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# EASO Newsletter in 2018

Key COI Related Points

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December 2018

## Items of relevance to COI and the work of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Consultative Forum as detailed in 2018 EASO newsletters

- Compiled by ARC – [emphasis added]

### November 2018

#### EASO hosts meeting of Medical Country of Origin Information (MedCOI) practitioners

*On 21-22 November the MedCOI (Medical Country of Origin Information) User Event took place at the EASO premises.*

The MedCOI Team from the Countries of Origin and Transit Sector, together with the BMA (Medical Advisors Office in The Netherlands) and BDA (Belgian Desk on Accessibility), welcomed 36 participants from 19 countries.

**COI researchers, medical doctors and advisors gathered to learn more about the EASO MedCOI Transfer Project and to exchange practical information on the use of the MedCOI database and MedCOI products.** For that purpose, policy and case law presentations, focus group discussions, presentations on future on-line training tools, medical lectures by two expert medical doctors and hands-on, tailor-made exercises were provided. They were also given the opportunity to exchange on their experiences and challenges throughout the two-day meeting.

The objective of MedCOI is to provide reliable Medical Country of Origin Information to national migration and asylum authorities in Europe in order to support accurate and fair decisions in international protection and other migration procedures.

More information about MedCOI can be found on our [website](#).

### October 2018

#### EASO publishes a Country of Origin Information (COI) report on the security situation in Pakistan

On 16 October 2018, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a Country of Origin Information (COI) Report entitled '[Pakistan security situation](#)'. The report is the third update of the security chapter of the EASO COI report on Pakistan, Country Overview, published in August 2015, subsequently updated in July 2016 and August 2017. The report provides information relevant for the protection status determination of Pakistani asylum seekers.

In 2017, Pakistan ranked in the top 5 of countries of origin in the EU+ countries, with a total number of about 32,000 applicants. By the end of 2017, more than 47,000 cases remained pending at all instances. **Throughout 2018, the country maintained this ranking in the top countries of origin and the total number of Pakistani applicants has remained stable.**

**The EASO COI Report 'Pakistan security situation' provides a general description of the security situation in Pakistan,** covering the following topics: an overview of the recent conflicts in the country; actors in the conflict; an overview of recent security trends and armed confrontations; the impact of the violence on the civilian population; and the impact of the violence on the state ability to secure law and order.

**The second part of the report provides an overview of the security situation in a more detailed description of the different regions in Pakistan.** In each regional chapter, a short description is given of the region, the background of the violence as well as the actors present in the region, followed by a description of the security trends, and the impact of the violence on the population.

**The main findings of the report include an overall decrease in total numbers of violent incidents and casualties throughout 2017 and 2018. However, security operations and armed clashes were still reported in all four provinces of Pakistan and in the FATA in the context of operation Radd-UI-Fasaad. Militant groups also continued to conduct attacks in 2017 and 2018, including suicide attacks, targeted killings, and sectarian-related violence. In the run-up to the general elections held in July 2018, several violent incidents and some major attacks occurred throughout the country.**

The report was drafted by the Belgian Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (Cedoca, Centre for Documentation and Research) in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology. It was reviewed by experts from the Office for Country Information and Language Analysis in the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Immigration and Asylum Office Documentation Centre in the Hungarian Office of Immigration and Nationality, the Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation in the Slovakian Migration Office, Lifos, the Centre for Country of Origin Information and Analysis in the Swedish Migration Agency and EASO, in order to ensure the highest quality [...]

### EASO organised a Country of Origin Information (COI) Conference on Iraq in Ankara on 25-26 October 2018

In the framework of the current Roadmap for cooperation between EASO and the Turkish Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM), EASO's External Dimension Sector and COI Sector organised a **Country of Origin Information Conference on Iraq** held in Ankara on 25-26 October 2018.

70 representatives from Turkish Provincial Directorates of Migration Management (PDMMs), as well as participants from DGMM, international speakers, Turkish Academics and members of the EASO COI Specialist Network on Iraq and the UNHCR, attended the event.

