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4.12.3. The focus of COI content

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COI units continued to focus on the most common countries of origin of asylum applicants in Europe, namely Afghanistan, Syria, Iran and Iraq.956 In addition, geopolitical instability in 2022 led COI units to research new countries of origin of asylum applicants. For instance, Burundi was a new country of interest for Slovenia and Switzerland.

Examples of reports released in 2022 by COI national teams and by UNHCR:

icon presenting the focus of COI content

- the security and human rights situation in Afghanistan957
- the security situation in Algeria958
- the security situation in Ethiopia959
- Internet and social media960 and criminal prosecution of Christian converts961 in Iran
- honour crimes962 in Iraq and the situation in Mosul963
- UNHCR published COI for case officers to assist in applying UNHCR guidance on Iraq
- UNCHR published position papers on returns to Mali,964 Ukraine,965 Ethiopia966 and Gaza .967 A position paper on the conflict of North and South Kivu, Ituri and human rights situation968 gave up-to-date information about the Democratic Republic of the Congo
- the situation of LGBTIQ individuals969 in Iran
- health care services availability and accessibility in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Tartous and Latakia970 and treatment upon return971
- military service972 and security apparatus973 in Syria
- human rights and a focus on the situation of women and girls and the de facto state's administration of justice974 in Afghanistan and the security situation following the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan975

COI teams closely followed the evolving security situation in Türkiye and Ethiopia, in particular in the Tigray region. They also collected information on Angola, Jordan, Lebanon, Somalia and Sudan. For instance, Sweden released new COI reports on Tigrayans and their situation outside of Tigray,976 Sudan,977 and South Sudan and the area of Abyei.978

EU+ countries followed the situation in Latin America, especially in Chile, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela. For example, Sweden published a report on Chile in April 2022.979 India and Pakistan were also highlighted in various national COI publications.

Some COI units relied on desk research, while others, for example France and Norway, organised fact-finding missions. Many countries, however, faced challenges in accessing specific countries due to fewer flights. There was also a lack of experts to interview in Afghanistan, Iran, Russia, Syria and Ukraine. Croatia reported difficulties in verifying specific information with sources in certain countries.

Box 8. COI on Russia and Ukraine

icon showing publications

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, COI units received many requests for information on the security situation in Ukraine and Russia. In response, the EUAA, national administrations and civil society organisations published daily information, articles, fact sheets and analytical reports on these two countries.

The EUAA published a report on Medical Country of Origin Information (MedCOI):[979] Russia in September 2022, and two COI reports on military service[980] and political opposition[981] in December 2022. These reports helped national case officers in individually assessing applications for international protection lodged by Russian nationals.

The COI unit in Norway published a report on military service and mobilisation in Russia[982] and the COI team in Sweden published different types of Ukrainian residence permits.[983] The Romanian National Council for Refugees released a report on the human rights situation in Russia.[984] The COI team in France produced a weekly watch on military mobilisation in Russia, and regular, management-level reporting in Germany focused on recent developments in Ukraine.

It became evident that the situation in Russia and Ukraine became a main area of focus at the expense of other geographical regions. Norway noted that unsettled situations in several countries will generate a need for information, such as projections of future outcomes, that may be difficult to meet.

Civil society organisations play a key role in producing COI from the ground. Their annual reports often contribute to a better understanding of the situation in countries of origin. For instance, the World Report 2023 by Human Rights Watch summarised human rights conditions in over 100 countries worldwide in 2022.[986] Amnesty International also publishes a yearly report on the state of the world's human rights. In 2022, COI publications from civil society organisations also focused on the situation of LGBTIQ individuals in their country of origin, for example the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA)'s annual report on the human rights situation of LGBTIQ people.

