

CIAS PRACTITIONER TOOLKIT

Contextualized Interviewing and Asylum Support

Structured tools for asylum interviewing, documentation, credibility-sensitive practice, and case workflow

Prepared by Venera Bekteshi, PhD, MPA, MA, LMSW

With appreciation to research assistants Kazbano Tariq, DePaul M.S. in Research Psychology (2026) and Savio Fernandez, DePaul M.S. in Human Computer Interaction (2026) for their assistance throughout the development and revision process.

I am deeply grateful to the **DePaul Migration Collaborative** for its support for this work. Special thanks to Professors **Sioban Albiol** and **Shailja Sharma** for their thoughtful feedback and guidance in strengthening the toolkit for practitioner use. I also thank **Jill Nyhof Rodriguez and Dominique Cressler** for their administrative, budgetary, and contractual support throughout the project.

Important Note

This toolkit is a structured practice aid for attorneys, accredited representatives, social workers, and allied practitioners. It is designed to strengthen upstream interviewing, documentation, and narrative development across the life of an asylum case by helping practitioners capture the cultural, developmental, economic, and U.S. climate context that shapes how experiences are remembered, disclosed, and documented. In doing so, it supports a coordinated case preparation, produces clearer records, and improves the accuracy of credibility-sensitive analysis (including nexus, delay, relocation, and future fear), while also reducing the likelihood that trauma-, language-, or context-mediated patterns are mistaken for deception.



About the DePaul Migration Collaborative

The DePaul Migration Collaborative (DMC) is born from DePaul University's commitment to immigrant communities. In 1996, the College of Law founded its nationally recognized Asylum & Immigration Law Clinic. In 2015, the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences introduced the first U.S. graduate program in Refugee & Forced Migration Studies. The DMC, a joint venture of the College of Law and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, embodies DePaul's continued dedication to interdisciplinary research and advocacy in migration and human rights, seeking systemic change through education and collective action, reinforcing DePaul's legacy as an immigrant-serving institution.

DePaul Migration Collaborative Co-Directors

Sioban Albiol, College of Law

Shailja Sharma, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

DePaul Migration Collaborative Staff

Jill Nyhof Rodriguez, Senior Program Manager

Dominique Cressler, Program Coordinator

2024-2025 DePaul Migration Collaborative Steering Committee:

Sioban Albiol, Professor of Legal Practice and Director, Asylum & Immigration Law Clinic, College of Law

Maria Joy Ferrera, Associate Professor, Social Work, Critical Ethnic Studies, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Euan Hague, Professor of Geography and GIS and Associate Dean for Graduate Programs and Research, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

Martha A. Pagliari, Assistant Dean of Experiential Learning; Professor of Legal Practice and Writing, College of Law

Shailja Sharma, Professor and Chair, International Studies, Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, Global Asian Studies, Islamic World Studies, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Learn more at: <https://law.depaul.edu/academics/centers-institutes-initiatives/depaul-migrationcollaborative>

Table of Contents

Navigation color key

Front Matter	Part I	Part II	Part III	Part IV	Appendices
Important Note					
How to Use This Toolkit					
User Pathways					
What This Toolkit Does					
PART I: CIAS FRAMEWORK AND QUICK START					
Section 1. The CIAS Framework: Context Before Adverse Inference					
Section 2. Quick Navigation: Where to Go When You Are Stuck					
Section 3. User Pathways and Core Design Principles					
PART II: CASE WORKFLOW TOOLS					
Section 4. Intake Claim Triage and Procedural Risk Screen					
Section 5. Flexible Narrative Development Roadmap					
Section 6. Compressed CIAS Pathways for Time-Limited Representation					
Section 7. Prompt Bank by Interview Stage					
Section 8. Delay, Partial Disclosure, Barriers, and Developmental Markers					
Section 9. Bridge Scripts, Legal Rationale, and Meaning-Checks					
Section 10. Affidavit and Narrative Review Toolkit					
PART III: DOCUMENTATION AND EVIDENCE					
Section 11. Evidence and Exhibit Organizer					
Section 12. Interpreter and Language-Access Guidance					
Section 13. Science Briefs and Citations Attorneys Can Use					
PART IV: CASE CLOSURE					
Section 14. Next Steps After Filing, Interview Prep, and Case Closure					
Appendix A. Glossary of Practical Terms					
Appendix B. Annotated Sample Declaration Architecture					
Appendix C. Blank Declaration Template					
Appendix D. Story Organizer for Limited-Scope or Assisted Pro Se Use					
Appendix E. Social Work / Clinical Contribution to Contextual Documentation					
Appendix F. Practitioner Reflection Log and Wellbeing Plan					
Appendix G. Optional Client-Facing Visual Supports for Narrative Elicitation					
Appendix H. Evidence Base and Development Process					
References					

How to Use This Toolkit

The CIAS Practitioner Toolkit is a modular practice aid for attorneys, accredited representatives, clinic supervisors, pro bono teams, paralegal staff, social workers, clinicians, and allied practitioners working with asylum seekers. It is designed to help practitioners gather and interpret the contextual information needed to understand asylum narratives more accurately, especially when disclosure is delayed, chronology is fragmented, interpretation is imperfect, or legal significance is not immediately visible.

Practitioners do not need to read this toolkit from beginning to end. It may be used as a full case workflow or as a set of stand-alone tools. Users may begin with the Quick Navigation section, select the tool that matches the problem in front of them, and return to the broader CIAS framework as needed.

User Pathways

Legal track. Attorneys, accredited representatives, and clinic supervisors may use the toolkit for intake triage, procedural-risk screening, narrative development, affidavit review, evidence planning, interpreter issues, credibility-sensitive documentation, and case closure.

Limited-scope / pro bono / paralegal track. Pro bono attorneys, supervised paralegal staff, legal navigators, and assisted-pro-se programs may use the quick navigation, story organizer, compressed pathways, declaration architecture, and filing-readiness tools when full representation is not available.

Social work / clinical support track. Social workers, clinicians, counselors, and psychosocial advocates may use the toolkit to document functioning, coping, trauma-related barriers to disclosure, strengths, safety concerns, language-access issues, and structural barriers in ways that support legal interpretation without collapsing clinical and legal roles.

What This Toolkit Does

This toolkit helps practitioners identify the minimum context needed before interpreting silence, delay, fragmented chronology, non-reporting, failed relocation, or uneven disclosure as weakness in an asylum narrative. Its purpose is to reduce preventable narrative misreading by helping practitioners ask better questions, document barriers neutrally, preserve client voice, and connect contextual information to legally relevant issues such as credibility, nexus, delay, relocation, and future fear.

PART I: CIAS FRAMEWORK AND QUICK START

Section 1. The CIAS Framework: Context Before Adverse Inference

CIAS—Contextual Influence in Acculturative Stress—builds on Bekteshi's original framework, which emerged from years of community-engaged research with immigrant communities and was further refined through systematic review published in *Ethnicity & Health* (Bekteshi & Kang, 2020). In this toolkit, the same acronym is also used as shorthand for Contextualized Interviewing and Asylum Support, reflecting how the original framework has been extended from its acculturative-stress research base into practical tools for asylum interviewing, documentation, and case preparation. Developed in response to the limits of individualistic models of acculturative stress, the framework demonstrates that immigrant adaptation is shaped not only by stress itself but also by cultural identity, family roles, structural inequities, migration conditions, and sources of resilience. As a guide to this toolkit, CIAS does not replace legal analysis. Rather, it extends that framework into asylum practice as a method for capturing the minimum contextual information needed to interpret credibility, nexus, delay, relocation, and future fear more accurately.

Each CIAS lens identifies what to assess, how the issue may appear in interviews, and why it matters legally. The four-domain model below gives practitioners a quick visual map of how U.S. climate context, developmental context, economic context, and cultural context shape asylum narrative formation and legal interpretation.

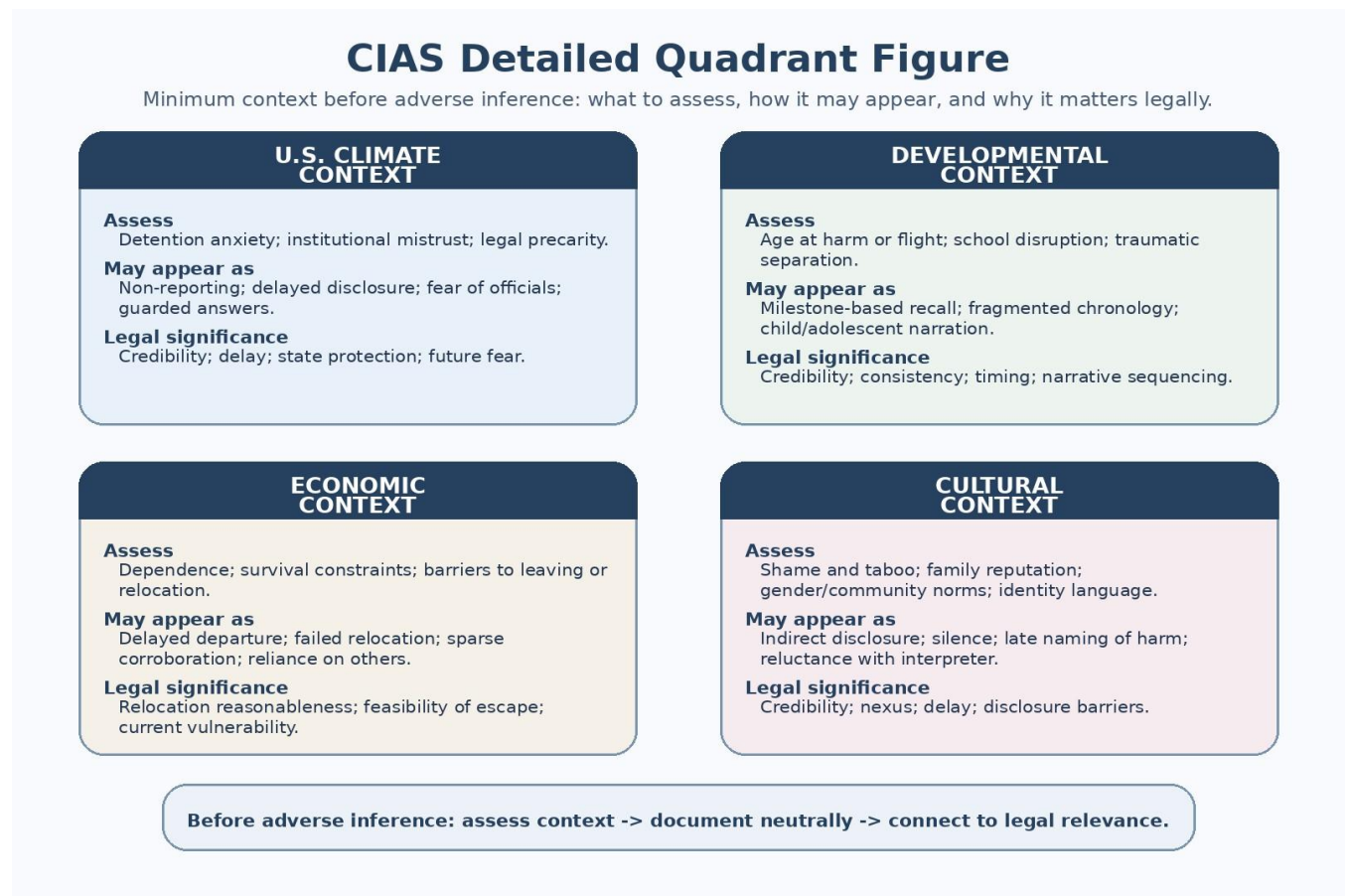


Figure 1. Detailed CIAS Quadrant.

Table 1. CIAS adopted in political asylum process

CIAS Lens	What It Helps Explain	Why It Matters Legally	Examples of Questions or Notes
U.S. climate context	Fear of institutions, legal precarity, detention anxiety, mistrust after border or state contact.	Helps explain why someone did not report, delayed disclosure, or fears interacting with officials.	Did prior contact with police, immigration, detention, or a border process affect what felt safe to disclose?
Developmental context	Age at harm, age at flight, schooling disruption, child versus adult recall, traumatic separation.	Helps explain fragmented chronology, milestone based recall, and differences in how events are narrated.	Was the client a child or adolescent when the harm occurred, and how might that shape recall now?
Economic context	Whether relocation, escape, transport, reporting, or help seeking was actually feasible.	Helps assess internal relocation, dependence, vulnerability, and practical barriers to safety.	What made leaving, hiding, or seeking help difficult in practical terms?
Cultural context	Shame, taboo, gender norms, family reputation, disclosure norms, role obligations, identity language.	Helps explain indirect disclosure, silence, reluctance, and why some harms are named late or differently.	Were there topics that felt dangerous, shameful, or unspeakable in the client's family or community?

Section 2. Quick Navigation: Where to Go When You Are Stuck

This section serves as a rapid-access guide for practitioners who open the toolkit in the middle of a case or when time is limited. Rather than requiring sequential reading of the full document, it directs the practitioner immediately to the relevant tool based on the presenting problem—such as delayed disclosure, chronology difficulty, interpreter concerns, or sparse corroboration. Research on attorney workflow in asylum practice confirms that usability under time pressure is a critical design requirement: tools that require extensive reading before use are frequently abandoned in high caseload environments (American Bar Association Commission on Immigration & HIAS, 2022).

2.1 Problem-to-Section Quick Reference

If You Are Stuck On...	Go To...
Delayed disclosure, silence, or avoidance of a sensitive topic	Sections 8–9 and science briefs in Section 13
Timeline gaps, unclear dates, or over general memory	Sections 7–8 and chronology building prompts in Section 7
No police report, no state protection, or unclear reporting history	Sections 4, 7, and 10
Internal relocation, feasibility of leaving, or dependence on others	Sections 4, 5, and 10
Interpreter issues, dialect mismatch, or communication breakdown	Sections 9 and 12
A late-emerging inconsistency during affidavit review	Section 10
A client who becomes emotionally overwhelmed in session	Section 7 containment guidance and Section 9 bridge scripts
A client harmed as a minor or with early trauma/separation history	Section 8

2.2 Visual Workflow Map

Use the map below to orient quickly to where the case is and what the next product should be.

1. Intake / Triage	2. Context + Background	3. Events + Aftermath	4. Barriers + Flight	5. Review + Evidence	6. Filing / Interview / Closure
Viability, deadlines, not ready-yet flags	Community, identity, development, baseline context	Harm, actors, persecutor words, consequences	Delay, reporting, relocation, return fear	Declaration holes, corroboration, interpreter notes	Copies, next steps, interview prep, closure

2.3 Where CIAS Fits Within Core Asylum Components

One way to make the CIAS toolkit maximally usable is to locate it inside the actual work products attorneys build. The table below shows where CIAS fits within the main parts of an asylum filing and interview-prep process (American Bar Association Commission on Immigration & HIAS, 2022).

