



EASO Newsletter in 2015

Key COI Related Points

December 2015

January 2015

COI Portal user training for Malta: On 27 and 28 January 2015, EASO held two training sessions on the Common European Country of Origin Information (COI) Portal for the Maltese migration board (Office of the Refugee Commissioner). In 2014, the office recruited 12 new caseworkers which needed to be trained. Participants welcomed this local training, tailored to their information needs and focussing on queries related to countries of origin they had specified beforehand (namely Libya, Syria, Eritrea, and Somalia). Besides providing caseworkers with hands on training on the COI Portal's main features, the sessions also aimed at presenting EASO's COI activities (including a brief outlook on the planned overhaul of the current COI Portal) and at reinforcing the Maltese National COI Portal Administrator's (NCPA) capacity to consolidate the knowledge acquired in the session. The training for Malta is the fifth in a row of successful regional user trainings, following sessions for caseworkers and COI researchers from Portugal, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Italy in 2014.

Number of asylum applicants from Ukraine on the increase: EASO organises a practical cooperation workshop on Ukraine: On 28 and 29 January 2015, EASO organised a Practical Cooperation Workshop on Ukraine in Malta upon the explicit request of a number of EU+ countries. This is already the second Ukraine workshop, after a first EASO meeting on the topic organised in Warsaw in July 2014. A total of 29 participants attended the workshop, representing 14 EU+ countries (EU Member States + Norway and Switzerland), the Commission, UNHCR, Frontex and EASO. Experts from the Polish Centre for Eastern Studies and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported live from Ukraine using a direct internet connection.

The workshop allowed participants to be updated on the current situation in different regions of Ukraine and on possible protection considerations as a result of the situation; to analyse and discuss data and profiles of Ukrainian applicants; and to compare and discuss case processing and decision practices in different EU+ countries. [...]

The majority of Ukrainian applications in the EU now relate directly to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Lugansk regions). These are mostly persons from non-government controlled areas who have fled the violence and claim not to have been able to settle and sustain themselves in another region in Ukraine. Many invoke not only a lack of access to accommodation, health care, livelihood and education, but also serious forms of discrimination because of their perceived association with pro-Russian rebels.

A second important profile is that of draft evaders, deserters and persons avoiding general mobilisation into the Ukrainian army. Due to the constantly changing situation, especially in Eastern Ukraine, many EU+ countries have temporarily halted decisions on Ukrainian applications for international protection, treated these applications with the lowest priority, or only processed non-conflict related applications. This has on the one hand led to considerable backlogs, but has also had an impact on the recognition rates. As many potentially well founded decisions have been frozen, the recognition rate of Ukrainian applications has remained quite low.

The key issue when deciding Ukrainian applications from persons fleeing nongovernment controlled areas is the availability of an internal flight/internal protection alternative (IFA/IPA). As the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine is rapidly deteriorating (in terms of resources, registration, access to services, mobility), the central question remains whether it is reasonable to apply IFA/IPA. Although all participating EU+ countries stressed that the availability of IFA/IPA is assessed on a case-by-case basis, interpretations of the situation seem to diverge. Whereas many EU+ countries in general apply IFA/IPA, some do not, and as mentioned before, a number of EU+ countries have halted processing because of the fluidity of the situation.

A regular monitoring of Country of Origin Information (COI) on the situation of IDPs in different regions is needed in order to support status determination. All experts agreed that the outlook for the Ukrainian conflict is negative and that the conflict zone is likely to expand. In recent months, the number of internally displaced persons has exponentially increased. Whereas most displaced persons choose to stay close to their homes, further onward displacement and eventually cross-border migration is likely if the Ukrainian government fails to successfully cope with the IDP situation. [...]

Call for input to the 2014 Annual Report on the situation of asylum in the EU: One of EASO's key tasks is to produce an Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union (EU) with an overview of key

aspects of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). This includes a comprehensive analysis of relevant statistics, as well as information on important asylum-related developments at EU and national level and on the practical functioning of the CEAS.

