**Volunteer Lawyers Network  
Pro Se Asylum Project**

**Country Conditions Research**

**Background:**  
When a person asks for asylum in the U.S.A. she must prove that she is: “unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country, and cannot obtain protection in that country, due to past persecution or a well-founded fear of being persecuted in the future on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.” This is the definition of a refugee.

The person seeking asylum is responsible (has the burden) of proving that she meets the definition of a refugee. The asylum applicant does this, in general, by:

1. Completing a detailed asylum application
2. Providing proof of identity
3. Providing proof of her fear
   1. Specific proof of what happened to her (this may include police reports, affidavits, photos, etc., that are specific to her case).
   2. Proof of what is happening in the country to support her claim of persecution. This may include country reports, newspaper articles, etc., that support the individual’s claim to asylum in general or specifically. For example, if the applicant says she was raped by a gang member and the police did nothing to help her or prosecute the crime, then reports or articles to show that this situation happens in the place it happened to her helps to support the claim.

We anticipate that most asylum cases we accept for this project will involve asylum claims for persons from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba. Asylum cases from these countries typically involve the following types of claims:

1. **Political Opinion** (this could be because they are persecuted or fear persecution based on an actual political opinion or based on a political opinion they do not have, but are thought to have)
   * Applicants for these types of claims currently generally come from:
     + Venezuela
     + Honduras
     + Nicaragua
     + Cuba
   * What to look for as you search for country conditions:
     + Look for reports/information on the different political conflicts in each country, the different participants, who is persecuting/harming whom, in what regions of each country, what types of people are being targeted, who is doing the targeting, what kind of harm is happening, statistics, etc.
2. **Religion**
   * Applicants for these types of claims could come from any of the countries, but generally, it would be someone who is not Catholic, rather of a minority religion such as Evangelical/Protestant/Pentecostal, or another minority religion.
   * What to look for as you search for country conditions:
     + Looks for conflicts between the above denominations/religions and the general population or the Catholic church/professing Catholics or discrimination against the above groups.
     + What are the dynamics between different faiths in any particular context?
3. **Membership in a Social Group**—common types of claims from the above countries may include:
   * Gender and family violence/Intimate partner violence—for these cases cultural context is very important. What is happening or common that puts certain people at risk, etc.
   * Sexual orientation/Transgender cases
   * Gang/Cartel/Violent private actor violence
   * Governmental ties to the above violence (e.g. corruption, use of corruption to gain control, get weapons, etc.)
   * It is important for the private actor cases (e.g. the government is not the persecutor, rather it’s a private actor) to make deeper connections on how there may be government participation or acquiescence—failure to investigate or prosecute—or how it’s connect to local politics and not just done for financial gain.
4. **Race/Nationality**—there may be minority groups being persecuted or who have suffered persecution in the past, in particular in Guatemala.
   * Look for discrimination or other types of mistreatment of minority groups in different countries, or of groups based on race/nationality, currently and in the past decades. Was this part of an overall government policy ever and if so, when? What were the affects?

**Types of Sources include:**

* Human Rights reports
* Religious protection reports from the U.S.
* U.S. State Department Reports
* Newspaper articles from reputable sources
* U.N. country reports
* Other international entities (e.g. UNESCO, WHO, etc.)
* Other reputable sources

More background information on asylum law in the U.S.A.:

<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/asylum-united-states>