Case Component	What It Does	Where CIAS Helps	Primary Outputs
Case theory / cover letter	States the broad claim, legal framing, and filing package contents.	CIAS helps clarify nexus, future fear, structural barriers, and the logic for neutral explanations of delay.	Short case summary; filing narrative logic; issue list.
Form I-589 / basic application data	Captures required application information and broad claim elements.	CIAS helps with intake triage, chronology anchoring, identity/context questions, and flags for what is not ready yet.	Completed intake screen; context anchors; issue flags.
Declaration / sworn narrative	Provides the client's account of harm, targeting, relocation, flight, and fear of return.	CIAS helps stage the narrative, clarify what belongs in which section, and preserve client voice without overloading the declaration.	Declaration structure; timeline notes; barrier clarifications.

Case Component	What It Does	Where CIAS Helps	Primary Outputs
Corroborating evidence	Supports the claim with identity documents, witness statements, country conditions, medical or psychosocial evidence, and other exhibits.	CIAS helps decide what evidence strengthens nexus, state protection analysis, relocation, current vulnerability, and disclosure barriers.	Evidence plan; exhibit list; translation plan.
Interview preparation	Helps the client understand the process and practice answering clearly without guessing.	CIAS helps identify high-risk topics, bridge scripts, interpreter issues, breaks, and core versus peripheral detail risks.	Interview prep checklist; meaning-check notes; clarification targets.
Post-filing / case closure	Tracks next steps, pending items, referrals, and the end of limited scope representation where applicable.	CIAS helps ensure the client leaves with usable next steps, copies, and a grounded close.	Next-steps list; closure checklist; referrals / unresolved items.

2.4 Reflective Questions Before Difficult Interviewing

This pause point is for use before difficult questioning or before drawing adverse conclusions from the narrative. Its purpose is to ensure the practitioner can identify the legal objective of the next inquiry and test whether an apparent gap may instead reflect trauma, language, development, shame, or context.

- ☐ What assumptions am I making about truthfulness, coherence, affect, reporting, or chronology?
- ☐ Am I asking for legally necessary detail, or am I pressing because ambiguity makes me uncomfortable?
- ☐ Is this the right meeting for this question, or will it be safer and more useful later?
- ☐ Do I need psychosocial, medical, developmental, or language-access input before I interpret what I am hearing?

2.5 Attorney Quick-Start: What Do You Need Today?

This checklist translates common case needs into immediate next steps, helping the practitioner move efficiently from identifying the current task to the toolkit section most likely to advance the case.

- ☐ I need to determine whether there is a viable claim and what cannot wait. → Section 4: Intake Claim Triage and Procedural Risk Screen
- ☐ I need to stage the narrative over multiple meetings. → Section 5: Flexible Narrative Development Roadmap

- ☐ I have very limited time with this client. → Section 6: Compressed CIAS Pathways for Time-Limited Representation
- ☐ I need better questions without forcing exact dates or overloading the client. → Section 7: Prompt Bank by Interview Stage
- ☐ I need to explain late disclosure, partial disclosure, shame, or fragmented recall. → Section 8: Delay, Partial Disclosure, Barriers, and Developmental Markers
- ☐ I need language to ask difficult questions without damaging trust. → Section 9: Bridge Scripts, Legal Rationale, and Meaning-Checks
- ☐ I need to review a sparse, shifting, or uneven declaration. → Section 10: Affidavit and Narrative Review Toolkit
- ☐ I need to plan corroboration, exhibits, or clarify whether expert support may help. → Section 11: Evidence and Exhibit Organizer
- ☐ I need interpreter planning, language-access guidance, or a record of possible meaning distortion. → Section 12: Interpreter and Language-Access Guidance
- ☐ I need a short, citable research point to explain a credibility-sensitive issue. → Section 13: Science Briefs and Citations Attorneys Can Use
- ☐ I need to prepare for filing, interview, next steps, or limited-scope closure. → Section 14: Next Steps After Filing, Interview Prep, and Case Closure

2.6 Common Issues: Ask / Note / Flag

This section translates recurring interviewing and documentation problems into standardized responses. Rather than leaving these moments to improvisation, it identifies what should be asked, noted, or flagged before the issue is converted into a legal interpretation.

- ☐ Client cannot give exact dates. → Do not force calendar precision; use season, holiday, election, school year, weather, or life-event anchors.
- ☐ Client becomes vague, numb, flooded, or abruptly changes topic. → Apply the Stop Rule, contain the moment, and flag the topic as Not Ready.
- ☐ Narrative feels sparse or dishonest. → Separate core from peripheral details before interpreting the problem as deception.
- ☐ Client says they did not report, delayed reporting, or left facts out earlier. → Use the Delay / Disclosure tool in Section 8 and note barriers neutrally.
- ☐ Interpreter may be flattening, summarizing, or shifting meaning. → Use the Meaning-Check Scripts in Section 9 and the Interpreter Observation Log in Section 12.
- ☐ Client was harmed as a child or shows milestone-based rather than calendar-based recall. → Use Developmental and Youth Considerations in Section 8 before drawing conclusions.
- ☐ Case would benefit from more context than the legal interview can ethically elicit alone. → Consider psychosocial, medical, or expert corroboration support (Section 11).

Section 3. User Pathways and Core Design Principles

3.1 Who This Toolkit Is For

Track	Primary Users	Typical Use
A. Full-service asylum representation	Attorneys and accredited representatives	Multi-meeting client interviews, narrative development, affidavit drafting, evidence planning, interview preparation, and credibility-sensitive documentation.
B. Limited-scope / assisted pro se support	Legal aid attorneys, pro bono attorneys, legal navigators, supervised volunteers	Intake, issue spotting, story organization, affidavit coaching, and preparation support when full representation is not available.
C. Clinical / social work / psychosocial support roles	Social workers, clinicians, counselors, psychosocial advocates	Contextual documentation of functioning, coping, trauma-related barriers to disclosure, strengths, safety, and structural barriers aligned with legal needs.

3.2 Core Design Principles

This toolkit is guided by a set of design principles that shape both the sequence shown in the toolkit map and the use of each tool across the case workflow. These principles reflect the central CIAS premise that asylum narrative development is staged, context-dependent, and shaped by trust, timing, language, and institutional constraint.

- ☐ Workflow reality: intake screens the claim; full narrative development usually occurs over multiple meetings as trust develops.
- ☐ Minimum viable structure: tools should reduce omission and assumption traps without overwhelming practitioners under time pressure.
- ☐ Stage matters: questions should be matched to where the client is in the case, not asked in the same way at every meeting.
- ☐ Neutral documentation: delayed disclosure, fragmented recall, and uneven affect should be documented carefully and without blame.
- ☐ Interdisciplinary utility: the toolkit should work for attorneys while still preserving meaningful roles for social work and psychosocial documentation.
- ☐ Client voice plus structured reasoning: the goal is to preserve the client's language while giving the practitioner a better logic for what to ask, what to defer, and what to explain.

3.3 Trauma-Informed Practice Model

The CIAS toolkit is grounded in a trauma-informed model that treats disclosure as shaped by safety, trust, language, power, and context rather than by simple willingness to speak (SAMHSA, 2014; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2021). The principles below translate that model into operational guidance for structuring meetings, pacing inquiry, and documenting narrative difficulty neutrally.

1. Safety and predictability

The client should understand the purpose of the meeting, what will happen, and what can wait.

2. Transparency and role clarity

The practitioner explains their role, the limits of confidentiality, how notes will be used, and how the interview fits the legal case.

3. Pacing and choice

Important facts may emerge gradually; pressing too hard too early can reduce both trust and information quality.

4. Client voice plus neutral documentation

The record should preserve the client's own language where possible while using restrained, non-blaming clarifications for delay, fragmentation, or chronology difficulty.

5. Interdisciplinary humility

Legal, social work, and psychosocial inputs may all be necessary to understand why a story is emerging in a particular way.

6. Resist re-traumatization

Adopt trauma-informed principles of safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural, historical, and gender responsiveness (SAMHSA, 2014; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2021).

PART II: CASE WORKFLOW TOOLS

Section 4. Intake Claim Triage and Procedural Risk Screen

Intake is not the stage at which every material detail will reliably emerge. At intake, the practitioner's task is to identify claim viability, urgent procedural posture, immediate risks, and issues that cannot wait. Full narrative development should usually occur later, after role clarity, trust, language access, and basic case structure are established.

This section therefore treats intake as issue spotting and triage, not full trauma extraction. It helps practitioners identify what must be captured immediately - deadlines, prior filings, procedural posture, adverse facts, broad harm/fear structure, protected-ground hypotheses, and evidence on hand - while flagging sensitive or high-risk topics that should be returned to later.

⚠ STOP RULE. Intake is for orientation, issue spotting, and broad claim structure—not full trauma extraction. If the client shows dissociation, extreme avoidance, blank affect, acute distress, or vague references to sexual violence, torture, childhood abuse, severe family abuse, or other high-risk harm, stop that line of questioning, and flag the area as Not Ready. Return to the topic only when it is legally necessary, safer to discuss, and appropriately supported.

4A. Procedural Posture and Urgent Risk Screen

Before moving into narrative development, identify whether any urgent procedural or eligibility issue requires immediate attention. This screen is not a substitute for legal analysis. Its purpose is to prevent deadlines, prior filings, adverse facts, or procedural posture from being missed before deeper narrative work begins.

Procedural posture / filing status

- ☐ Is there a filing deadline or one-year filing issue?
- ☐ Is the client in removal proceedings?
- ☐ Has the client received an NTA, hearing notice, or immigration court document?
- ☐ Has the client had a credible fear interview, reasonable fear interview, border interview, or prior screening?
- ☐ Has the client filed asylum before, either alone, with counsel, through a preparer, or with help from a community member?
- ☐ Are there prior written statements, forms, notes, affidavits, or pro se filings that may need review?
- ☐ Is there a prior removal order, expedited removal history, voluntary departure, or missed hearing issue?
- ☐ Is the client detained or facing an urgent hearing, filing, or interview date?

Adverse facts / possible bars to flag

- ☐ Any arrest, charge, conviction, citation, or pending criminal matter?
- ☐ Any alleged gang, armed-group, political-party, military, police, or government involvement?
- ☐ Any concern about having harmed others, assisted harm, or been forced to participate in harm?
- ☐ Any firm resettlement or long stay in another country before arrival?
- ☐ Any prior inconsistent statement or document prepared by someone else?
- ☐ Any notario, preparer, interpreter, family member, or community member who helped shape an earlier narrative?

☐ Any fraud, false document, false identity, or entry-related concern that needs legal review?

Evidence and documents on hand

- ☐ Identity documents
- ☐ I-94 or entry documents
- ☐ Passport / visa / travel documents
- ☐ Prior immigration filings
- ☐ Court or government notices
- ☐ Police, medical, school, employment, or military records
- ☐ Photos, videos, screenshots, social media, messages, or call logs
- ☐ Witness names or contact information
- ☐ Country-conditions materials already collected
- ☐ Documents needing translation

Immediate support needs affecting participation

- ☐ Interpreter or dialect issue
- ☐ Literacy or disability-related access issue
- ☐ Immediate safety concern
- ☐ Housing, transportation, food, medical, or mental-health need
- ☐ Childcare, caregiving, family pressure, or community-surveillance concern
- ☐ Client appears overwhelmed, confused, dissociated, or unable to continue safely

Practice note: A checked box does not mean the client is ineligible or not credible. It means the issue should be flagged early for legal review, documentation planning, or follow-up. Do not try to resolve every flagged issue at intake.

4B. Immediate Claim Screen

Question or Capture Point	Notes / Client Language	Follow-Up?
What happened that makes return feel unsafe?		☐
Who caused the harm, threat, or fear?		☐
Why does the client think they were targeted?		☐
Is the client afraid to return? Why?		☐
Did the client seek help or protection? From whom, and what happened?		☐
Did the client try to move, hide, relocate, or stay somewhere else? Was it possible or safe?		☐
What is known now about current fear, threats, family risk, or similarly situated people?		☐
What does the client already have in writing, if anything (old applications, notes, pro se statements, WhatsApp timelines, intake forms)?		☐
What details appear important but not ready for discussion yet?		☐

Plain-Language Nexus Prompts

- ☐ Why do you think this happened to you?
- ☐ What did the person, group, or authority say about you?
- ☐ Did they mention your family, politics, religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, community, work, or social role?
- ☐ Were other people like you harmed or threatened?
- ☐ Did anything about your identity, family, beliefs, role, or community make you more visible or vulnerable?
- ☐ What would someone from your community understand about why this happened?

Practice note: At intake, the practitioner does not need to finalize the legal theory. The goal is to make sure possible nexus is not missed simply because the client does not use legal terms.

4C. Intake-Safe Context Prompts

- ☐ Where did you live, and who was around you?
- ☐ Who was in your household, family, or community at the time?
- ☐ What was normal daily life like before things changed?
- ☐ What family, community, work, school, religious, political, or social roles mattered then?
- ☐ What made daily life feel safe or unsafe?
- ☐ What language or dialect were you using during the important events?
- ☐ If exact dates are hard, what season, school year, holiday, election, conflict, weather, pregnancy, move, or life event helps anchor the time?

4D. Not-Ready-Yet and Follow-Up Flags

- ☐ The client mentions something important but says they cannot explain it now.
- ☐ The client gives only a broad outline around a sensitive topic.
- ☐ The client becomes vague around one time period, person, or event.
- ☐ The client shows visible distress when approaching one part of the story.
- ☐ The client minimizes severity or abruptly changes topic.
- ☐ The client mentions a delay, gap, taboo, shame-related issue, or fear of consequences.
- ☐ The client appears confused about why a question matters legally.
- ☐ The client seems afraid of consequences for family or community members.
- ☐ The client may need a different interpreter, more time, or a safer setting before continuing.
- ☐ The topic appears legally important but emotionally unsafe to press at intake.

Practice note: A Not-Ready-Yet flag should not be treated as an omission or contradiction. It is a marker for planned follow-up.

