don't understand, just say so, or ask for it to be said again a different way.
- Don't rush. The officer can always set another interview on a different day if there are more questions. It is more important to make sure the answers you are giving are correct. If you need time to think about your answer, then say that you need more time.
- Try to answer questions completely, without leaving anything out.
- Do not exaggerate. Be honest and don't exaggerate your circumstances. Do not be afraid to say that you don't know the answer to a question. If you cannot remember, say that you do not remember.
- Try not to get angry. The officer has to ask you questions to test whether you are being honest and may need to ask questions that people would not normally ask. The officers have a job to do,

so try not to react if you disagree with what is being put to you. If you do not agree, it is okay to say so, and if possible give your reasons about this clearly and calmly.

- The interview will be audio recorded and kept on your file. If you are not comfortable being recorded, you will be given an opportunity to say so. The Department cannot record you unless they have your consent. You can request a copy of the interview record at any time.

What sorts of things might I be expected to respond to at the interview?

Common issues which an asylum seeker would be expected to respond to would include:

- inconsistencies – if you have said different or conflicting things about the same event;
- omissions – if you have not mentioned something important;
- adverse country information – information about your country that says what happens there is very different to what you said happens in your country;
- doubts that you actually fear what you say you fear;
- doubts about the genuineness of documents you have provided;
- doubts that the things you say you fear will happen are likely to actually happen;
- why there was a delay in making an application for a protection visa and whether you have a provided a plausible explanation for this delay.

Do I have to answer every question?

The Departmental officer will need to assess whether:

- the person has made a genuine effort to substantiate their claims or establish they are a person to whom Australia has protection obligations;
- all documentary evidence available to the asylum seeker has been submitted, or a satisfactory explanation for the absence of any relevant supporting material has been provided;
- the information and supporting material submitted by the asylum seeker have been considered in light of relevant country information and independent expert advice;
- the asylum seeker's statements are found to be generally coherent and plausible and are not contrary to available country information or other known facts relevant to the asylum seeker's case;
- the asylum seeker has provided a satisfactory explanation for any other concerns raised by the decision maker (such as delay in seeking asylum); and
- there is no objective evidence to discount the claims and no reasonable prospect of obtaining further information that might discount the claims.

So generally it is in your interest to answer each question you are asked openly and fully.

What happens after the interview?

Once you have been interviewed, the Department officer can make a decision on your case any time after the interview.

If you are going to provide more documents or evidence to the Department officer after the interview, you should ask when they are due so that the Department officer will not make a decision before then.

What happens once I have a decision?

The decision in your case will be sent to you in a letter or email. If it is a positive decision, you will generally be asked to provide evidence of your character, such as police clearance certificates from Australia or overseas, and take a medical examination. You will be sent a letter or email specifying the requirements for these.

If it is a negative decision, the letter will contain the reasons for the Department officer's decision as to why you should not be granted the protection visa, and details of your rights to review the Department's decision.

If you arrived via plane and were immigration cleared, you will have the option to appeal the Department's decision with the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). You should seek legal advice as soon as possible after receiving your decision, as you have only **28 days** from the date you received the email or the date you are legally considered to have received a posted letter to lodge an application at the AAT.

If you arrived by boat, a review may be undertaken by the Immigration Assessment Authority (IAA). There is no need to lodge an appeal to the IAA, and you will be notified via email or by letter when your case has been referred to the IAA.

Getting help from RACS

RACS is entirely independent of the Department of Home Affairs. All assistance is free.

If you would like advice or assistance, RACS offers the following service options:

Service	Day	Time	Address/Number
Client Line	Monday to Friday	11AM to 1PM and 2PM to 4PM	(02) 8355 7227 or admin@racs.org.au
Auburn Drop-in	Wednesday	Register in person from 10 AM to 12 PM	Visit 44A Macquarie Road, Auburn

Please note: This fact sheet contains general information only. It does not constitute legal or migration advice. RACS is independent of the Department of Home Affairs. All assistance is free. This factsheet was prepared in October 2023.