As an independent centre of expertise on asylum, EASO tries to make the report as comprehensive and accurate as possible, taking account of information available from a wide range of sources. The 2013 Annual Report made several references to civil society sources, contributing significantly to the overall quality and value of the report. This year, civil society organisations are invited to contribute once again, as are individuals such as lawyers, academics and any persons who may have invaluable insights to share.

Based on lessons learned from last year's contributions, the structure of any input should be as follows: indicate the theme you are commenting on, formulate observations in a concise manner, provide references to any empirically based reports or studies, and include any additional background information.

Please email contributions to consultativeforum@easo.europa.eu (**Deadline for input is 27 February 2015.**)

February 2015

EASO publishes report on the security situation in Afghanistan

[...] The EASO COI 'Afghanistan security situation' report provides a general description of the security situation in Afghanistan, covering the following topics: a brief historic overview; actors in the conflict; security trends and armed confrontations; description of tactics and arms used; ability of the state to secure law and order; impact of the violence on security forces, civilian population and the political process; and the geographical overview of the security situation.

In addition, the report provides a description of the security situation for each of the 34 provinces and Kabul. In these chapters, a general overview of the province is given, followed by a view on the impact of violence in the province and data on violent incidents. Qualitative information on the type of violence is also provided. Finally, a short overview on violence-induced displacements is given, followed by a description of the armed actors in the province. The reference period for the security report runs from 1 January 2014 until 31 October 2014.

Information provided in the report shows a new trend in the security situation. In the light of the withdrawal of foreign troops, the closure of international military bases and the transition of the security tasks to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), armed insurgent groups, such as the Taliban and Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan, have increasingly conducted large scale attacks on the ANSF. The insurgents have been increasingly successful in conquering and holding territory, but the ANSF generally still manage to control large city centres and towns in most of the country. As from 2013, this increase in attacks has led to more civilian casualties mainly inflicted by crossfire, mortar and artillery shelling, in contrast to previous years when Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs, for example: roadside, car and suicide bombs) represented the greatest threat to civilians.

Another important finding of the report is that there are still significant geographical differences in the security situation. Sources indicate Helmand, Kandahar and Nangarhar as the provinces with most violent incidents between January and October 2014. When comparing the number of violent incidents with the population in a province, Kunar is the most volatile province. Sources also indicate Faryab as increasingly violent with a high number of civilian casualties. The most tranquil areas are situated in central and northern Afghanistan.

Researchers from Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Hungary, Slovak Republic and EASO participated in the joint drafting process of this COI report. The report was written in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology. It was reviewed by other experts (from Sweden, the Netherlands and UNHCR) in order to ensure the highest quality.

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

Kick-off meeting of the COI Specialist Network on Eritrea

On 11 February 2015, EASO organised the kick-off meeting for the Country of Origin Information (COI) Specialist Network on Eritrea. This is already the 8th COI Specialist Network established over the last 2 years. Other networks cover Syria, Somalia, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, the Russian Federation, and Afghanistan. The session started with a presentation and description of the framework and goals of the network by EASO, together with the provision of updated information on the Common COI Portal, which will play a central role in disseminating knowledge produced by the networks to the end users.

Similar to activities of other specialist networks, a mapping exercise was done on sources, COI activities and gaps. Discussions were also held on communication tools to be used by the network and about potential network activities.

Finally, three EU+ countries (EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland) gave a briefing on recent country visits to Eritrea, followed by a discussion on validating sources and information.

Call for input to the outline of the EASO Work Programme 2016

EASO has recently launched the public consultation process on the outline of the EASO Work Programme 2016. The Outline defines the general plans for EASO's activities and provides the overall basis for the yearly activity-based budgetary planning. According to the EASO Regulation, the Management Board is responsible for adopting the work programme each year by 30 September, after having received the opinion of the European Commission. The process for its adoption foresees inter alia that by 31 March, EASO shall send the draft work programme to the European Commission, together with the final draft estimates of revenue and expenditure and the draft establishment plan. Your comments and inputs will be a valuable resource to develop the EASO detailed draft work programme 2016. All inputs received will be taken into account in the drafting process to the extent possible. Contributors will be acknowledged. Please send your comments and input by **10 March 2015** to consultative-forum@easo.europa.eu

March 2015

EASO Practical Cooperation Workshop on Afghanistan

On 19-20 March 2015, EASO organised a Practical Cooperation Workshop on Afghanistan in Brussels, attended by 35 participants from 21 EU+ countries (Member States, Switzerland and Norway) and UNHCR. This workshop followed the publication, in February 2015, of an EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report on the security situation in Afghanistan (<http://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/Afghanistansecurity-situation-EN.pdf>).