4E. Immediate Practical Actions Before the Client Leaves

- ☐ Confirm the next step and who is responsible.
- ☐ Identify the next deadline or unknown deadline.
- ☐ List documents the client should bring or send.
- ☐ Identify whether translation is needed.
- ☐ Clarify what will be discussed next time.
- ☐ Note any topic that was deferred and why.
- ☐ Confirm whether the client has urgent safety, housing, medical, childcare, transportation, disability, or language-access needs.
- ☐ If representation is limited-scope, explain clearly what the practitioner can and cannot do.
- ☐ If legal review is needed for a possible bar, prior filing, criminal issue, or adverse fact, flag it without trying to resolve it at intake.

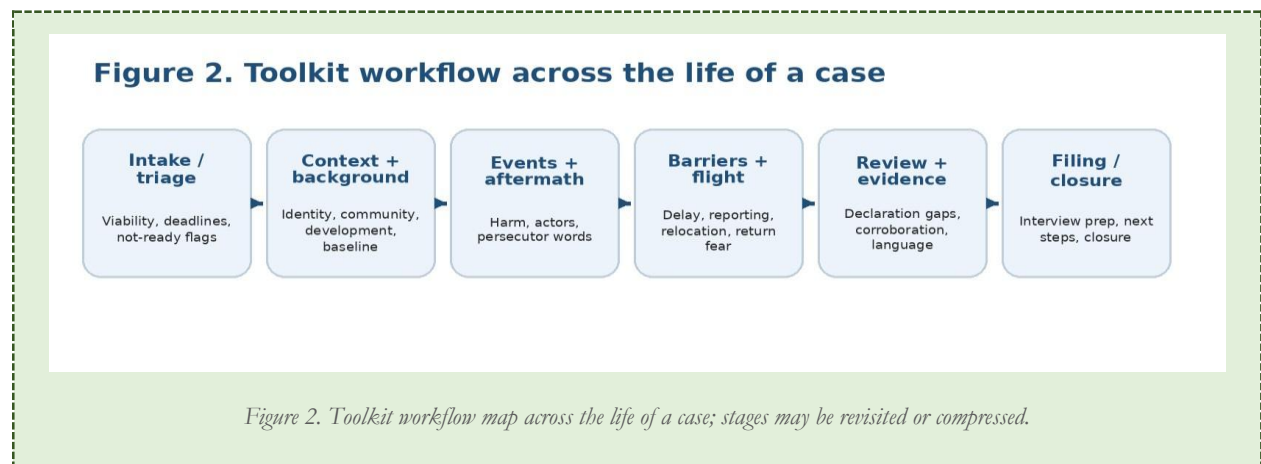
What Intake Should Not Do

Intake should not force a complete trauma narrative, demand exact dates when the client cannot provide them, resolve every inconsistency, or require disclosure of every sensitive fact in the first meeting. Intake should create a safe, legally useful starting record: claim structure, urgent procedural risks, broad chronology, immediate evidence needs, language-access concerns, and topics for planned follow-up.

Section 5. Flexible Narrative Development Roadmap

The roadmap below is a best-practice sequence. Asylum case-building rarely unfolds in a perfectly linear way. Practitioners may move back and forth across stages as new facts emerge, documents surface, interpreters change, deadlines shift, or review reveals gaps in the narrative. In detained, high-caseload, limited-scope, pro se-clinic, or urgent-deadline settings, the sequence may need to be compressed.

What should be preserved is not the exact number of meetings, but the logic of staged inquiry: orient first, identify procedural posture and urgent risks, establish context, identify core events, assess reporting, relocation and flight, review the declaration and evidence, and prepare for filing or interview.



Use this table as a sequencing guide. Stages may be combined, revisited, or compressed depending on case posture, detention, filing deadlines, client readiness, interpreter availability, and organizational capacity.

5A. Session-by-Session Roadmap

Stage / Meeting	Primary Focus	What to Capture	What May Wait
Stage 1 / Meeting 1	Orientation + intake triage	Biographical data, broad harm/fear structure, protectedground hypothesis, context anchors, language-of-encoding, not-ready-yet flags.	Detailed trauma narrative, exact chronology under pressure, graphic details.
Stage 2 / Meeting 2	Context and background	Family, geography, community, roles, beliefs, identity, school/work, what life looked like before things changed.	Worst-event detail if the client is not ready.
Stage 3 / Meeting 3	Core persecution narrative	First incident, most significant incident, last incident, what was said, how the client interpreted the threat, immediate aftermath.	Overly polished declaration language.
Stage 4 / Meeting 4	Relocation, reporting, flight, and post-event consequences	Reporting/no reporting, state protection limits, attempts to relocate, barriers to leaving, flight route, current effects.	Exhibit perfection and final legal theory language.
Stage 5 / Meeting 5	Affidavit development and evidence planning	Declaration structure, holes, transitions, exhibit list, country conditions targets, witness needs, translation needs.	Fine edits that can wait until the draft exists.
Stage 6 / Meeting 6	Interview prep and case closure / next steps	Clarifications, mock questions, interpreter plan, material facts review, copies and pending items, limited-scope disengagement if relevant.	New trauma extraction unless materially necessary.

5B. Optional 12-Week Filing Timeline for Cases With Sufficient Lead Time

This timeline is optional. It is most useful when the practitioner has enough lead time to sequence the case deliberately. It should not be read as a required schedule, and it may not fit detained cases, emergency filings, short-deadline matters, or limited-scope representation.

Week(s)	Main Task	Suggested CIAS Outputs
1–2	Initial meeting, scope explanation, intake triage, basic application data	Triage screen, broad chronology, notready-yet flags, immediate document list.
3–4	Context and background building	Context notes by CIAS lens, language-of-encoding note, early nexus hypotheses.
5–6	Persecution narrative development	Event notes, chronology anchors, reporting/no-reporting explanation, initial declaration outline.
7–8	Evidence gathering and country conditions research	Exhibit organizer, translation list, corroboration plan.
9–10	Drafting and review	Declaration draft, core-vs-peripheral review, holes and transitions checklist.
11–12	Filing prep, interview prep, and next steps	Filing readiness checklist, interview prep checklist, closure/next-steps list.

Section 6. Compressed CIAS Pathways for Time-Limited Representation

When time is limited, practitioners should preserve the minimum CIAS logic rather than attempt to complete the full roadmap. The goal is to capture enough context to avoid misreading delay, silence, fragmented chronology, sparse detail, or interpreter-mediated confusion as deception.

A compressed pathway should not become forced trauma extraction. Practitioners should document what was deferred and why.

These pathways exist because the circumstances under which they are used are rarely ideal—detention, a single available meeting, an imminent deadline, or a client in crisis. Naming that reality briefly and honestly can itself reduce pressure in the room. Before beginning, practitioners should take a moment to orient themselves and the client to the specific goal of this meeting, rather than treating it as a compressed version of a full interview.

6A. Full Pathway

Use when multiple meetings are available. Follow the flexible roadmap across intake, context, core events, barriers and flight, affidavit review, evidence planning, and filing or interview preparation.

6B. Three-Meeting Pathway

Use when representation is short but more than one meeting is possible.

Meeting 1: Intake and procedural posture

- claim screen;
- deadline posture;
- prior filings or prior statements;
- immediate bars/ineligibility flags;
- broad harm/fear structure;
- not-ready-yet flags;
- immediate evidence needs;
- urgent safety, housing, medical, disability, or language-access needs.

Meeting 2: Core narrative and legal interpretation

- core harm events;
- actors/persecutors;
- nexus in plain language;
- reporting or non-reporting;
- relocation or failed relocation;
- flight;
- disclosure barriers;
- interpreter or meaning-check issues.

Meeting 3: Declaration, evidence, and next steps

- declaration review;
- client voice/read-back;
- core-versus-peripheral discrepancies;
- evidence plan;
- unresolved gaps;
- interpreter concerns;

- filing or interview preparation;
- next steps and closure.

6C. One-Meeting Emergency Pathway

Use only when time is extremely limited. Capture the minimum necessary structure:

- what happened;
- who caused the harm;
- why the client believes they were targeted;
- whether the state could or would protect them;
- why relocation was not safe or feasible;
- what the client fears now;
- any urgent bars, deadlines, prior filings, or procedural concerns;
- any facts that are important but not safe or possible to fully discuss yet.

In emergency settings, practitioners should document what was deferred and why. A compressed pathway should preserve legal viability, client voice, and safety; it should not pressure the client to disclose every difficult detail in one sitting.

6D. Setting-Based Adaptations

Setting	How to Adapt the Roadmap	Non-Negotiables to Preserve
Detained / limited meeting access	Use the one-meeting emergency pathway when access is extremely limited, or combine orientation, triage, broad chronology, actor/nexus/fear structure, immediate bars, and not-ready-yet flags. Avoid forcing exact dates or full trauma detail when access is limited.	Preserve role clarity, deadline posture, actor/nexus/fear structure, interpreter access, client voice, and documentation of what was deferred and why.
High-caseload private or legal-aid settings	Use quick navigation, the three-meeting pathway where possible, chronology anchors, and declaration review tools to keep notes disciplined and legally focused.	Preserve the core-versus-peripheral distinction, neutral delay language, interpreter or pacing notes, adverse facts flagged early, and clear next steps.
Team-based practice (attorney + paralegal + volunteer)	Use a shared case log so that later disclosures to one team member are not automatically treated as contradictions. Record who heard the information, in what setting, and with what interpreter.	Preserve coordinated messaging, clear role explanation, and team review of weak spots before finalizing the narrative.

Non-Negotiables to Preserve in Any Pathway

- ☐ role clarity and scope;
- ☐ deadline and procedural posture;
- ☐ actor / persecutor clarity;
- ☐ nexus in plain language;
- ☐ bars or adverse facts flagged early;
- ☐ state protection and relocation logic;
- ☐ interpreter and language-access concerns;
- ☐ client voice;
- ☐ not-ready-yet flags;
- ☐ documentation of what was deferred and why.

⚠ STOP RULE. Containment note for high-risk topics. If a topic is flagged as high-risk—sexual violence, torture, childhood abuse, family betrayal, or severe dissociation—plan a slower session, pre-warn the client, build in break points, and keep grounding steps visible. This adapts the practical containment logic emphasized in attorney-facing trauma guidance and trauma-informed care toolkits (American Bar Association Commission on Immigration & HIAS, 2022; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2021).

Section 7. Prompt Bank by Interview Stage

Prompt specificity, chronological reach, and emotional tolerability shift across meetings as trust, language context, and case knowledge develop. Using the same questions at every meeting wastes time, overloads clients prematurely, and misses the staged nature of trauma disclosure. This prompt bank is organized by interview stage so that practitioners can draw from the section that matches where they are in the case, rather than improvising under time pressure (Khan et al., 2021; Marian & Neisser, 2000). Each sub-section includes the question, a brief note on its CIAS relevance, and a follow-up flag.

Chronology-building rule: Do not force calendar dates when the client cannot reliably produce them. Use contextual anchors instead: weather, season, holiday, school year, election, pregnancy, harvest, route, transfer, or who was in power. This reflects both the trauma literature and attorney practice guidance that warns against date-guessing (American Bar Association Commission on Immigration & HIAS, 2022; Herlihy et al., 2002).

7A. Background and Foundation Prompts

Prompt	Why It Matters / CIAS Note	Follow-Up?
Tell me about where you grew up and who was around you.		☐
What was normal daily life like before things changed?		☐
What identities, memberships, beliefs, or roles were important in your community?		☐
What was considered dangerous, shameful, or risky in your community? <i>Indirect alternative: Was there anything people avoided talking about openly?</i>		☐
Who were the people you trusted most then?		☐
What language or dialect did you use most in daily life?		☐

7B. Persecution Event Prompts

Prompt	Why It Matters / CIAS Note	Follow-Up?
Can you walk me through what happened, one step at a time, in the way that feels most manageable?		☐
What do you remember first?		☐
What stands out most strongly about that day or event?		☐
What did you think was happening at the time?		☐
What was said or done that made you believe you were being targeted? <i>Indirect alternative: Sometimes people sense something is wrong even before anyone says it directly—was it like that, or was something specific said or done?</i>		☐
How did your body react then—what do you remember noticing physically or emotionally?		☐
What exactly did the persecutor say, accuse you of, call you, or threaten you with?	Persecutor language often makes nexus, subjective fear, and objective fear more visible than summary labels alone.	☐

7C. Post-Event Prompts

Prompt	Why It Matters / CIAS Note	Follow-Up?
What changed after that?		☐
What became harder to do in daily life?		☐
Who knew what happened?		☐

Prompt	Why It Matters / CIAS Note	Follow-Up?
Did you try to seek help? Why or why not?		☐
Was there any reason you did not tell people right away? <i>Indirect alternative: Some things take time before they feel possible to share—was that true here?</i>		☐
What made it difficult to talk about this earlier?		☐

7D. Flight, Relocation, and Return-Risk Prompts

Prompt	Why It Matters / CIAS Note	Follow-Up?
When did leaving first become necessary?		☐
What made it hard to leave sooner?		☐
Did you try to move or stay somewhere else first?		☐
What happened when you tried to relocate, hide, or seek protection?		☐
What options did you think you had at the time?		☐
What risks existed if you stayed?		☐

7E. Post-Arrival Prompts

Prompt	Why It Matters / CIAS Note	Follow-Up?
What has life looked like since arriving?		☐

Prompt	Why It Matters / CIAS Note	Follow-Up?
What still feels unsafe now?		☐
What is still affecting you now?		☐
What fears remain if return becomes necessary?		☐
What has helped you cope or stay grounded?		☐
What makes it easier or harder to seek help now?		☐

7F. Visual Chronology Anchors and Over-general-Memory Support

When a client cannot produce exact dates, do not treat that as failure. Use contextual anchors and return later. This is especially important when the client remembers in snapshots, sensations, school years, seasons, or family milestones rather than calendar time. Documents and photos—a birth certificate, a timestamped photo, a school record—can serve as anchors too, and are worth asking about directly.