The ACCORD department of the Austrian Red Cross manages a COI system, ECOI.net, with information on political, humanitarian and human rights topics in countries of origin. As in previous years, in 2022 they continued with a query service for asylum lawyers, refugee counsels and officers deciding on claims for asylum.[987] The organisation also publishes reports,

which in 2022 focused on Eritrea, Iran, Pakistan and Russia. They also produce Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) overviews, which highlighted Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. Regular country briefings were also published on Afghanistan and Iran.

Asylos, an NGO working on increasing the accessibility and importance of high-quality COI in the asylum procedure, started quarterly informal meetings in June 2022 with COI experts from civil society organisations. The aim is to exchange information on best practices, challenges and new publications, conduct peer reviews and explore opportunities for collaboration. The group also offers commentaries on COI produced by governmental and intergovernmental COI units, as well as by the EUAA. In line with its overall mission, Asylos implemented a project which addressed gaps in COI on stateless people and produced a COI report on stateless Palestinians. Under the initiative “Emergency COI Repositories”, Asylos created repositories for Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Türkiye and Ukraine.988

Civil society organisations continued to produce material on the Middle East region, in particular on Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Asylos and Clifford Chance published monthly COI on Afghanistan .989 The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) analysed the situation of vulnerable groups since the transition of power in Afghanistan.990 The Norwegian Refugee Council issued a report on the impact of housing, land and property rights on returns to Sinjar in Iraq,991 and the International Crisis Group (ICG) published a paper on governance and security in the Sinjar district.992

Many COI reports by civil society organisations also concentrated on the African continent in 2022. The Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR) depicted the human rights situation in Cameroon.993 Political participation, rule of law, the stability of democratic institutions and other fundamental rights in Sierra Leone were discussed in a Bertelsmann Stiftung publication. 994 The International Crisis Group continued its ongoing field research in Sudan and the Tigray region in Ethiopia and published analytical reports and briefings on the political, security and human rights situation, such as security-related developments in the Tigray conflict.995

For the Asian region, reports were published by civil society organisations on Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. For example, in May 2022 Amnesty International published a report on the impact of the economic crisis on the Sri Lanka’s population and on their social rights).996 In addition, Equal Ground and the Centre for International Human Rights of Northwestern Pritzker School of Law submitted a report on the Violations by Sri Lanka of the Civil and Political Rights of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning/Queer (LGBTIQ) at the 135th Session of the Human Rights Committee.997

A challenge that seems to persist, as highlighted by civil society organisations, relates to the lack of accessibility and user-friendliness of COI databases and the lack of multilinguistic information, as COI material is mostly available in English. In addition, there seems to be an imbalance between countries of origin for which a high number of COI reports are available and countries for which no or limited information exists.998 To mitigate this, UNHCR continued sharing monthly COI bulletins in Spain.999

There also seems to be a lack of data on intersex applicants and their situation in countries of origin.1000 Concerns were raised by an NGO about whether authorities regularly use accurate and up-to-date COI in the assessment of asylum applications,1001 and it alerted about the

possibility of bias in the use of COI by authorities.1002 In addition, civil society organisations noted that applicants may be at times poorly informed about the importance of COI in the assessment of their application and about their right to suggest further documents to support their application.1003

icon showing publications

Box 9. COI reports by the EUAA in 2022

- Afghanistan: developments since the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021 targeted attacks , 1004 the security situation 1005 and key socio-economic indicators 1006
- Afghan refugees in Pakistan 1007 was updated. It describes their legal status and provides information on their socio-economic situation in Pakistan
- Iraq: targeting and treatment of persons belonging to specific profiles 1008 and the security situation 1009
- Syria: the security situation 1010 the targeting of certain profiles and groups in the country 1011 and the socio-economic context in Damascus city Colombia 1012
- Colombia 1013
- Medical Country of Origin Information (MedCOI): Nigeria 1014 on the overall epidemiological situation and challenges in accessing health care
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM/C) in Ethiopia1015 maps FGM/C practices and trends at the national and regional levels
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM/C) in Mali 1016

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