On the basis of the information collected in this COI report, the workshop discussed international protection determination policies and practices in EU+ countries with regard to Afghan applicants. The agenda covered:

- Risk profiles and related international protection considerations;
- The security situation in different regions of Afghanistan;
- Indicators for assessing the security situation in light of Art.15 of the Qualification Directive;
- Applicability of internal flight/protection alternatives;
- Scope for more exchange and consultation on country practices.

A number of case studies allowed for in-depth discussions on national interpretations of the security situation in Afghanistan and related decision practices, focusing mainly on indicators for the application of Article 15 of the Qualification Directive. For each case, a drafter of the EASO COI report gave an overview of the current security situation in a selected Afghan province, in terms of numbers of casualties, types of violence, weapons use, victims, and displacement.

Although in general the positive decision rate is high for Afghan applicants, the case studies brought to the surface important divergences in national decision practices and more specifically in the legal reasoning behind these practices. Differences relate to: application of either Art. 15(b) or 15(c) of the Qualification Directive; application of 15(c) for the whole territory, only for selected provinces or regions, or no application at all; the application (or not) of a "sliding scale" when assessing individual circumstances under Art. 15 and the level of individuality required; and the specific conditions under which an Afghan national may be expected to find an internal protection alternative within the country. [...]

Update of the EASO COI Report on the Security Situation in Afghanistan

In the margins of the Practical Cooperation workshop, members of the drafting team of the recently published EASO COI Report on the Security Situation in Afghanistan met to evaluate the drafting process of the first security report, discuss initial feedback received, and agree upon timeframes, terms of reference and work processes for the update of the report, which will be published by the end of summer 2015.

National Common COI Portal Administrators Meeting

On 17 March National Common COI Portal Administrators (NCPAs) met to share experiences on the EASO COI Portal in particular on the aspects of user management, national usage and training.

EASO updated participants on the COI Portal state of play (statistics on usage and most popular documents, new storage of COI from EU institutions, and regional trainings for users) and on the "next generation COI

Portal”, foreseen to be launched in early 2016, in which EASO and national COI reports will be publically accessible [Currently, the EASO COI Portal is a platform for EU+ states’ (EU Member States, Switzerland and Norway) national asylum administrations only.] [...]

EASO and Italy sign agreement to continue EASO support to Italy until April 2016

EASO and Italy signed a new Support Plan which provides for EASO tailor-made support to Italy to be implemented over a period of 12 months. The support focuses on long-term operational support for the Italian Territorial Commissions and Sections in the field of: **Country of Origin Information (COI)** and administrative preparation of the asylum files; tackling of the existing backlog of pending cases in the Dublin procedure; and strengthening the capacity of reception measures (such as those for unaccompanied minors). Moreover, EASO will continue training personnel employed with the Italian National Asylum Commission and to engage in **capacity building measures for the newly established COI Unit.**

April 2015

Country of Origin Information Seminar on the Russian Federation

On 22 April 2015, EASO held a Country of Origin Information (COI) seminar on the Russian Federation for members of the EASO COI Specialist Network on the Russian Federation. COI experts from 14 different EU+ countries (EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland) attended the seminar, as well as an expert from the International Crisis Group, an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation committed to preventing and resolving deadly conflict (www.crisisgroup.org).

Although the number of asylum seekers from the Russian Federation decreased by more than 50% in 2014 compared to 2013 (from about 42,000 in 2013 to 20,000 in 2014), the need for objective and accurate information remains high. The majority of Russian asylum seekers in EU+ countries still originate from the North Caucasus, mostly from Chechnya, which is why the meeting focused on the general and human rights situation in this area.