Season	Holiday / Holy Day	Election / Conflict	School Year	Pregnancy / Child Age	Move / Detention / Release	Language Used Then

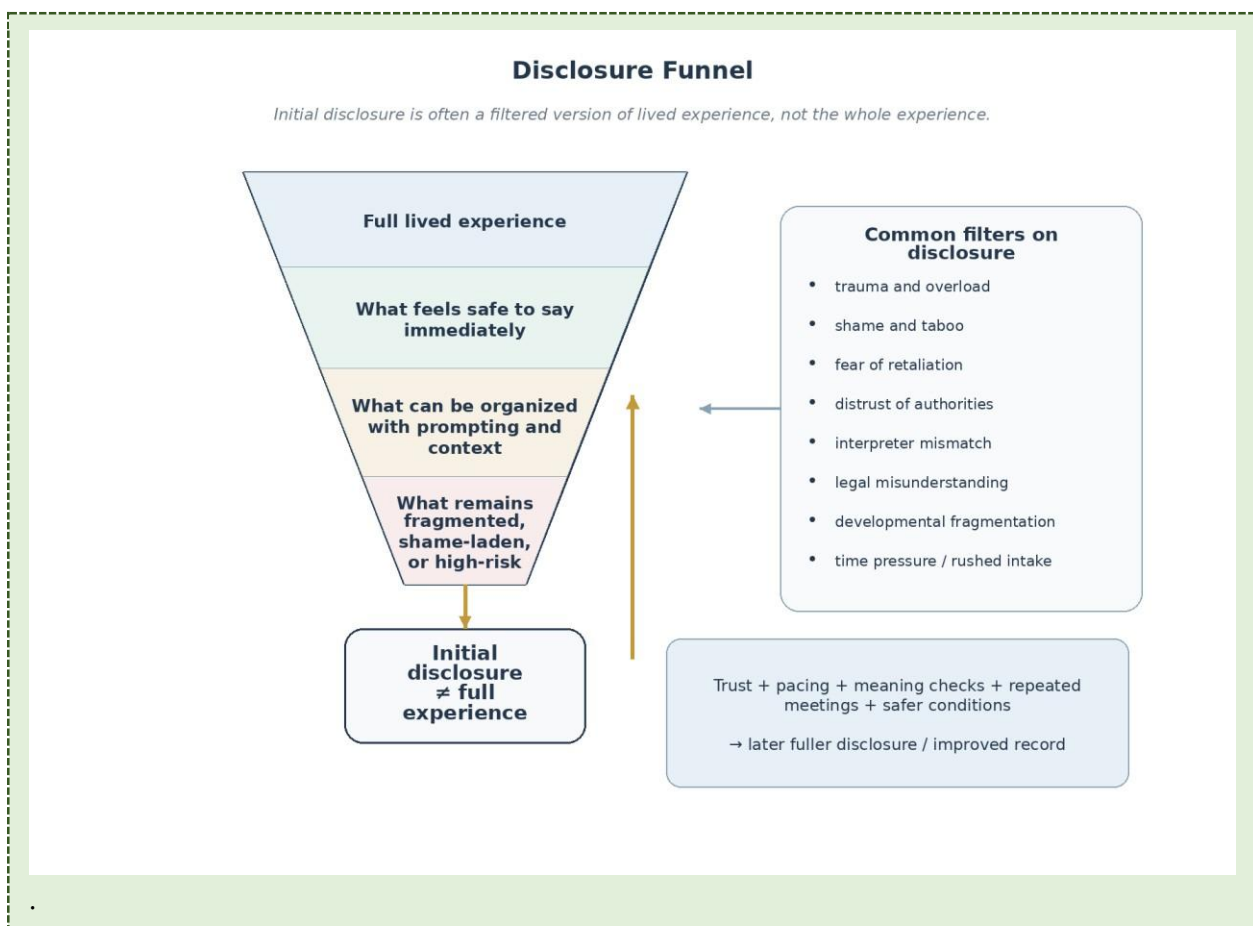
Additional anchors for the same case:

Job / Employment	Family Event	COVID-19 Shutdown	Protest / Major Event	Birthday

⚠ STOP RULE. Containment cue. If chronology work causes flooding, pause, orient to the room, shift to a neutral topic, and decide together whether to return later. In-session containment protocol: (1) pause immediately; (2) say, "We do not have to talk about this right now"; (3) help the client orient to the present—name five things they can see, four they can feel, or invite a short walk / water break; (4) shift to a neutral question if needed; (5) note the topic for later return (SAMHSA, 2014; American Bar Association Commission on Immigration & HIAS, 2022; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2021).

Section 8. Delay, Partial Disclosure, Barriers, and Developmental Markers

Delayed and partial disclosure is not a reliable indicator of deception. Research documents that shame, trauma-related avoidance, dissociation, fear of retaliation, immigration-status fears, and interpretation or language problems can all suppress or delay disclosure even when the underlying events are entirely truthful (Bögner et al., 2007; Center for Human Rights, Gender and Migration at Washington University in St. Louis, Red Regional de Espacios Seguros, & UNHCR, 2020). This section provides tools for identifying specific disclosure barriers, documenting them neutrally, and asking about them without blame—while preserving the practitioner's responsibility to evaluate what is core, what is peripheral, and what requires clarification or legal strategy. If a client becomes dissociated or overwhelmed while discussing these barriers, see Appendix G.6 (Regulation and “Return Later” Card) for grounding tools.



8A. Why Something May Not Have Been Shared Earlier

- ☐ Trauma-related avoidance, fragmentation, or emotional flooding.
- ☐ Shame, humiliation, taboo, or fear of social consequences.
- ☐ Fear of retaliation by family, community, persecutors, or authorities.
- ☐ Fear of not being believed or fear of seeming inconsistent.

- ☐ Distrust of authorities, lawyers, interpreters, or institutions.
- ☐ Concern about family consequences or community reputation.
- ☐ Language barriers, dialect mismatch, or interpretation problems.
- ☐ Cultural norms against discussing violence, sexuality, shame, family conflict, or mental distress.
- ☐ Not understanding legal relevance at the earlier stage.
- ☐ Practical time pressure, rushed intake, unstable living conditions, or lack of service knowledge.
- ☐ Fear that disclosure would expose, endanger, or burden family members.
- ☐ Prior bad advice, rushed prior screening, or earlier document trails that captured only part of the story.
- ☐ Not knowing what services or protections existed, or whether disclosure would help.

8B. Questions to Clarify Delay Without Blame

- ☐ What made it hard to talk about this earlier?
- ☐ What would have made it feel safer to say this sooner?
- ☐ Is there a reason this became easier or possible to discuss now?
Indirect alternative: What's different about today, if anything, compared to before?
- ☐ Were there things you were afraid might happen if you shared this?
Indirect alternative: Sometimes staying quiet feels safer, even without one specific fear in mind—was it like that for you?
- ☐ Was there something about the setting, the interpreter, the timing, or the relationship that made this harder?

8C. Suggested Neutral Documentation Language

Primary audience: social work and clinical practitioners.

- "Additional detail emerged over time as trust developed."
- "The client described difficulty discussing this topic initially."
- "The client reported barriers to disclosure including fear, shame, and language limitations."
- "The client was not ready to discuss this in the first meeting."
- "The timing and sequence of disclosure appear related to distress, fear, and contextual barriers rather than to the absence of the event."

8D. Developmental and Youth Considerations

Use this section when the client is a minor, was harmed as a minor, or carries early trauma or traumatic separation that may still shape disclosure and trust (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2021). Developmental fragmentation should not be read as coaching or dishonesty; it reflects how memory is stored and retrieved at different stages of life.

Pattern to Consider	How It May Show Up	What to Do / Not Do
Early childhood trauma	Memory may be stored in fragments, body sensations, or snapshots rather than event-byevent chronology.	Use developmental anchors, not pressure for exact dates. Do not read fragmented recall as coaching.
Traumatic separation from caregivers	Distrust of authority figures, fear, withdrawal, separation anxiety, or confusion about why people leave.	Name the difficulty, build predictability, reassure without overpromising, and avoid punitive interpretations.
School-age trauma responses	Withdrawal, concentration difficulty, nightmares, reenactment, aggressive or fearful behavior.	Recognize trauma symptoms and document them as such if relevant to narration or functioning.
Adolescent trauma responses	Anxiety, shame, anger, risk-taking, suicidal thoughts, substance use, or revenge fantasies.	Slow the pace, clarify safety, and avoid assuming that dysregulation equals noncredibility.
Developmental age differs from chronological age	A client may narrate based on maturity or functional ability rather than calendar age.	Document both chronological age and functional / developmental considerations when relevant.

8E. Barriers Note Worksheet

Field	Notes
What was difficult to disclose?	
What barrier(s) were present?	
What changed and allowed later disclosure?	
What neutral wording belongs in the notes / declaration?	
What follow-up is still needed?	

8F. Use With Care: Documenting Barriers Without Over-Explaining

This tool is meant to discipline explanation, not to excuse every discrepancy. A trauma- or contextrelated barrier may be present, and legal judgment must still evaluate what is core, what is peripheral, and what requires clarification. Use this section when it improves interpretation. Do not turn every case into a psychological essay, and do not assume that every late fact is harmless simply because barriers exist.

Section 9. Bridge Scripts, Legal Rationale, and Meaning-Checks

Effective interviewing in asylum contexts requires more than accurate questions—it requires language that preserves trust, manages distress, and maintains the practitioner's legal and ethical position simultaneously. Research shows that partial disclosure, shifting detail, silence, and difficulty naming events more often reflect fear, shame, dissociation, or overload than deception (Bögner et al., 2007; SAMHSA, 2014). This section provides scripted language for the moments practitioners commonly find most difficult: when something important appears to be withheld, when a detail shifts, when a sensitive question is legally necessary but emotionally risky, and when interpretation may have distorted meaning. These scripts are starting points, not scripts to memorize.

Evidence note: These bridge scripts are grounded in trauma-informed interviewing principles and the observation that partial disclosure, shifting detail, silence, or difficulty naming an event may reflect fear, shame, dissociation, or overload rather than lack of truthfulness. They are meant to preserve trust, pacing, and client voice while still gathering legally relevant information (Bögner et al., 2007; SAMHSA, 2014).

9A. When You Think Something Important Is Being Held Back

"It seems like there may be more here, and that is okay. We do not have to get to it all today."

"Sometimes people are not ready to talk about certain parts right away. Is that happening here?"

"We can note this and return to it when it feels more manageable."

9B. When You Need to Slow Down

"Let's stay with this one part for a moment."

"We can pause here if you need."

"You do not need to tell this all at once."

9C. When a Detail Changes or Seems Inconsistent

"Help me understand what feels most accurate now."

Indirect alternative: "There's no pressure to have it perfectly clear—just tell me what feels closest to true right now."

"Sometimes details come back in pieces. Let's walk through it slowly."

"What part of this feels clear, and what part still feels uncertain?"

9D. Legal Rationale Bridge Scripts

This sub-section provides the legal-rationale technique emphasized in attorney-facing asylum toolkits: warn the client before a sensitive question and explain why the question matters legally, so

the practitioner's role feels protective rather than intrusive (American Bar Association Commission on Immigration & HIAS, 2022).

"I need to ask a difficult question about the police now. The reason I am asking is because the decision-maker will need to understand why the state could not protect you."

"I am going to ask about something sensitive. I am asking because this may help explain why you were targeted, why you did not report, or why you cannot safely return."

"You can answer in whatever level of detail feels manageable. If this is not the right time, we can come back to it later."

9E. Meaning-Check Scripts for Interpreted or Confusing Moments

"Can you explain to me what you think I am asking for?"

"Please tell me in your own words what the interpreter just asked you."

"Let's pause. Are there words we are using that do not translate well into your language?"

"When I say [police / politics / family / shame / relationship], what does that word mean in your home language or community?"

9F. Closing Scripts

"Before we stop, is there anything we should note so you feel okay leaving today?"

"What would help you feel grounded before you go?"

"What would make it easier to return to this next time?"

9G. Scripts for Weak Spots, Role Clarification, and Difficult Feedback

"Part of my role is to identify the weak spots in the case early so we can address them together. That does not mean I do not believe you."

"I may ask hard questions now because the other side may ask them later. I want us to prepare in a way that protects you."

"Right now I am trying to understand what the law will require us to explain, not to judge whether what happened to you matters."

"If there is a document or prior statement that seems different, let's slow down and understand what it means before we decide it is a contradiction."

Section 10. Affidavit and Narrative Review Toolkit

Preserving client voice while reviewing for legal clarity, credibility risks, and unresolved gaps

Primary audience: attorneys and accredited representatives.

The declaration is often the central narrative document in an asylum case. It should be legally coherent, but it should not erase the client's voice. A strong declaration helps the reader understand what happened, why the client was targeted, why protection or relocation was not available, and what the client fears now - while preserving the client's own language, pacing, and meaning as much as possible.

This section helps practitioners review declarations before filing for narrative gaps, weak nexus, unclear actors, unexplained delay, over-explaining, adverse facts, missing corroboration, interpreter issues, and credibility-sensitive discrepancies. The goal is not to make every declaration sound perfect. The goal is to make the record accurate, clear, contextualized, and faithful to the client's account.

Client Voice First

A declaration should not sound like a template, a country-conditions report, or a lawyer's essay. Practitioners may organize, clarify, and sequence the client's account, but should avoid replacing the client's words with stock language. Where possible, preserve the client's natural phrasing, especially around fear, targeting, family/community meaning, shame, threats, and what the client understood at the time.

Before filing, the declaration should be read back or reviewed with the client in a language and format they can understand.

- ☐ Does this sentence sound like the client or like the practitioner?
- ☐ Has the client confirmed that this wording feels accurate?
- ☐ Are culturally specific words, family roles, threats, insults, or community meanings preserved where possible?
- ☐ Have we avoided inserting generic trauma language that the client did not use?
- ☐ Have we avoided over-polishing the narrative so much that it loses authenticity?
- ☐ Has the client had a chance to correct wording, sequence, emphasis, and meaning?
- ☐ Has the declaration been reviewed with appropriate interpretation or language support?

10A. Core Review Questions

- ☐ Do we understand the client's background and social context well enough to interpret the narrative?
- ☐ Is the persecution story chronologically understandable, even if exact dates are not available?
- ☐ Is nexus visible, or is it only implied?
- ☐ Are transitions missing between event, aftermath, flight, post-arrival, and present fear?
- ☐ Are there unexplained gaps, delays, or late disclosures that require clarification?
- ☐ Are there places where context or short science references might help interpretation?
- ☐ Is the client's own voice still present?
- ☐ Would this declaration survive a prepermission-style challenge that says it is too thin, too vague, or missing a key element?
- ☐ Does the declaration explain why the harm happened to this client, not only what happened?
- ☐ Are the main actors/persecutors clearly identified?
- ☐ Are reporting, non-reporting, relocation, and delay explained where legally relevant?
- ☐ Are there any facts that DHS, the asylum office, immigration court, or a skeptical adjudicator would likely question?
- ☐ Are any bars, prior filings, adverse facts, or inconsistencies flagged for legal review?
- ☐ Does the declaration distinguish what is known, what is approximate, and what remains uncertain?
- ☐ Has the client reviewed the declaration in a language they understand?

10B. Hostile Reader / Adjudicator Lens

Before filing, practitioners should review the declaration from the perspective of a skeptical reader. This does not mean adopting a hostile view of the client. It means identifying predictable attacks before they become filing weaknesses.