**The conference covered relevant topics such as the security and political situation in Iraq, the situation of ethnic and religious minority groups, internal protection and relocation alternatives for Iraqi applicants. [...]**

### September 2018

#### EASO organised two activities under the EASO - Turkish Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) Roadmap in September 2018

The EASO-DGMM Country of Origin (COI) Workshop on Somalia held in Izmir (Turkey) on 26-27 September. The aim of the meeting was to **provide up-to-date information on Somalia**, on several topics of interest to the DGMM and PDMMs, and to discuss methodology, sources and challenges in conducting COI research on Somalia. External speakers, as well as members of the EASO COI Specialist Networks on Somalia, took part in the workshop and provided information on specific topics

### August 2018

Nothing of relevance to COI

### July 2018

#### Professional Development Workshop on Implementing the Judicial Practical Guide on Country of Origin Information, Sofia, Bulgaria

On 4-5 July, EASO provided support to Bulgaria under its operational plan by organising a professional development workshop for Bulgarian members of courts and tribunals. The workshop was held at the National Institute of Justice in Sofia and was attended by 30 judges.

Through multiple sessions led by two judicial trainers from Austria and the United Kingdom, the participants were given the opportunity to learn about the implementation of the Judicial Practical Guide on Country of Origin Information (COI), and in particular about the main provisions in the EU legislation relating to COI as well as the sources of the COI.

Upon completion of the theoretical part of the workshop, the judges analysed several case studies and participated in a moot court session, where they had to prepare their legal submissions for the final ruling of the court.

## June 2018

### **EASO publishes first country guidance**

The 'Country Guidance: Afghanistan' is the result of a pilot development, aimed at fostering convergence in Member States' decision practices.

In its 28th meeting of 6-7 June 2018, the EASO Management Board endorsed the first country guidance note. This guidance note is the result of a pilot process, in which EASO coordinated the efforts of senior-level policy officials from Member States in producing a joint assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. The pilot process was launched in accordance with the [Outcome of the 3461st Council meeting of 21 April 2016](#), and is a step in the preparation for the enhanced mandate envisaged for the Agency under the [proposed Regulation on the European Union Agency for Asylum \(EUAA\)](#).

**The country guidance is based on common up-to-date [country of origin information \(COI\)](#), produced in accordance with the EASO COI methodology.** This information is analysed in accordance with EU legislation on qualification for international protection ([Directive 2011/95/EU](#)), the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union and, where appropriate, of the European Court of Human Rights. It also takes into account general EASO guidance on the examination of applications for international protection ([EASO practical tools](#)) and takes note of the relevant UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines.

It is a non-binding document, which aims at assisting decision-makers from the national asylum authorities in examining the applications from the particular country of origin and, ultimately, at fostering convergence in the decision practices of Member States.

For further information on EASO's work on country guidance and to access the 'Country Guidance: Afghanistan', see <https://www.easo.europa.eu/country-guidance>.

## May 2018

### **EASO Management Board appoints interim Executive Director**

At a meeting on 6 June 2018, the Management Board of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) appointed Mr. Jamil Addou as interim Executive Director of Agency. The decision was taken by the Management Board of EASO, which is the governing body of the Agency, today to release the Executive Director, Mr. José Carreira, from his duties with immediate effect, following his resignation of 6 June. [...]

### **EASO publishes a Country of Origin Information (COI) report on the Security Situation in Afghanistan**

[...] The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a Country of Origin Information (COI) Report entitled '[Afghanistan Security situation - Update](#)'. The report is an update of the EASO COI Afghanistan Security Situation Report, published in December 2017. It provides an update of some of the information found to be time-sensitive, while still referring to the December 2017 report for more long-term, contextual information.

In 2017, Afghanistan ranked third in the top countries of origin of applications received by EU+ countries with more than 47,000 asylum applications. In the first four months of 2018, more than 12,000 applications have

been lodged in the EU+ by Afghans, thus remaining in third position in the overall applications to date. In addition, Afghan applications constitute an important backlog in EU+ countries. At the end of April 2018, more than 32,000 applications from Afghan nationals were awaiting a first instance decision in the EU+. The 'Afghanistan Security situation - Update' provides a description of the general security situation in Afghanistan, as well as the situation in each of the 34 provinces and Kabul City. In these provincial chapters, a subchapter is dedicated to the actors in the conflict in this province. A second subchapter describes the recent security trends and the impact on the civilian population. The terms of reference of this report were defined based on information needs identified by asylum policy experts in EU+ countries and UNHCR. The report presents information until 31 March 2018.