The grounds most commonly cited by applicants for international protection are linked to the insurgency (persons suspected of aiding insurgents or forced to join the “Kadyrovtsy”). There are also an important number of female applicants basing their application on domestic violence. There are only a limited number of applications by LGBT persons or political opponents.

In addition to comprehensive presentations by, and discussions with, the International Crisis Group expert, the network members also discussed past and ongoing activities and future forms of cooperation in the field of COI on the Russian Federation.

EASO Country of Origin Information Strategic Network Meeting

On 28 and 29 April 2015, the EASO COI Strategic Network (StratNet) held its fifth bi-annual meeting. The StratNet consists of heads of national Country of Origin Information (COI) units or persons otherwise responsible for COI in national asylum administrations and provides strategic input into EASO’s COI activities. Also UNHCR attends StratNet meetings.

During the meeting, EASO updated the StratNet about recent and ongoing COI activities and invited the network to take note of or provide feedback on selected issues related to the COI Specialist Networks, country-specific Practical Cooperation meetings, the Common European COI Portal, topical activities related to COI and LGBT, recently published EASO COI products, and EASO operational support in the field of COI.

After a presentation of recent data collected in the context of the Early Warning and Preparedness System (EPS), **the StratNet discussed the impact of recent data trends on COI needs.**

Two sessions were devoted to discussions on Input and Feedback from Non-State Actors. Both EASO and EU+ countries exchanged experiences with regard to input, feedback and criticism from individuals, academics, civil society, international organisations and media on COI products and COI research in general. **Breakout discussions were held on opportunities and challenges related to publicity of COI and transparency of COI work processes, the importance of disclaimers, introductions and sections on methodology in COI products, and the possible effects of partnership with non-state actors on the quality of COI products.**

The StratNet also provided feedback on EASO plans for surveying the quality and use of COI products, for updating the EASO COI Report Methodology and for future EASO COI production. Finally, the StratNet was informed about EASO’s Information and Documentation System (IDS).

EASO Training Curriculum, First EASO Certification and Accreditation Working Group meeting

The EASO Work Programme 2015 establishes that a European certification of the EASO training curriculum will be developed. The EASO Certification and Accreditation Working Group (CAWG) has been established to achieve this objective. [...] In total, 13 Member States were represented at the first meeting. [...] The members of the group were given an overview of the Certification and Accreditation Project and of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) context in which the Certification is being undertaken. An independent consultant familiarised the group with the relationship between the European Qualification Framework and the concept of Learning Outcomes. [...] An independent expert has been commissioned by EASO to review existing EASO Training materials in order to inform the “shift to learning outcomes” and to provisionally identify the EQF level that may most closely relate to each module’s learning outcomes, making explicit reference to knowledge, skills and competences. Instructions were developed for the working group on the development of learning outcomes and the assessment thereof. [...] The independent expert led the first working session on applying learning outcomes to the Interview techniques module. This discussion allowed members of the working group to understand the methodology behind applying learning outcomes while considering the relationship to European Qualifications Framework level descriptors. The discussion also addressed the assessment of Learning Outcomes. [...] **Further to the work undertaken in plenary, sub-groups used the same process to review the modules Inclusion, COI and CEAS.** Additionally, one module was allocated to each sub-group to process (Exclusion, APD and Gender & SOGI) before the second working group meeting takes place in Malta on 26-27 May 2015.

May 2015

COI & LGB Workshop

On 19 and 20 May 2015, EASO organised a workshop on Country of Origin Information (COI) & Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual persons (LGB) in selected countries of origin. The workshop was attended by COI specialists from EU+ states (EU Member States + Norway and Switzerland), civil society representatives and UNHCR. Several experts (academics, Human Rights Watch, a Nigerian NGO representative) provided an overview of the legal framework in regard to LGB persons, its application, the treatment of LGB by state and non-state actors and the social life of LGB in Cameroon, the Gambia, Nigeria, Senegal and the Russian Federation.

In addition, a COI researcher from Lifos (the COI unit of the Swedish Migration Agency/SMA) presented the approach to and outcomes of a fact-finding mission to Nigeria on the specific topic of LGB. Similarly, the Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada introduced the Canadian methodology for identifying, contacting and interviewing oral sources on the question of LGB. Documentaries on the situation of LGB youths in Russia (Children404), on sexual minorities in Nigeria (The Veil of Silence) and Cameroon (Interview with Alice N’Kom) completed the plenary presentations by country experts.