- ☐ What would a skeptical adjudicator say is vague?
- ☐ What would DHS or opposing counsel say is missing?
- ☐ What looks inconsistent with prior forms, border statements, credible-fear notes, pro se filings, or earlier drafts?
- ☐ Are there unexplained delays in disclosure, departure, reporting, or filing?
- ☐ Are there facts that could raise bars, discretionary concerns, or adverse credibility concerns?
- ☐ Are there places where the declaration assumes country, family, cultural, or political context the reader may not understand?
- ☐ Are there claims that need corroboration, clarification, or a neutral explanation?
- ☐ Are interpreter, translation, or language-of-encoding issues visible where relevant?

Practice note: A hostile-reader review should not lead to overwriting the client's narrative. It should identify where clarification, corroboration, context, or legal strategy is needed.

10C. Hole Prompts and Review Worksheet

Hole prompts

- ☐ What would a reader not understand here?
- ☐ What would make this sequence clearer?
- ☐ What context is assumed but not written?
- ☐ What happened between this event and the next?
- ☐ Where does the protected ground become visible?
- ☐ What is over-explained in a way that weakens rather than strengthens the declaration?
- ☐ Where does the declaration jump too quickly?
- ☐ Where does the reader need more context before understanding the legal significance?
- ☐ Where does the client's own explanation need to be preserved more directly?
- ☐ Where is the nexus implied but not visible?
- ☐ Where could a late-disclosed fact be misread without explanation?
- ☐ Where does the declaration sound too generic, too polished, or too lawyer-written?

Review worksheet

Review Area	What Is Missing / Unclear?	Action Needed	Who Will Follow Up?
Chronology			
Main actors / persecutors			
Nexus / protected ground			
State protection / reporting			
Relocation / flight			

Review Area	What Is Missing / Unclear?	Action Needed	Who Will Follow Up?
Delay / disclosure			
Post-arrival / present fear			
Client voice / natural wording			
Over-explaining / boilerplate language			
Prior statements / prior filings			
Adverse facts / possible bars			
Corroboration gaps			
Interpreter / translation issues			
What needs client confirmation before filing?			

10D. Core vs. Peripheral Detail Evaluation Matrix

Not all discrepancies have the same significance. Some differences involve peripheral details, such as time of day, weather, sequence of minor events, or approximate dates. Others may affect core elements, such as who harmed the client, why they were targeted, whether the state was involved, whether relocation was possible, or what the client fears now. This matrix helps practitioners classify discrepancies before deciding whether they require clarification, corroboration, legal strategy, or no action.

Discrepancy / Shift Identified	Core or Peripheral?	Why It Matters	How to Clarify or Repair	Follow-Up Needed?

Example 1: Peripheral detail shift: The client first said the incident happened “in the evening,” then later said it was “late afternoon.” If the timing does not affect who harmed the client, why the harm occurred, whether the client reported, or why the client fled, this may be peripheral. Clarify if needed, but do not overstate it.

Example 2: Core detail requiring clarification: The client first identified the attackers as “men from the neighborhood,” but later says one was a police officer or political-party member. This may affect state action, nexus, reporting, and protection analysis. Clarify carefully and review whether interpretation, fear, shame, or misunderstanding affected the earlier account.

Example 3: Delayed disclosure needing context: The client did not mention sexual violence, family betrayal, LGBTQ identity, or political involvement at intake but later discloses it. This may

require careful contextual documentation, not automatic disbelief. Review safety, shame, interpreter issues, role clarity, and whether the client understood the legal relevance earlier.

Example 4: Potentially material inconsistency: The client gives two different accounts of who directly caused the main harm or why the harm occurred. Treat this as a core issue requiring follow-up, client review, and legal strategy before filing.

Practice note: Some adjudicators may still treat peripheral discrepancies harshly. This matrix does not guarantee how a decision-maker will respond. It helps the practitioner identify what needs clarification before filing and what should not be overcorrected in a way that erases the client's voice.

10E. Declaration Drafting Tips

- ☐ Do not guess exact dates. If calendar dates are uncertain, use approximate anchors and say so plainly.
- ☐ Give enough detail to understand the event, but do not force maximal detail that the client cannot reliably maintain.
- ☐ Make nexus visible. The declaration should help a reader see why the client was targeted, not merely what happened.
- ☐ Explain reporting or non-reporting, relocation efforts or barriers, and what changed after the event.
- ☐ When useful, include the first significant incident, the most serious incident, the last incident before leaving, and the present fear if returned.
- ☐ Preserve the client's voice. Use neutral clarifications for delay or chronology difficulty, but do not overwrite the narrative with clinical jargon.
- ☐ Use the annotated sample architecture and blank template in Appendices B and C as drafting aids, not as scripts to copy verbatim.
- ☐ Do not insert stock affidavit language that the client would not naturally use.
- ☐ Do not make the declaration sound like a legal brief.
- ☐ Preserve the client's own words for threats, insults, fear, shame, family meaning, identity, and community context.
- ☐ Use approximate dates honestly rather than forcing false precision.
- ☐ Make clear what the client knew at the time, not only what the practitioner knows now.
- ☐ Read back key sections and confirm meaning before filing.
- ☐ If interpretation was used, confirm that the client understood and approved the final wording.
- ☐ Use templates as structure, not as language to copy.

10F. Actor Clarity, Adverse Facts, and Pre-Filing Risk Review

A CIAS lens does not erase a legal bar, but it shapes how the underlying facts are understood, documented, and explained. A prior inconsistent statement may reflect interpreter substitution, rushed or unscreened intake elsewhere, or trauma-driven chronology rather than deception. An apparent firm-resettlement fact may reflect survival-driven necessity—the only way to obtain housing, work, or safety—rather than an intent to durably resettle. Context does not resolve a bar as a legal matter, but it often determines whether the underlying facts are accurately characterized in the first place.

This toolkit flags possible bars and adverse facts early so they can be addressed, not ignored—but it does not provide bar-by-bar legal analysis or case law. For structured support in approaching a flagged bar, use the tools already in this toolkit: Section 4A for early identification, Section 10B for reviewing the record through a hostile-reader lens, this section for actor clarity and pre-filing risk review, and Section 11 for corroboration planning.

- ☐ Have I named the main actor clearly each time rather than relying on vague pronouns like “they”?
- ☐ Would a reader outside the client’s country context understand why the event, actor, or symbol mattered, or have I assumed that “everybody knows”?
- ☐ Does any paragraph read like a political science paper or country report instead of the client’s own narrative?
- ☐ Have I captured the persecutor’s own words where those words strengthen nexus, subjective fear, or objective fear?
- ☐ Are there bars to asylum, ineligibility issues, or adverse facts that require a legal strategy rather than silence?
- ☐ If new documents surfaced late, have I explained whether the tension is about chronology, translation, omitted context, or a materially different fact?
- ☐ Are all major actors identified clearly?
- ☐ Does the declaration explain how the client knew who the actors were?
- ☐ Are pronouns like “they” or “people” used where a more specific actor is needed?
- ☐ Are bars, criminal history, prior filings, prior inconsistent statements, or adverse facts flagged for legal review?
- ☐ Has the practitioner avoided hiding adverse facts that may later appear in the record?
- ☐ Is there a plan to address prior statements, border notes, credible-fear notes, pro se filings, or preparer-drafted documents?
- ☐ Would a supervisor or second reviewer know what still needs legal strategy before filing?

Practice note: This section is for issue-spotting and pre-filing review. It does not provide legal advice on bars or eligibility. Issues flagged here should be reviewed by the responsible legal practitioner.

10G. Read-Back Before Filing

Before filing, the declaration should be reviewed with the client in a language, pace, and format they can understand. The purpose is not only proofreading. It is meaning confirmation. The client should have the opportunity to correct wording, sequence, emphasis, names, dates, translations, and statements that do not feel accurate.

- ☐ Was the declaration read back or reviewed with the client?
- ☐ Was interpretation or translated review provided if needed?
- ☐ Did the client confirm key facts, names, dates/approximate dates, and sequence?
- ☐ Did the client confirm that the declaration preserves their meaning?
- ☐ Were any sections changed because the client said they did not sound right?
- ☐ Were unresolved uncertainties noted rather than hidden?
- ☐ Did the client understand what will be filed?

PART III: DOCUMENTATION AND EVIDENCE

Section 11. Evidence and Exhibit Organizer

Evidence planning is most effective when treated as an integral part of narrative development rather than a task completed at the end of the case. This organizer makes evidence gathering visible from early in the workflow and links each document directly to what it proves, whether it requires translation, and where it fits within the overall case theory. It also provides structured guidance on when psychosocial, medical, or expert corroboration may be necessary—particularly when traumarelated barriers, developmental factors, or language-mediated distortion need careful explanation that lay testimony alone cannot fully carry (Saadi et al., 2021; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2024). The toolkit makes evidence gathering visible as a core workflow component rather than an afterthought (American Bar Association Commission on Immigration & HIAS, 2022).

11A. Corroboration Planning Prompts

- ☐ What can corroborate identity and family relationships?
- ☐ What can corroborate political, religious, social-group, or community involvement?
- ☐ What can corroborate reporting, non-reporting, medical harm, relocation attempts, or post-flight threats?
- ☐ What country conditions or objective materials illuminate the context the client is describing?
- ☐ What is realistically obtainable, what needs translation, and what is unlikely to be obtainable without creating risk?

11B. When Psychosocial, Medical, or Expert Corroboration May Help

A mental health, psychosocial, or medical evaluation may help when memory loss, chronology difficulty, functional impairment, or trauma-related barriers to disclosure need careful explanation. Expert or psychosocial input may be especially useful when sexual violence, shame, dissociation, childhood trauma, traumatic separation, developmental delay, or severe post-arrival instability affect how the story can be told. Such corroboration should clarify function, barriers, or risk—it should not replace the client's own narrative or be used as a substitute for legal theory. When considering expert support, ask: What question needs explaining? What part of the record is at risk of being misread? What kind of evaluator or specialist is actually necessary.

11C. Exhibit Organizer

Exhibit / Document	What It Supports	Status	Translation Needed?	Source / Who Will Obtain It	Notes / Authenticity Concerns

11D. Explaining Evidence-Gathering to the Client

Clients do not always understand why their attorney cannot simply request records directly, or why locating documents, contacts, or witnesses often depends on the client's own effort. The following is a sample script practitioners can adapt in plain language:

“I can request some records myself, but for many documents—especially ones from your home country, from family members, or from people who saw what happened—I am not able to get them on my own. I need your help finding out what exists, where it might be, and who might still have it or remember it. If something cannot be found, that does not mean you did something wrong. It means we work on this together, and you tell me what you know, even if it feels incomplete.”

CIAS context shapes what a client can realistically gather, and why. Cultural context may make contacting relatives for records unsafe or shame-inducing. U.S. climate context—institutional mistrust or fear of any authority, including one in the home country—may make a client reluctant to make contact at all. Economic context may make retrieval, travel, or translation costs prohibitive. Developmental context matters when the client was a child at the time of harm and never held identifying documents. An unobtainable document is information, not a gap to be silently noted or held against the client.

Section 12. Interpreter and Language-Access Guidance

Language access in asylum proceedings is not a neutral administrative function—it is a variable that directly shapes memory retrieval, comprehension, and the testimonial record. Research establishes that the language in which experiences were encoded affects which autobiographical memories are most accessible (Marian & Neisser, 2000); that interpreter practices including summarization, compression, and culturally loaded connotation can alter meaning in ways that modify the official record (Ottosson et al., 2024; Mellinger & Dadhania, 2025); and that non-native speakers are judged less credible even when equally accurate, meaning that hesitation, reduced fluency, or low confidence should not serve as proxies for deception (Raver et al., 2023). This section makes interpretation visible throughout the case workflow, provides practical guidance for before, during, and after interpreted meetings, and offers a structured log for documenting issues that may affect the testimonial record.

12A. Before the Meeting

- ☐ Identify the client's strongest language and dialect, and if possible the language used during key events.
- ☐ Ask whether a gender preference, cultural concern, or prior relationship makes a particular interpreter unsuitable.
- ☐ Clarify confidentiality and explain that the client can ask for clarification or a change if the interpretation feels wrong.
- ☐ Avoid using family or community members as interpreters when there is a conflict, shame barrier, or safety concern.
- ☐ Do not assume the client's named language is their best language. Stigma against indigenous or minority languages can lead clients to claim a more dominant language (such as Spanish) even when comprehension is limited; confirm actual fluency before substantive interviewing.
- ☐ Screen for conflicts of interest (relationship to the client, to the events, or to opposing parties) and, where possible, confirm the interpreter has trauma-informed training.
- ☐ If the attorney shares the client's language, decide in advance whether to interview without an interpreter or still use one. Working directly can build rapport, but it leaves no independent record of what was said; a third-party interpreter or a contemporaneous note can preserve that record even when the attorney is fluent.

12B. During the Meeting

- ☐ Speak in short units and avoid jargon or idioms.
- ☐ Watch for long client answers followed by very short interpreter summaries.
- ☐ Use meaning-check questions when a term feels culturally loaded or when the client looks confused.
- ☐ Document visible problems in real time rather than assuming you will remember them later.
- ☐ Pause if the client wants clarification, a break, prayer time, water, or grounding.

- ☐ For domestic violence and LGBTQ+ cases, watch for interpreter discomfort, softening, or refusal to render explicit or identity-related terms—especially with an interpreter from the client’s own community. Address it directly with the interpreter or change interpreters if accurate rendering is at risk.

12C. After the Meeting

- ☐ Note any interpreter issues that could affect the record.
- ☐ Identify whether a follow-up meeting is needed with a different interpreter or clearer terminology.
- ☐ If an earlier interpreted answer appears materially distorted, document the reason for the clarification rather than treating it as a free-floating inconsistency.

12D. Interpreter Observation and Meaning Log

Two logging options are offered. Use the short-form log below for a quick, time-limited note in the moment; use the full log on the next page when an issue is significant enough to document in detail.

Short-form log:

Date / Meeting	Issue Type	Brief Note	Action Taken

Full log:

Field	Notes
Meeting date	
Interpreter name / agency	
Language of encoding (language spoken during persecution)	
Language of interview	
Potential dialect mismatch?	
Observed summarization / compression?	
Culturally loaded term mismatch?	
Additional notes	

Section 13. Science Briefs and Citations Attorneys Can Use

Primary audience: attorneys and accredited representatives.

