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4.12.2. The focus of COI content

4.12.2. The focus of COI content

COI production continued to focus on the most common countries of origin of asylum applicants in Europe, namely Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Research was also undertaken on other countries of origin in 2021, including:
icon presenting the focus of COI content

- Ethiopia concerning the evolving security situation and in particular the Tigray region;
- Turkey on the security situation, military service and the position of Kurds;
- Pakistan;
- Sudan; and
- Palestine, particularly concerning Gaza.

To further enhance the information available on specific countries, the EUAA addressed particular areas in greater detail, as can be seen in COI and MedCOI reports, as well as country guidance. The Asylum Research Centre Foundation (ARC) and the Dutch Council for Refugees provided commentary on some of the EUAA products and offered their recommendations, including on the methodology, the peer review process and the possibility to consult existing COI in more languages.[1018],[1019]

To make information more readily available, in September 2021, the ARC launched a Thematic COI Sources Database, where public COI sources are listed by topic (such as children's rights, gender and LGBTIQ), medical COI, minorities, media sources, etc.[1020]

The ARC and Asylos collaborated on a project which addresses information gaps about persons with disabilities who are seeking international protection. They found that persons with disabilities commonly had their claims rejected, appearing to be a consequence of the lack of COI on the topic. They published a document on "Principles for Conducting Country of Origin Information Research on Disability", which will be followed by a handbook, training module and a country report on the situation of children and young people with disabilities in Nigeria. [1021]

Despite efforts by national COI units to improve the production of COI and widen the scope, civil society organisations continued to report on the lack of detailed and up-to-date COI on specific topics.[1022] In particular, they highlighted the lack of COI reports related to statelessness and nationality rights. The main source of information for these themes is from UNHCR's repository of protection policy and guidance, although reports from the EUAA, the UK Home Office and the ARC published in 2021 made reference to these issues. [1023]

The ENS highlighted the importance of COI in assessing statelessness and nationality matters, where inaccuracies can lead to the rights of stateless refugees and migrants being jeopardised. 1024

It was also reported that at times COI reports are drafted with a certain political background for specific regions, which affects their value as objective evidence. 1025

Additional challenges included the lack of accessibility and user-friendliness of COI databases and the lack of multilinguistic information, as COI material is mostly available in English.1026 Both of these issues make it difficult for stakeholders to use country of origin information even at times when it is available. It was reported that applicants may not be made aware of the importance of COI at the first instance stage of the asylum proceedings and of their right to submit additional COI evidence in support of their claim. 1027

In 2021, courts also stepped in to stress the importance of consulting COI before taking a decision on a claim. In *CF and DN (Afghanistan)* v *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, the CJEU provided clarification on the interpretation of the recast Qualifications Directive on the criteria to be applied to assess a situation of indiscriminate violence to grant subsidiary protection and highlighted the importance of taking into account all relevant facts on the country of origin at the time of taking the decision.

icon presenting afghan flag within the context of country of origin information

Box 4.5. COI on Afghanistan

Following the changes related to the security situation in Afghanistan in August 2021, many countries reported difficulties in accessing up-to-date information in the first weeks of the Taliban takeover. They noted a lack of contact networks and sources in the country. However, in the weeks to follow, many EU+ countries (for example Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Romania and Sweden) rapidly produced COI reports to better inform policies on how to manage this group of applicants. Some countries suspended negative decisions considering that the COI available at that stage was no longer relevant (for example Belgium, Denmark and Luxembourg).

The EUAA provided support to countries by producing a COI information Report on Afghanistan in September 2021 and Country Guidance: Afghanistan in November 2021.

1018-1027 foot notes do not display in edit mode

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