During break-out sessions, participants also had an opportunity to exchange views with the invited experts on the challenges of collecting COI on LGB in the selected countries.

Finally, the workshop offered an occasion to present the recently published EASO guide “Researching the situation of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons (LGB) in countries of origin” as well as the new EASO training module on “Gender, Gender identity and Sexual orientation”.

Researching the situation of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons (LGB) in countries of origin publication is available here: <https://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/Researching-the-situation-of-LGB-in-countries-of-origin-FINAL-080515.pdf>

June 2015

EASO provides COI training to German judges in Lower Saxony

Following a specific request from the President of the Administrative Court of Braunschweig, Germany, EASO provided Country of Origin Information (COI) training to 12 judges from Lower Saxony on 18 June 2015. This training, which was organised by EASO, was intended to assist the participants to further develop their skills in conducting COI research. Taking into consideration EASO’s experience from previous trainings of this kind, it was possible to adapt the training to the stated needs of the judges. Selected countries of origin & topics of particular relevance were identified and emphasis was put on practical tools with regard to conducting online research as well as selecting and assessing pertinent information.

The participants were able to develop their capabilities in respect of conducting COI research through a range of hands-on exercises while at the same time strengthening their awareness of key COI quality criteria and their understanding of relevant professional terminology in English.

Country of Origin Information report on Eritrea: Country Focus

EASO published a new Country of Origin Information (COI) report entitled 'Eritrea Country Focus'. The report provides information on a selection of topics relevant for international protection status determination in regard to Eritreans. [...]

Between 2013 and 2014, the number of Eritrean applicants in the EU+ countries (EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland) more than doubled, rising from 20 295 applicants registered in 2013 to about 47 125 in 2014, a 132 % increase. 2014 was characterised by a strong rise in applicants throughout the second quarter, reaching a high of 7 875 registered in the month of July. Although the inflow of Eritrean applicants in the EU+ fell sharply from August 2014, recently figures show that the numbers of Eritrean applicants are again on the increase.

Moreover, the stock of pending cases remained at over 30 000 at the end of April 2015 at EU+ level– possibly indicating difficulties in making decisions on Eritrean applications including a lack of COI. The most recurrent asylum motives brought forward by Eritrean applicants in EU+ countries relate to openended national service (and those fleeing it such as deserters, draft evaders, or their family members); fear of persecution on the basis of religion (e.g. of Jehovah's witnesses, Pentecostals, etc.); consequences of illegal departure in case of return; and harsh treatment during detention.

The Eritrea Country Focus aims to provide information on these subjects. The report first provides a chapter on general country information and state structure, including the political system. This is then followed by a description of national service (structure, exemptions, civil and military service, recruitment, duration, desertion and draft evasion); prisons and detention; religion; identity documents and; exit (Illegal and legal).

The report covers the period up until April 2015 The Country Focus is based on publicly available reports of COI units, UN agencies, human rights organisations, scholars, official and NGO papers, government and diaspora media.

The Eritrea Country Focus report was written using the EASO network approach whereby networks of national COI experts work jointly to provide common COI at EU level in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology.

The report was drafted by a researcher from the Analysis and Services Division of the State Secretariat for Migration, Switzerland and reviewed by COI experts on Eritrea from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, an external expert, and EASO in order to check and ensure quality. EASO will continue to produce such reports on important countries of origin and to update them on a regular basis in order to raise and harmonise COI standards in the EU and use of common COI to further support the practical implementation of the Common European Asylum System.

EASO COI Report on Eritrea: <https://easo.europa.eu/asylum-documentation/easo-publication-and-documentation/>

[July/August 2015](#)

EASO releases the Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the EU 2014

[...] The report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the situation of asylum in the EU+ (EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland) by examining requests for international protection to the EU, analysing application and decision data, and focusing on some of the most important countries of origin of applicants for international protection. [...]