This section provides a curated bank of brief-ready, case-anchored propositions drawn from the peer-reviewed literature. Its purpose is not to turn every declaration into a literature review but to give practitioners a small, targeted set of research summaries they can cite selectively when credibility, delay, chronology, interpreter issues, or developmental context are likely to be misread. Each proposition is stated in attorney-accessible language and accompanied by its core citation. Practitioners should use these selectively, only where the proposition directly addresses a weakness in the record that needs explanation.

Issue	Attorney-Ready Note
Trauma, memory, and inconsistency	Repeated retellings can produce discrepancies without deception, particularly in peripheral details, and the risk of discrepancy increases as time passes and trauma symptoms remain high (Herlihy et al., 2002; Herlihy & Turner, 2015).
Memory loss and chronology difficulty	In U.S. medico-legal affidavits, memory loss was documented in a significant minority of asylum seekers and was associated with PTSD and depression rather than head trauma; memory difficulty often appeared as gaps, chronology problems, avoidance, and shortterm interference (Saadi et al., 2021).
Overgeneral memory	Trauma-exposed refugees and asylum seekers may retrieve generalized rather than highly specific autobiographical memories, especially under stress, which means aggressive demands for granularity can worsen rather than improve narrative quality (Khan et al., 2021).

Issue	Attorney-Ready Note
Delayed disclosure of sexual violence	Delayed disclosure of sexual violence is strongly associated with shame, dissociation, and avoidance; it should not automatically be read as fabrication (Bögner et al., 2007).
Enabled versus elicited disclosure	GBV disclosure may be safer and more accurate when it is enabled over time through relational safety rather than elicited aggressively at intake (Center for Human Rights, Gender and Migration at Washington University in St. Louis, Red Regional de Espacios Seguros, & UNHCR, 2020).
Language-dependent recall	Language can shape which autobiographical memories are most accessible; changes in language context or interpreter mediation can affect what details are recalled and how they are expressed (Marian & Neisser, 2000).
Non-native speaker credibility penalty	Non-native speakers may be judged less credible even when they are similarly accurate, which means speech hesitation, low confidence, or reduced fluency should not be treated as a proxy for deceit (Raver et al., 2023).
Interpreter-mediated distortion	Interpreter "word accuracy" does not guarantee meaning accuracy; institutional jargon, cultural connotation, and summarization can all distort what ends up in the record (Ottosson et al., 2024; Mellinger & Dadhania, 2025).

Holistic credibility assessment	Credibility assessment should be context-sensitive and should account for personal circumstances that affect how evidence is provided, including mental health, education, age, language, and other distortion factors (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2024; UNHCR, 2013).
Cultural background and credibility assessment	Applicants and adjudicators typically come from different cultural backgrounds; cultural differences can affect perception of time, use of two-dimensional images and maps, and estimation of distance, age, or duration, meaning apparent vagueness or inconsistency in these areas may reflect cultural background rather than unreliability (Bruïne et al., 2026).
Effect of adversarial questioning style on consistency	Complex, negative, or double-negative cross-examination-style questioning can itself impair the accuracy and apparent consistency of a witness's account, independent of the underlying truthfulness of the account; the effect varies by question type and should caution against reading confused answers to hostile-style questioning as evidence of unreliability (Wade & Spearing, 2022).

PART IV: CASE CLOSURE

Section 14. Next Steps After Filing, Interview Prep, and Case Closure

Case closure is not an afterthought—it is a critical transition point that shapes whether the client leaves with a clear plan, whether outstanding items are tracked, and whether the practitioner has discharged their ethical obligations around scope of representation and referral. This section borrows the practical ending logic of attorney-facing asylum toolkits: after the narrative is built, practitioners still need a filing-ready package, a structured interview-prep process, and a closing checklist so the case does not end in confusion or unresolved commitments (American Bar Association Commission on Immigration & HIAS, 2022). Each tool below is usable independently in time-limited settings.

14A. Filing Readiness Checklist

- ☐ Client has reviewed the declaration and understands the main structure.
- ☐ Core claim elements are visible: protected ground, harm/threat, persecutor, state protection issue, relocation issue, current fear.
- ☐ Exhibit list is complete enough to file, with translation needs identified.
- ☐ Client has copies—or knows when copies will be provided—of major filing components.
- ☐ Any one-year-deadline or timeliness issue has been identified and documented.

14B. Interview Prep Checklist

- ☐ Review the basic structure of the claim in plain language.
- ☐ Practice saying "I do not know" or "I do not remember exactly" rather than guessing.
- ☐ Review how to ask for clarification, a break, or interpreter correction.
- ☐ Clarify that affect, tears, flatness, or confusion do not have to be "performed" a certain way.
- ☐ Identify high-risk topics and make a plan for pacing them.

14C. Before You Close: Limited-Scope Closure Checklist

- ☐ Provide the client with paper and/or electronic copies of the filing package where appropriate.
- ☐ Give the client a written list of next steps, deadlines, pending items, and known unknowns.
- ☐ Identify any missing document that may still be obtained later.
- ☐ Clarify whether representation is continuing or ending; if ending, provide a clear disengagement / closure note consistent with local rules and practice.
- ☐ Provide referral information for interpretation, mental health, social work, or emergency needs if relevant.
- ☐ Check whether the client feels sufficiently grounded to leave the meeting.

Appendix A. Glossary of Practical Terms

Purpose. This glossary defines the specialized and technical terms used throughout the CIAS Practitioner Toolkit. It is designed to support practitioners from different disciplines—legal, social work, clinical, and allied—who may use terminology differently in their home fields. All definitions reflect the specific meaning of each term within this toolkit's framework and should not be substituted for legal definitions used in court or administrative filings.

Use This Appendix When

- A term in the toolkit is unfamiliar or ambiguous.
- Orienting a new team member or supervising practitioner to the toolkit's conceptual language.
- Translating between legal and social work or clinical terminology within a team.

Practice Note

These definitions are working definitions for toolkit use. They should not be cited in legal filings without independent verification of applicable legal standards.

Term	Working Meaning in This Toolkit
Core fact	A fact central to the claim, such as who harmed the client, why they were targeted, what happened, or what they fear if returned.
Peripheral detail	A secondary detail such as the exact day, weather, clothing, room layout, or other detail that may shift without changing the core event.
Language of encoding	The language or dialect used when the experience happened, which may shape how memory is later retrieved.
Meaning gap	A gap between literal translation and the institutional or cultural meaning of the question or answer.

Term	Working Meaning in This Toolkit
Enabled disclosure	Disclosure that emerges over time because the setting, pacing, and relationship make it safe enough to speak.
Elicited disclosure	Disclosure that is pulled through direct questioning before sufficient safety or readiness exists.
Not Ready flag	A documented note that a topic appears important but should not be pressed in the current meeting.
CIAS lens	One of the four contextual domains (U.S. climate, developmental, economic, cultural) used to interpret testimony in this toolkit.
Nexus	The legally required connection between the harm suffered and a protected ground (race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or particular social group).
Containment	A structured, practitionerinitiated pause used when the client becomes flooded, dissociated, or unable to continue safely.

Appendix B. Annotated Sample Declaration Architecture

Purpose. This appendix provides an annotated map of a well-structured asylum declaration, showing what belongs in each section, why it matters legally, and how the CIAS framework supports each component. It is intended to guide drafting and review rather than serve as a script. The sample architecture below is intentionally generic and rewritten for CIAS use; it is not copied from any jurisdiction-specific model (American Bar Association Commission on Immigration & HIAS, 2022).

Use This Appendix When

- Beginning to draft a declaration for the first time with a new client.
- Reviewing a completed draft to identify structural holes or missing transitions.
- Explaining the declaration structure to a client, paralegal, or volunteer in plain language.
- Comparing the actual declaration to a standard architecture before filing.

Practice Note

Use the Blank Declaration Template in Appendix C alongside this appendix for drafting. Do not copy sample language verbatim. Rewrite every section in the client's own voice. The annotated architecture shows what to include and why—the client's language determines how.

Declaration Component	What Goes Here	Why It Matters
Opening oath	A short sworn statement under penalty of perjury.	Signals that the declaration is the client's sworn narrative.
Identity + entry	Name, age, country of origin, date of arrival, and who is included in the case.	Establishes the narrator and the filing context.
Background and context	Family, community, schooling/work, important identities, political/religious/social context.	Provides the "before" picture and helps the reader understand nexus and risk.
What happened	First significant incident, worst incident, last incident, or another coherent event sequence.	Builds the harm narrative without requiring every detail at once.

Declaration Component	What Goes Here	Why It Matters
Why I believe I was targeted	What was said, done, signaled, or known that links the harm to a protected ground.	Makes nexus visible rather than implied.
Reporting / no reporting	Whether the client sought help and why they did or did not.	Addresses state protection and non-reporting without speculation.
Relocation and flight	Whether the client moved, hid, or tried to relocate and what happened.	Supports relocation analysis and return-risk logic.
After I left / current fear	What happened after departure, threats to family or similarly situated people, and why return remains unsafe.	Connects past harm to current fear.

Appendix C. Blank Declaration Template

Purpose. This appendix provides a blank, fillable declaration template corresponding to the architecture in Appendix B. It is a drafting aid—a starting structure—not a finished product. Every section must be rewritten in the client's own voice, with specific facts replacing the bracketed fields. Do not submit this template without thorough revision.

Use This Appendix When

- Beginning a new declaration and needing a structural starting point.
- Coaching a client or supervised volunteer on what a declaration requires.
- Providing a visual framework to the client in plain language during a meeting.

Practice Note

This template uses bracketed fields. All bracketed fields must be replaced with case-specific language before filing. Refer to Section 10 (Affidavit and Narrative Review Toolkit) to review the completed declaration before submission.

I, [full name], declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States that the following is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. I make this declaration in support of my application for asylum and related protection.

1. My name is [name]. I am [age] years old and I am from [country / region]. I arrived in the United States on [date / approximate date] through [location].
 2. Before the harm began, my life looked like this: [background, family, school, work, community, identities, beliefs, or roles that matter to the claim].
 3. The people, groups, or authorities that mattered in my story were: [who they were and why].
 4. What happened to me began when [first incident or first meaningful change].
 5. The most important things that happened were: [first / worst / last or another coherent structure].
 6. I believe I was targeted because [protected ground / social group / political opinion / religion / nationality / family / identity explanation].
 7. I [did / did not] seek help from police, authorities, family, community, or others because [why / why not].
 8. I [did / did not] try to relocate or hide before leaving because [what happened / why it was not safe or feasible].
 9. Since I left, [what has happened to family, similarly situated people, or the conditions in the place of return].
 10. I fear that if I return, [future fear].
 11. [If needed] Some details were difficult to discuss earlier because [brief neutral explanation].
- [Signature line] [Date]

Appendix D. Story Organizer for Limited-Scope or Assisted Pro Se Use

Purpose. This organizer is designed for use in limited-scope representation, assisted pro se support, or brief orientation sessions where full practitioner-guided narrative development is not available. It provides a structured self-guided framework that helps individuals organize their story around the key legal elements of an asylum claim, using accessible language rather than legal terminology. It is not legal advice, and individuals using it without legal counsel should be encouraged to seek full representation wherever possible.

Not legal advice. This tool supports story organization only. It does not create an attorney-client relationship and is not a substitute for legal representation.

Use This Appendix When

- The practitioner is working in an assisted pro se or legal navigator capacity.
- A client needs to organize their story independently before a first legal meeting.
- A brief intake session must capture enough structure to identify next steps.
- Community organizations or navigators are providing early orientation without formal legal advice.

Practice Note

This organizer should be introduced gently and completed at whatever pace feels safe. Not every question needs to be answered in writing. Some individuals may prefer to speak their answers aloud to a navigator or trusted person rather than write. Accept whatever the person can give and treat it as a starting point, not a complete record.

Question	Your Response (in your own words)
Who are you? What identities, family roles, or memberships matter in your story?	
Where did you live, and what was happening in your community before things changed?	
What happened that made you unsafe or afraid?	
Who or what caused the harm? (A person, group, government, or authority?)	
Why do you believe you were targeted? What do you think the reason was?	
Were there things the person or group said or did that made it clear why they were targeting you?	
Did you try to report what happened to the police or another authority? Why or why not?	
Did you try to move somewhere safer inside your country? What happened?	
What made it hard to leave sooner? (Money, family, documents, fear, children, disability, other reasons?)	
Were there things about your story that were hard to talk about at first? What made them difficult to share?	
Have there been changes or threats to your family or people in a similar situation since you left?	
Why can you not safely return now? What would happen?	
What languages do you speak? What language did you use most when the important events happened?	
Is there anything else that feels important to your story that you have not had a chance to say yet?	

Appendix E. Social Work / Clinical Contribution to Contextual Documentation

Primary audience: social workers, clinicians, and psychosocial advocates.

Purpose. This appendix provides a structured framework for social workers, clinicians, psychosocial advocates, and allied professionals to document their observations in a format that is useful to the legal team. It is not designed to produce clinical diagnoses or formal psychological evaluations; it is designed to capture contextually relevant observations about functioning, coping, barriers to disclosure, and structural conditions that help the legal team interpret the client's narrative more accurately. Research consistently shows that interdisciplinary documentation improves credibility-sensitive interpretation and reduces the risk that traumarelated testimonial patterns are mistaken for unreliability (Miller et al., 2019; Webb et al., 2022). Clinical and social-work contributors using this appendix are not legal fact-extractors; their role is to document psychosocial and contextual observations from within their own professional lens, not to gather evidence on behalf of the legal case. Formal medical or forensic evaluation—including diagnostic assessment, referral timing, and documentation of physical or psychological findings for evidentiary use—is a distinct professional function from the general contextual documentation this appendix supports and should be coordinated separately when needed.

Use This Appendix When

- A social worker, clinician, or psychosocial advocate is contributing to the case team.
- Trauma-related barriers to disclosure need to be documented in a form the legal team can use.
- The legal team has identified a pattern (fragmented chronology, delayed disclosure, flat affect) that may benefit from contextual explanation.
- A formal psychological evaluation has not been commissioned but contextual observations are still relevant.

Practice Note

Observations recorded here are for internal case-team coordination unless otherwise agreed. Do not share with opposing parties or adjudicators without explicit legal team authorization. Record only what you directly observed; clearly distinguish observation from inference.

