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In 2021, there were no major institutional changes with regards to COI units. However, Germany employed more country analysts and formed new regional teams, resulting in a larger production of new country reports. In contrast, other countries faced budget cuts due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus had to downsize their teams.

Because fact-finding missions were still not possible, for example in Belgium, Denmark and Sweden, COI production was based on desk research and video interviews or Skype meetings. The new method allowed reports to be produced within a short timeframe and made it possible to produce quick updates on earlier fact-finding missions.

In Germany, the production line of COI reports was streamlined and an internal peer review was introduced amongst the regional analyst teams. Sweden as well developed a mainstreamed methodology for COI reports which are used to identify safe countries of origin of asylum applicants.

In the Netherlands, the Office for Country Information and Language Analysis (Team Onderzoek en Expertise Land en Taal (TOELT)) was divided into two departments, one employing country specialists and linguists (TOELT 01) and the other employing the employees of the Regional Information Centres and the coordinators' interpreters (TOELT 02). Additionally, since February 2021 the IND made most of the country of origin reports publicly available, as the reports were found to be useful sources for the assessment of an asylum application and other stakeholders working with asylum seekers. 1014

The Belgian Refugee Council was involved in the ongoing revision of the Migration Code in Belgium.1015The organisation recommended that the full content of Article 10 of the Asylum Procedure Directive is transposed into Belgian law to highlight the importance of accurate and up-to-date COI.1016 Additionally, it recommended to include into national legislation the quality standards which have already been established, such as the EUAA's Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology and the ACCORD Researching Country of Origin Information –Training Manual.1017

While some countries faced difficulties in carrying out training on the job for new COI analysts and researchers, other countries turned to new platforms to provide the training online. For example, Sweden developed webinars for case officers and other employees at the Swedish Migration Agency, which are available after the live transmission. The “focus country pages” on the Lifos website were also enhanced by including recommended reading on various topics and main countries of origin.

In Switzerland, training on methodologies, quality standards and visualisations was boosted, and in Greece, monthly workshops on topics related to COI research were organised with academics and researchers. In Germany, all new COI analysts participated in the EUAA COI training with a focus on drafting EUAA COI reports and conducting peer reviews. This was organised partly as a webinar and partly as in-person training.

1014-1017

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