The report also looks into key asylum related developments in 2014 such as the Task Force Mediterranean, reception capacity in the Member States, developments in national asylum systems and EASO support. Amongst other things, EASO continued to provide operational support to Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Cyprus and successfully piloted join-processing projects and a project with Malta and Italy on facilitation of irregular migrants. EASO has trained over 2,800 asylum and reception officials.

Moreover, EASO held external dimension activities with a number of states including Turkey, Serbia, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. Furthermore, EASO launched new statistical data collection under its Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS), which sees contribution from all EU+ states on a monthly basis, adding to information available from Eurostat. [...]

EASO Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the EU 2014:

<https://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/EASOAnnual-Report-2014.pdf>

Joint BUDG - LIBE Committees meeting in Catania

Members from the European Parliament's BUDG and LIBE committees travelled to Sicily from 22 to 24 July to study and discuss how to address the migratory pressures that the region is facing from a budgetary perspective. [...]

EASO signed a new support plan in the beginning of this year, which runs until April 2016. EASO's aim is to support the Italian authorities and contribute to improving the Italian asylum and reception system. EASO provided support in a number of areas including data collection and analysis, COI, tackling of the backlog of pending cases in Dublin procedure, reception system and emergency capacity, and training of staff and of the judiciary.

Upcoming EASO COI Reports

In August 2015, EASO will publish a new Country of Origin Information (COI) report entitled '**Pakistan Country Overview**'. This report will provide both general background information and more detailed information on topics relevant for international protection status determination in regard to Pakistani asylum seekers. [...]

Intended as a reference document and a tool for preparing asylum interviews and asylum decision making, the report includes general country information (geography, demography, short history, state structure and political landscape, education, media and telecommunication, health care, socio-economic and humanitarian situation, documents), as well as more detailed information on the general and regional security situation in Pakistan. A chapter on the human rights situation provides an overview of human rights violations and focuses on specific risk groups, ethnic minorities, religious groups and sexual and gender minorities. A last chapter is dedicated to migration, displacement and internal mobility. The report covers the period up until May 2015. The Pakistan Country Overview was written using the EASO network approach whereby networks of national COI experts work jointly to provide common COI at EU level in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology. The Pakistan report was drafted by COI specialists from Austria, Belgium, France, Hungary and the UK, together with EASO. A quality review was undertaken by COI specialists from Ireland, Lithuania, UNHCR and EASO.

In addition to the EASO COI Reports already published in 2015 (Afghanistan Security Situation, Eritrea Country Focus) and the abovementioned Pakistan Country Overview report, a number of new EASO COI publications are scheduled for the second half of 2015. In July, the process was launched for the drafting of a topical report on **Human Trafficking in Nigeria**. Using a Finnish COI report as a starting point, a number of EU+ countries will contribute by providing complementary information and sources and reviewing the final report. In August, a preparatory meeting will be held in which the drafting team of a COI report on State Actors in the Russian Federation will discuss terms of reference and timeframes. Also in August-September, COI specialists from EU+ countries will start drafting the **update of the Afghanistan Security Situation**.

Training plans for the second semester

The second semester will start with the train-the-trainers' sessions in the newly updated module on Country of Origin Information (COI) and the module on Interviewing Vulnerable Persons. The online part of these trainings will start on 7 September, while the face-to-face session will be held in Malta from 6 to 9 October. Should you wish to register for any of these train-the-trainers' sessions, kindly send the registration form to training@easo.europa.eu by 31 August.

COI Seminar on Iran

On 16 and 17 June, EASO organised a meeting for the Members of the COI Specialist Network on Iran. It was the second meeting since the Network was established in May 2014. The meeting had two main purposes: to discuss the level of cooperation within the network, including an update on recent information needs, new and upcoming national products, as well as possible future joint activities; and to have in-depth discussions on specific topics relevant for the international protection status determination procedures. A number of presentations were delivered on different topics. These included: The political climate in Iran; Internet freedom in Iran and on how the state tries to curtail it; Gendered aspects of Iran's laws and legal framework with the emphasis on recent events and changes relevant to family law and women's rights and status in Iran. The involvement of external speakers and the active participation of Network members resulted in another fruitful seminar on COI-specific issues.