Area	Observations / Notes
Current functioning (sleep, concentration, work/school, caregiving, daily tasks)	
Coping and resilience strategies	
Family role strain or disruption (including mixed-status family dynamics, extended kin, and obligations to relatives abroad)	
Community support or isolation	
Structural barriers (housing, transport, work, legal precarity, language access, racism, gender-based marginalization, community surveillance, access to care)	
Trauma-related barriers to disclosure	
Strengths and stabilization factors	
Clinical cautions / what legal team should understand about pacing	
Recommended follow-up or referral	

Appendix F. Practitioner Reflection Log and Wellbeing Plan

Purpose. This appendix provides a brief, usable reflection and wellbeing log for practitioners to complete after difficult sessions. Its goal is not generic wellness language. It is to create a structured pause so that legal urgency does not consume reflective judgment—and so that drift, emotional residue, and next-step needs are captured while they are still fresh. Research on practitioner sustainability in trauma-adjacent legal work shows that brief structured reflection after difficult sessions reduces decision fatigue, improves documentation quality, and supports practitioner longevity in high-caseload environments (Asylum Access, 2020).

Use This Appendix When

- Completing a session involving disclosure of sexual violence, torture, childhood abuse, family betrayal, or severe dissociation.
- After a session that felt off-track, emotionally heavy, or difficult to manage.
- As a routine end-of-day practice in high-caseload settings.
- When a practitioner notices signs of accumulation: irritability, numbness, dread, overidentification, or avoidance.

Practice Note

Complete this log as soon as possible after the session, while memory is fresh. It does not need to be long. If significant distress is present, consult a supervisor or peer before proceeding with the next difficult task.

F.1 Post-Session Reflection

Reflection Prompt	Response
Where did we deviate from the CIAS roadmap today? Why?	
What topic created the most emotional output or confusion?	
What bridge script or containment step helped, and what should change next time?	
What emotional residue am I carrying right now?	
What requires extra attention in the next session?	
Do I need consultation, debrief, pause, or referral support before proceeding?	

F.2 Three-Minute Close-Out Checklist

- ☐ Note what felt heavy, stuck, or unfinished.
- ☐ Separate legal urgency from emotional residue.
- ☐ If needed, consult, debrief, or pause before the next difficult task.
- ☐ Watch for accumulation: irritability, numbness, dread, over-identification, or avoidance.

Appendix G. Optional Client-Facing Visual Supports for Narrative Elicitation

Primary audience: any practitioner working directly with the client; these tools are designed to be shown to or used together with the client.

Purpose. These optional visual supports help clients organize memories, relationships, movement, and safety concerns when verbal recall is fragmented, non-linear, overwhelming, or difficult to express in a conventional question-and-answer format. Research on trauma-informed communication supports the use of externalized, low-pressure organizational aids to reduce anxiety and improve the quality of recalled information in high-stakes disclosure contexts (SAMHSA, 2014; Khan et al., 2021). These tools support legal interviewing; they do not replace it.

Use These Tools When

- The client remembers in scenes, fragments, or sensory snapshots rather than linear chronology.
- Exact dates are difficult to recall.
- The client keeps referring to "they" or other vague actors.
- The client becomes overwhelmed when asked to narrate continuously.
- Interpreter-mediated communication is making sequence or meaning difficult to track.
- The client is a child, was harmed as a minor, or appears to think in developmental or event anchor terms rather than calendar time.

Practice Note

These visual supports are optional. They should be offered gently, not imposed. A client may speak, point, circle, write, or skip sections. The goal is to reduce pressure and help organize information—not to test memory or require a coherent account before the client is ready.

G.1 Event and Time-Anchor Map

Purpose. To help organize events without forcing exact dates.

Instructions to practitioner. If the client does not know a precise date, say: "You do not need the exact date. We can use age, season, school year, weather, holiday, election, or another life event."

Anchor Type	Client Response
How old were you when this happened?	
Were you in school, working, or at home then?	
What season was it?	
Was it near a holiday, election, harvest, protest, conflict, or public event?	
What was the weather like?	
Who was living with you at that time?	
What language were you speaking then?	
What happened just before this event?	
What happened soon after it?	

G.2 Before / During / After Storyboard

Purpose. To help clients who remember in scenes or episodes rather than long verbal narratives.

Instructions to practitioner. You may say: "We can break this into three parts: before it happened, while it was happening, and what happened after."

BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
Where were you?	What happened first?	What changed after?
Who was with you?	Who was there?	Who knew?
What was daily life like?	What was said?	What became harder?
What felt normal then?	What did you think was happening?	Did you try to seek help?
What made the day different?	What do you remember most clearly?	What made it hard to talk about later?

G.3 People, Power, and Protection Map

Purpose. To help identify actors clearly when narratives use vague labels such as "they," "those people," or "everyone knew."

Instructions to practitioner. You may say: "Let's identify who each person or group was, what power they had, and whether anyone could protect you."

Person / Group	Who Were They?	What Power Did They Have?	What Did They Do or Say?	Could They Protect You or Harm You?
Family member(s)				
Community member(s)				
Police / soldiers / officials				
Political group / gang / militia				

Person / Group	Who Were They?	What Power Did They Have?	What Did They Do or Say?	Could They Protect You or Harm You?
Religious / cultural authority				
Employer / landlord / trafficker / partner				

G.4 Movement, Safety, and Relocation Path

Purpose. To help map flight, internal relocation, repeated movement, and why danger remained.

Instructions to practitioner. You may say: "Let's map where you went and whether each move helped or did not help."

Place	Why Did You Go There?	Did It Feel Safer?	What Danger Still Followed?	Why Could You Not Stay There?
Home / original location				
Second place				
Third place				
Border / transit				
Arrival location				

G.5 What the Persecutor Said / What It Meant

Purpose. To help capture persecutors' own words, which may clarify nexus, motive, fear, and credibility.

Instructions to practitioner. You may say: "If you remember any words they used, even only part of a sentence, those words may matter."

G.6 Regulation and "Return Later" Card

Purpose. To support safe pacing when a client becomes flooded, shuts down, dissociates, or can no longer answer clearly.

Instructions to practitioner. This is not a client test. It is a visual pause-and-choice aid. You may say: "We can slow down. You can point to what feels right."

What Is Happening Right Now?	What We Can Do
I need a pause	Stop for a moment
I can answer a little, but not everything	Ask one small question only
I do not want to talk about this yet	Mark as "return later"
I feel confused	Clarify one word or one step
I feel overwhelmed in my body	Ground first, then decide whether to continue
I want to keep going	Continue slowly

Grounding choices. Look around and name five things you can see; put both feet on the ground; take a drink of water; stand up or stretch; shift to a less difficult question; stop and return later.

G.7 Youth / Developmental Memory Support

Purpose. To support clients who were harmed as children or adolescents and may organize memory around school stage, family events, separation, or developmental milestones rather than dates.

Instructions to practitioner. You may say: "You do not need exact years. We can think about how old you were, what grade you were in, who cared for you then, or what changed in your family."

Developmental Anchor	Client Response
How old were you?	
Were you in school? What grade?	
Who were you living with?	
Had there been a separation, move, or loss?	
What changed in your behavior, body, or daily life afterward?	
Do you remember this as a full event or more like pieces / snapshots?	

Practice caution. Do not treat developmental fragmentation as proof of dishonesty or coaching.

G.8 How to Introduce Visual Supports

Purpose. To provide practitioners with language for offering visual tools without imposing them.

- "We do not have to do this only by talking."
- "Some people find it easier to map things out."
- "You can point, circle, or write only a few words."
- "We are not testing your memory."
- "We are just trying to organize what feels clear, what feels unclear, and what we may return to later."
-

G.9 Documentation Reminder

Purpose. To prompt practitioners to record how visual tools were used and what they produced.

After using any visual support, note in the case file:

- ☐ Which tool was used.
- ☐ Whether the client responded better to visual anchoring than open verbal recall.
- ☐ What remained unclear.
- ☐ What should be revisited later.
- ☐ Whether the tool reduced distress, improved sequence, clarified actors, or strengthened nexus understanding.

G.10 Caution

⚠ STOP RULE. These tools must not be used to pressure disclosure, force coherence, or make the client "perform" a clearer story than they can safely give. They are meant to support pacing, organization, client voice, safer recall, and clearer documentation. Their use should always remain optional, gentle, and client-led.

Appendix H. Evidence Base and Development Process

What This Toolkit Accomplishes

The CIAS Practitioner Toolkit integrates three bodies of work: a review of literature on trauma and autobiographical memory, delayed disclosure, acculturative stress, structural vulnerability, languagedependent recall, and interpreter-mediated distortion; a systematic analysis of existing asylumpractice toolkits including those produced by the ABA/HAAS, Asylum Access, and USCRI; and two rounds of feedback collected from practicing immigration attorneys, social work professionals, and student reviewers through workshops and consultations. The result is a modular, four-part toolkit that moves practitioners from intake through case closure using a CIAS-informed framework grounded in published research.

The toolkit provides: a structured intake triage tool; a flexible narrative development roadmap that may be combined, revisited, or compressed; compressed CIAS pathways for full, three-meeting, one-meeting emergency, detained, high-caseload, limited-scope, and team-based settings; a five-stage prompt bank organized by interview phase; a barriers and delayed-disclosure documentation framework with developmental modifiers; a bridge-script and meaning-check library; a declaration review toolkit with a core-versus-peripheral discrepancy matrix; an evidence and exhibit organizer; an interpreter observation log; a science-brief bank with attorney-ready citations; a case closure checklist; and seven client-facing visual elicitation supports.

Structured Interviews with Attorneys and Social Workers

Development reflects practitioner workshop feedback, student review, and structured interviews conducted with attorneys and social workers in live practice settings. Workshop feedback tends to be general, impressionistic, and shaped by the group dynamic; individual interviews allowed practitioners to identify specific workflow problems, usability failures, and contextual gaps that group settings rarely surface.

Structured interviews with immigration attorneys and social workers addressed four specific toolkit development needs:

First, workflow feasibility testing. The toolkit presents the narrative roadmap as a flexible sequence rather than a fixed meeting count, and it distinguishes cases with sufficient lead time from detained, emergency, limited-scope, pro se-clinic, and high-caseload settings where the sequence may need to be compressed. Interviews tested whether the flexible roadmap, optional 12-week timeline, threemeeting pathway, and one-meeting emergency pathway are realistic across legal aid, private practice, pro bono, and social work practice types.

Second, discipline-specific usability. Attorneys and social workers use different documentation standards, operate under different ethical obligations, and produce different work products. Interviews identified which sections of the toolkit are immediately usable by each discipline, which require modification, and which may require entirely different versions for each user group.

Third, credibility-sensitive practice gaps. The toolkit addresses credibility issues — delayed disclosure, chronology gaps, interpreter distortion, developmental fragmentation — primarily through a trauma and memory lens derived from the research literature. Interviews tested whether this lens matches how attorneys and social workers actually encounter and interpret these problems in practice, and

whether the toolkit's tools for documenting and explaining them are legally sufficient and professionally defensible.

Fourth, missing content identification. Practitioners in live settings routinely encounter problems that neither the literature nor workshop feedback surfaces — particular client populations, jurisdictional practices, documentation formats, fee structures, or institutional constraints that create gaps the toolkit does not currently address. Interviews systematically surfaced these gaps before the toolkit was finalized.

H.1 Literature Review: From Narrative Extraction to Contextual Interpretation

The central difficulty in contemporary asylum practice is not the absence of narrative, but the misreading of narrative form. The U.S. asylum system asks applicants to produce timely, coherent, and internally consistent accounts in a setting defined by legal deadlines, interpreter dependence, administrative backlog, and intensifying regulatory constraint. As of early 2026, USCIS reported over 1.4 million pending affirmative asylum claims; EOIR documented 3,666,795 pending cases in the first quarter of FY2026, with hearings calendared through FY2030; and DHS proposed additional restrictions on asylum-related employment authorization (USCIS, 2024, 2025a, 2025b; EOIR, 2026a, 2026b; DHS, 2026b). These are not neutral procedural facts. They produce an adjudicative climate in which omission, delay, chronological uncertainty, and limited corroboration are readily read as weakness — even though the research literature consistently demonstrates that such patterns are generated by trauma, shame, translation barriers, and post-migration precarity rather than fabrication.

H.1.2 The Limits of the Existing Toolkit Landscape

Existing practitioner resources address parts of this problem without resolving it, because they remain analytically fragmented. Attorney-facing resources such as the ABA/HIAS asylum toolkit are strong on workflow: they help practitioners organize intake, develop declarations, gather evidence, and prepare for interviews (American Bar Association Commission on Immigration & HIAS, 2022). Rights-based resources such as the Asylum Access toolkit foreground empowerment and implementation (Asylum Access, 2020). Trauma-informed case management materials, including USCRI guidance, attend to stabilization, pacing, and safety (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2021). Each of these tools is valuable; none is sufficient on its own. What is missing is an integrative framework that treats narrative production itself as contextual — rather than assuming that once the right question is asked, a legally usable answer will reliably emerge.

H.1.3 Trauma-Informed Practice: Evidence and Limits

The trauma-informed literature establishes why this fragmentation is consequential. Disclosure is relational, paced, and dependent on perceived safety rather than simple willingness to answer questions (Miller et al., 2019; Webb et al., 2022). Bögner et al. (2007) found that sexual violence was frequently disclosed late because shame and dissociation interfered with earlier reporting. Saadi et al. (2021) documented that memory loss and chronology difficulty in asylum affidavits were associated with PTSD and depression — not deceit. Trauma-informed care becomes insufficient, however, when it remains at the level of general principle. In asylum work, trauma-informed practice must also provide a method for documenting late-emerging facts neutrally, explaining disclosure barriers without medicalizing the entire narrative, and preventing trauma-related testimonial form from being misread as unreliability.

H.1.4 Structural Context and Acculturative Stress

The acculturative stress and structural competence literature makes that methodological shift possible by relocating narrative difficulty from individual deficit to social context. Berry's (1997) model of acculturation, extended by Bhugra (2004) and Yakushko et al. (2008), demonstrates that migration reorganizes identity, coping, and social position under compounding stress. More recent work with refugee-serving professionals shows that trauma-informed practice fails when detached from legal precarity, poverty, racism, gendered vulnerability, and language exclusion (Im & Swan, 2021; Ostrander et al., 2017). The CIAS framework is valuable precisely because it presses beyond generic acculturation theory and directs practitioners to read testimony through four intersecting domains — U.S. climate, developmental context, economic context, and cultural context — as a disciplined corrective to the decontextualized manner in which asylum narratives are too often assessed.