The report is drafted in accordance with the [EASO COI Report Methodology](#). It was based on information provided by the Country of Origin Information (COI) department from the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, completed with information added by the EASO COI sector. The report was reviewed and commented upon by COI researchers from Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Slovakia and Sweden.

It is EASO's intention to continue to produce such reports on important countries of origin and to update them regularly in order to raise and harmonise COI standards in the EU and to further support the practical implementation of the Common European Asylum System.

## **April 2018**

### **Pilot professional development workshop on implementing the Judicial Practical Guide on Country of Origin Information (COI) – 12-13 April 2018**

On 12-13 April 2018, EASO's Network of Members of Courts and Tribunals held a pilot professional development workshop on implementing the Judicial Practical Guide on Country of Origin Information (COI). This workshop was conducted by two Judicial Trainers from Norway and the United Kingdom and was attended by 19 judges from nine EU Member States.

Based on the corresponding Judicial Practical Guide and Compilation of Jurisprudence from the EASO Professional Development Series (to be published soon), this workshop provided participants with an insight of the use of COI in the judicial decision-making process under the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). During the break-up sessions, participants were further given the opportunity to analyse in depth case-studies and exchange on best practices. The workshop ended on the second day with a moot-court session during which all parties presented their submissions to the court for final judgement.

This workshop is part of the activities developed by EASO's Network of Members of Courts and Tribunals and illustrates the growing interest of EASO's involvement in professional development initiatives.

### **Second meeting for the upgrade of the module on COI – 17-19 April**

The EASO Curriculum training module on Country of Origin Information (COI) is being upgraded in view of the new EASO COI Report Methodology, with the target group of the module consisting of COI researchers.

On 17-19 April 2018, EASO held the second content expert group meeting to discuss the changes to be implemented in the module. It consists of five experts from Finland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Sweden. Their main focus is to review the current structure and content of the module and enhance its didactic elements.

The upgrade of the module is expected to be finalised by the end of 2018 with the pilot training session to be organised early 2019.

## **EASO Vacancies**

[EASO/2018/TA/005- Head of Countries of Origin and Transit Sector - AD8](#)

## **March 2018**

### **COI Specialist Network meeting on Somalia**

On 6 and 7 March 2018, the IAU unit organised a Country of Origin Information (COI) specialist network meeting on Somalia, attended by COI specialists from several EU+ countries who are members of this network. The meeting was aimed at exchanging information, knowledge and experience regarding COI on Somalia. In addition, three external speakers gave presentations on specific topics that had been identified as the most pressing COI needs and challenges with respect to the country.

Professor Stig Jarle Hansen, from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, gave an presentation on the latest developments regarding Somalia's main insurgent group Al-Shabaab, while a security analyst from the UN gave an update on the security situation in South-Central and Northern Somalia. Dr. Ibrahim Farah delivered a further in-depth presentation on clans and minorities in Somalia.

### Kick off meeting for the development of the module on MedCOI

On 21 and 22 March 2018, EASO organised the kick-off meeting for the development of the module on MedCOI.

MedCOI is a project initiated in 2010 with the aim of improving the access to medical Country of Origin Information (COI) for national migration and asylum authorities in Europe. The project is implemented by the Netherlands (Medical Advisors Office – BMA) and Belgium (Desk on Accessibility – BDA), together with the ICMPD. Fourteen Member States take part in the project. MedCOI is currently funded by AMIF, but funding cannot be extended beyond 2020.

During its 12th Management Board meeting in 2013, EASO committed to take over the activities of the MedCOI project in order to guarantee the services and establish stable funding. The transfer of the project to EASO started with a kick-off meeting in October 2017 and is expected to run until 2020 when EASO is envisaged to have the full capacity to deliver the MedCOI services as part of its daily operations.

In its project for the transfer of MedCOI, EASO foresees the development of tailored training module. The content expert group for the development of the module on MedCOI consists of five experts from the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and Switzerland. During the kick-off meeting the content group agreed on the target group, structure and draft content of the module. The module is expected to be finalised by the end of 2018 with the pilot training session to be organised in early 2019.

### February 2018

#### Meeting on Afghans in Iran – Brussels, 13 February 2018

On 13 February 2018, EASO organised a Practical Cooperation meeting on Afghans in Iran. This meeting brought together Country of Origin Information (COI) researchers from the Afghanistan COI Specialists Network, the Iran COI Specialists Network and caseworkers and decision makers experienced on the topic of Afghans in Iran. The Norwegian Landinfo and Swedish Lifos presented the outcomes of their recent fact-finding mission to Iran, and the founder and CEO of the Iranian NGO HAMI, Fatemeh Ashrafi, presented a detailed view of the current situation of Afghan migrants in the country. During a break-out session, case-workers and decision-makers discussed decision practices in the different EU+ countries.