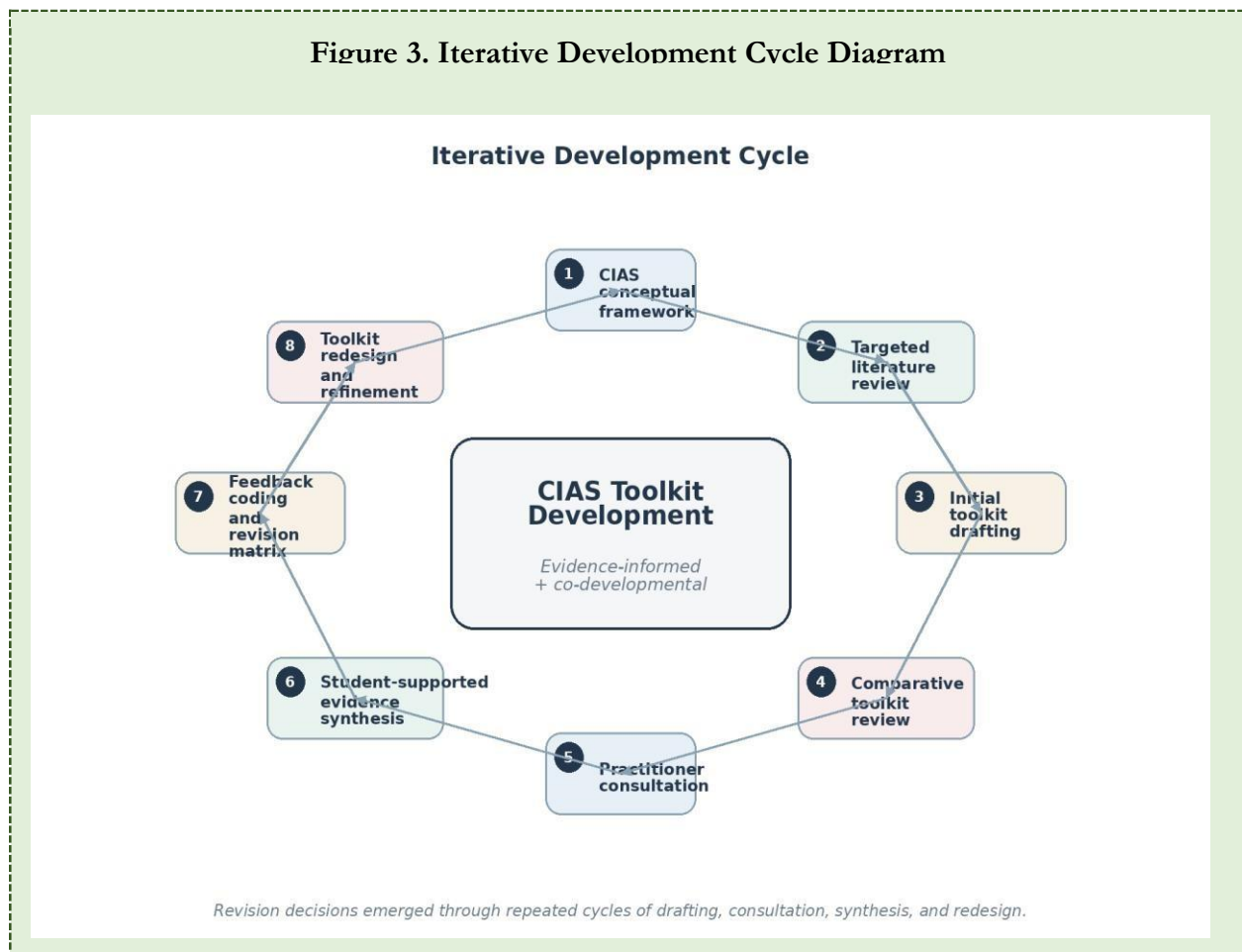
H.1.5 Resilience, Testimonial Form, and the Case for a CIAS-Based Toolkit

Resilience and credibility research reinforce this argument by showing that asylum narratives are shaped not only by trauma but also by survival. Ungar (2011) reconceptualizes resilience as a socialecological process rather than an individual trait. Repeated interviews can produce discrepancies in peripheral detail without deception, and the risk increases as time passes and trauma symptoms remain active (Herlihy et al., 2002; Herlihy & Turner, 2015). Autobiographical recall is languagedependent (Marian & Neisser, 2000). Non-native speakers may be judged less credible even when equally accurate (Raver et al., 2023). Interpreter-mediated encounters can compress or distort meaning (Mellinger & Dadhania, 2025; Ottosson et al., 2024). A CIAS-based toolkit is justified because it translates this literature into practice architecture. Its value lies not in collecting more information, but in interpreting existing information more responsibly.

H.2 Methodology and Analytic Process

This section documents the design, data sources, and analytic process underlying the CIAS Practitioner Toolkit. Development has been structured around identifiable feedback domains, explicit implications for practice, and corresponding toolkit revisions.

Figure 3. Iterative Development Cycle Diagram



H.2.1 Design

The CIAS Toolkit was developed through an iterative, community-engaged process informed by community-based participatory research principles. Development began with the CIAS framework as its conceptual foundation and progressed through repeated cycles of drafting, practitioner consultation, comparative toolkit review, student-supported evidence synthesis, and structured revision. The guiding design assumption was that a practitioner toolkit must do more than summarize theory: it must convert theory and empirical evidence into tools that fit real legal workflows, reduce interpretive error, and preserve client dignity in high-stakes interviewing contexts. This project received approval from DePaul University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the start of data collection.

The design is evidence informed as it draws from research on trauma and autobiographical memory, delayed disclosure, language of encoding, interpreter mediation, developmental context, and credibility assessment. It is co-developmental as workshop participants, student reviewers, and practicing professionals shaped the form, sequence, and usability of each component through structured feedback cycles.

H.2.2 Data Sources

Four categories of input informed development. First, the toolkit is grounded in the CIAS framework and a targeted review of recent literature. Second, multiple internal drafts were reviewed and revised. Third, external comparative toolkits were analyzed for design and workflow features.

Fourth, structured practitioner feedback was collected through presentations, workshop-style sessions, and interviews with immigration attorneys, social workers, and allied professionals. Interviews were conducted using a culturally sensitive approach attentive to participants' professional context, disciplinary norms, and communication style, and were audio-recorded and transcribed to support systematic analysis. Individual interviews lasted approximately one hour or longer, allowing participants to elaborate on workflow problems, usability concerns, and case examples in more depth than the workshop-style sessions allowed.

These consultations generated substantive observations on intake overreach, late disclosure, nonlinear narratives, interpreter distortion, corroboration challenges, nexus development, over-explained declarations, private-practice realities, and the need for clearer front-end explanation of the CIAS model.

H.2.3 Analytic Process

Coding followed a grounded theory approach. Student coders underwent structured training in grounded theory analysis and coding methods before engaging with the data, then began with open coding of interview transcripts and workshop notes to identify recurring concepts, concerns, and practice implications without imposing categories in advance. These initial codes were iteratively compared, refined, and grouped into higher-order categories as patterns stabilized across sources, grounding the domain-level organization of the feedback in the language and priorities practitioners actually used rather than in categories set before analysis began. Graduate research assistants met weekly with the principal investigator throughout the coding process to review emerging codes, resolve disagreements, and confirm that higher-order categories remained grounded in what participants said rather than in the coders' own assumptions.

The analytic process was structured around iterative synthesis and translation. Feedback and evidence were first organized in a master tracking system, then coded by domain, source, practice significance, affected toolkit section, and required action. Comments were sorted into high-, medium-, and lower-priority categories.

Revision was executed as six sequential, scoped tasks. Task 1 restructured the front matter, user pathways, and CIAS framework presentation, and relocated literature and methodology content to this appendix. Task 2 reframed the narrative development roadmap as flexible rather than a fixed meeting sequence and built the compressed CIAS pathways for time-limited representation. Task 3 restructured intake as claim triage and procedural risk screening rather than a trauma extraction. Task 4 rebuilt the affidavit-review section around client voice, a hostile-reader lens, and an expanded core-versus-peripheral matrix. Task 5 was a document-wide cleanup pass addressing crossreferences, figure captions, formatting consistency, and PDF-readiness. Task 6 integrated the clinical and interdisciplinary themes, a standalone bars-screening reference module, interpreter and chronology-anchor extensions, and science-brief bank.

References

- American Bar Association Commission on Immigration, & HIAS. (2022, February 3). *Asylum toolkit for pro bono attorneys representing pro se Afghan applicants* [Toolkit]. <https://resources.humanrightsfirst.org/wpcontent/uploads/2022/07/ABA-HIAS-Asylum-Toolkit-February-2022.pdf>
- Asylum Access. (2020, March). *Refugee rights toolkit: A leader's guide to making refugee rights a reality* (Working version). <https://asylumaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/AsylumAccess-Refugee-Rights-Toolkit-March-2020.pdf>
- Bekteshi, V., & Kang, S.-W. (2020). Contextualizing acculturative stress among Latino immigrants in the United States: A systematic review. *Ethnicity & Health*, 25(6), 897–914. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2018.1469733>
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), 5–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>
- Bhugra, D. (2004). Migration, distress and cultural identity. *British Medical Bulletin*, 69(1), 129–141. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bmb/ldh007>
- Bögner, D., Herlihy, J., & Brewin, C. R. (2007). Impact of sexual violence on disclosure during Home Office interviews. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 191(1), 75–81. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.106.030262>
- Bruïne, G. de, Vredeveldt, A., & van Koppen, P. J. (2026). Culture and credibility: The assessment of asylum seekers' statements. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 32(1), 321–343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2023.2279328>
- Center for Human Rights, Gender and Migration at Washington University in St. Louis, Red Regional de Espacios Seguros, & UN High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020, December 10). *The silence I carry: Disclosing gender-based violence in forced displacement: Practitioners' toolkit for Mexico* (Revised, 2020). <https://www.refworld.org/sites/default/files/attachments/60cacb9e4.pdf>
- Department of Homeland Security. (2026b, February 23). Employment authorization reform for asylum applicants. *Federal Register*, 91, 8616–8700. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/02/23/2026-03595/employmentauthorization-reform-for-asylum-applicants>
- European Union Agency for Asylum. (2024, January 17). *Practical guide on evidence and risk assessment*. <https://www.euaa.europa.eu/publications/practical-guide-evidence-and-riskassessment>
- Executive Office for Immigration Review. (2026a, January 26). *Asylum decisions* (Adjudication statistics). U.S. Department of Justice. <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1344851/dl?inline=1>
- Executive Office for Immigration Review. (2026b, March). *FY 2027 performance budget: Congressional justification*. U.S. Department of Justice. <https://www.justice.gov/jmd/media/1434716/dl?inline=1>
- Herlihy, J., Scragg, P., & Turner, S. (2002). Discrepancies in autobiographical memories—Implications for the assessment of asylum seekers: Repeated interviews study. *BMJ*,

- 324(7333), 324–327. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.324.7333.324>
- Herlihy, J., & Turner, S. (2015). Untested assumptions: Psychological research and credibility assessment in legal decision-making. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 6, Article 27380. <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v6.27380>
- Im, H., & Swan, L. E. T. (2021). Working towards culturally responsive trauma-informed care in the refugee resettlement process: Qualitative inquiry with refugee-serving professionals in the United States. *Behavioral Sciences*, 11(11), Article 155. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs11110155>
- Khan, S., Kuhn, S. K., & Haque, S. (2021). A systematic review of autobiographical memory and mental health research on refugees and asylum seekers. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12, Article 658700. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2021.658700>
- Marian, V., & Neisser, U. (2000). Language-dependent recall of autobiographical memories. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 129(3), 361–368. <https://doi.org/10.1037/00963445.129.3.361>
- Mellinger, H., & Dadhania, P. R. (2025). More than miscommunication: Rethinking interpretation at the Asylum Office. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 13(4), 478–496. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23315024251339779>
- Miller, K. K., Brown, C. R., Shramko, M., & Svetaz, M. V. (2019). Applying trauma-informed practices to the care of refugee and immigrant youth: 10 clinical pearls. *Children*, 6(8), Article 94. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children6080094>
- Ostrander, J., Melville, A., & Berthold, S. M. (2017). Working with refugees in the U.S.: Trauma-informed and structurally competent social work approaches. *Advances in Social Work*, 18(1), 66–79. <https://doi.org/10.18060/21282>
- Ottosson, L., Angu, P., & Gustafsson, K. (2024). Mismanagement and misinterpretations in asylum interviews: Perspectives from South Africa and Sweden. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 37(3), 785–799. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feae054>
- Raver, A., Lindholm, T., Gustafsson, P.-U., & Alm, C. (2023). Memory accuracy, suggestibility and credibility in investigative interviews with native and non-native eyewitnesses. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1240822. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1240822>
- Saadi, A., Hampton, K., de Assis, M. V., Mishori, R., Habbach, H., & Haar, R. J. (2021). Associations between memory loss and trauma in US asylum seekers: A retrospective review of medico-legal affidavits. *PLOS ONE*, 16(3), e0247033. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0247033>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). *SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach* (HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884). <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/SAMHSA-s-Concept-of-Trauma-and-Guidancefor-a-Trauma-Informed-Approach/SMA14-4884>
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees. (2013, May). *Beyond proof: Credibility assessment in EU asylum systems* (Full report). <https://www.refworld.org/reference/regionalreport/unhcr/2013/en/104283>
- Ungar, M. (2011). The social ecology of resilience: Addressing contextual and cultural ambiguity of a nascent construct. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 81(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01067.x>

- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2024, March 29). *Affirmative asylum interview scheduling*. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/asylum/affirmativeasylum-interview-scheduling>
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2025a, October 17). *The affirmative asylum process*. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/asylum/the-affirmativeasylum-process>
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2025b, November 21). *Questions and answers: Affirmative asylum eligibility and applications*. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/asylum/affirmative-asylum-frequently-asked-questions/questions-and-answersaffirmative-asylum-eligibility-and-applications>
- U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. (2021, June). *Trauma-informed case management with foreign national children and youth survivors of trafficking*. <https://refugees.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/06/Trauma-Informed-Care-Toolkit.pdf>
- Wade, K. A., & Spearing, E. R. (2022). The effect of cross-examination style questions on adult eyewitness accuracy depends on question type and eyewitness confidence. *Memory*, 31(2), 163–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2022.2129066>
- Webb, A. E., Gearing, R. E., & Baker, H. W. (2022). Trauma-informed lawyering in the asylum process: Engagement and practice in immigration law. *Journal of Mental Health and Social Behaviour*, 4(2), Article 171. <https://doi.org/10.33790/jmhbsb1100171>
- Yakushko, O., Watson, M., & Thompson, S. (2008). Stress and coping in the lives of recent immigrants and refugees: Considerations for counseling. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 30(3), 167–178. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-008-9054-0>