### January 2018

#### Call for input towards the 2017 Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union

EASO has issued an invitation to its civil society stakeholders to provide their input to the Agency's 2017 Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the EU. Contributions, which are open to civil society organisations, may be sent until 16 February 2018 to [ids@easo.europa.eu](mailto:ids@easo.europa.eu) and [consultative-forum@easo.europa.eu](mailto:consultative-forum@easo.europa.eu), using a [dedicated form](#).

One of EASO's key tasks is to produce an [Annual Report on the situation of asylum in the European Union](#) with an overview of key aspects of the Common European Asylum System. This includes a comprehensive analysis of relevant statistics, as well as information on important asylum-related developments at EU+ and national

level, as well as on the practical functioning of the CEAS. The Report provides an opportunity to look into the key challenges and achievements in the previous year, reflects the ongoing debates and puts into context the operational activities and work of EASO. The launch of the Report is accompanied with a public event, providing a forum to openly discuss and debate the main issues at stake as regards international protection in the EU, with a focus on current key themes in each year, such as the relocation programme.

The Report has been published since 2011 and as an independent centre of expertise on asylum, EASO endeavours to make the report as comprehensive and accurate as possible, taking account of information available from a wide range of sources. The [2016 edition of the Report](#) welcomed the highest number of contributions from civil society to-date. To further enhance the transparency and the inclusive nature of the Report, contributions received from civil society were published on [EASO's website](#). There, you can also find the [results of an evaluation survey](#) on the added value and usefulness of the Report, which again brought helpful insights and feedback from a broad group of stakeholders.

EASO believes that the wide scope of sources used contributed significantly to the overall quality and value of the report and we were happy to see that the Report is highly appreciated by its readership. We are looking forward to further enhancing the ongoing dialogue and multifaceted cooperation between EASO and civil society actors, and await your contributions.

### EASO Courts and Tribunals invited to the Scuola Superiore della Magistratura

EASO was invited to speak about its research on Country of Origin Information at an event organised on 21 November 2017 by the Scuola Superiore della Magistratura, which was attended by 40 judges from all over Italy. EASO presented its newest publication for judges, entitled Judicial Practical Guide on Country of Origin Information. During the presentation, various EASO COI activities were explained such as the COI Networks, Practical Cooperation, [COI products](#), COI Operational Support, [COI Portal](#) and [COI Methodology and Training](#).

### IARLJ Eleventh World Conference (Athens, 27 November – 1 December, 2017)

From 27 November to 1 December 2017, the International Association of Refugee Law Judges ([IARLJ](#)) organised its 11th World Conference on Asylum and Migration Law in Athens. EASO was invited to introduce its mission to over 140 judges from five continents and presented the [Professional Development Series](#), which is tailor-made for judges by judges with an aim of providing courts and tribunal members with a full overview of the Common European Asylum System. The main focus of the presentations was last year's newly developed **EASO Judicial Practical Guide on Country of Origin Information**, as well as EASO COI Networks, COI reports, COI Methodology COI Training activities and the EASO COI portal.

Judges from all over the world met to discuss contemporary challenges in the context of refugee and migration law, security issues in asylum and migration litigations, statelessness, and human rights, all of which are contemporary issues from a judicial perspective.

### EASO organises a Country of Origin Information (COI) Conference on Iran (Ankara, 6-7 December 2017)

In the framework of the current pilot Roadmap for cooperation between EASO and the Turkish Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM), EASO's External Dimension Sector and the COI Sector organised a Country of Origin Information Conference on Iran, held in Ankara on 6-7 December 2017.

Seventy representatives from Turkish Provincial Directorates of Migration Management (PDMMs) as well as participants from DGMM, international and Turkish speakers, Turkish Academics and members of the EASO COI Specialist Network on Iran attended the event.

The conference covered relevant topics such as religious conversion, the situation of LGBTI persons, the situation of political opponents, and the situation of Afghan refugees in Iran.

It represented an excellent opportunity of exchange and discussion and was welcomed very positively by participants.