



EASO Newsletters in 2019

Key COI Related Points

February 2020

Items of relevance to COI and the work of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Consultative Forum as detailed in 2019 EASO newsletters and 2019 COI publications

- Compiled by ARC Foundation [emphasis added] -

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EASO Training Plan for 2020

We are very pleased to announce that the EASO Training Unit has now grown into the EASO Training and Professional Development Centre. This reflects the fact that, year on year, the range of training courses on offer has expanded to cover the needs expressed by Member States' asylum and reception authorities as well as other organisations involved in the asylum process. By the end of 2019, we had reached 35 616 participations in EASO training sessions.

Last year, we piloted two new modules (Identification of potential Dublin cases and MedCOI for advanced users) as well as upgraded the Country of Origin Information module, and the Module for Managers was re-modelled and renamed to become a module on managing in the asylum context.

In 2020, we will be piloting several new modules:

- Registration of application for international protection;
- Identification of potential exclusion cases;
- Evidence assessment (upgrade);
- Exclusion (upgrade);
- Reception of vulnerable persons, and
- **MedCOI for basic users (online only).**

Of course, we continue to deliver our regular modules. These include the core modules (Interviewing techniques, Inclusion and Evidence assessment) and the increasingly popular specialised modules such as Interviewing vulnerable persons, Interviewing children, and Reception. For more detailed information on the content, you can consult the EASO Training Curriculum catalogue (2018) [here](#).

Please take a look at the [Training Plan 2020](#) and get in touch via [this email](#) if you require further information.

EASO outside the EU+

EASO is increasingly supporting the Western Balkans administrations and Turkey, both at a national and regional level, including through a European Union-funded multi-country programme (IPA II, "Regional Protection Sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans and Turkey, phase II"). EASO will continue to do so in the newly started phase 2 of the project (June 2019 - June 2021), where project implementation remains shared with FRONTEX, UNHCR and IOM. Close coordination with the European Commission, EU Delegations, EU Member States and other relevant stakeholders is also taking place to ensure synergies and avoid a duplication of efforts. The aim of this EU-funded project is to support the Western Balkans and Turkey in protection-sensitive migration management as well as to further align with relevant EU legislation and practices in the area of asylum and reception of asylum seekers.

In the second half of 2019 EASO organised specific regional events focused on Country of Origin Information (COI). In October, a workshop on COI for Western Balkans members of courts and tribunals was organised in Belgrade, and in December a regional workshop on Country of Origin Information focusing on Pakistan and Iraq was organised in Sarajevo, specifically targeting case officers. Both events were very well received.

In the first half of 2020, trainings on EASO core modules are planned both at a regional and national level, to continue supporting the quality of the asylum processes and decisions in the Western Balkans.

At a national level, EASO has developed a closer cooperation through the implementation of two Roadmaps with Serbia and North Macedonia (2017-2019) that are now currently under revision. These documents outline EASO's activities that will strengthen the national administration in the area of asylum and reception of asylum seekers in the Western Balkans. EASO is also currently reinforcing cooperation with Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. A number of missions took place in these four countries to agree on future Roadmaps and identify where EASO's expertise will be of added value.

Within this framework, EASO has translated its tool for Identification of Persons with Special Needs (IPSN) into [Macedonian](#) and [Serbian](#). EASO's IPSN is a publicly available support tool for practitioners who encounter applicants for international protection on their day-to-day work. This was designed to assist in the timely identification and assessment of special needs, and in providing guidance on the special guarantees which need to be put in place.

EASO Courts and Tribunals Professional Development Activities in the last 2019 quarter

Pursuant to its mandate to provide high-quality training to members of courts and tribunals with full respect of judicial independence, throughout the last months of 2019 EASO continued to facilitate professional development workshops.

Professional Development Workshops, EASO's HQ

On 3 and 4 October 2019, members of courts and tribunals from 17 EU Member States attended a professional development workshop on exclusion from international protection hosted by EASO. By participating in case studies and a moot court exercise, the participants exchanged practices and gained a practical insight into dealing with cases concerning exclusion clauses. The workshop was facilitated by two judicial trainers from Ireland and Germany, based on the corresponding [judicial analysis](#) from the EASO Professional Development Series.

Similarly, on 21–22 November 2019, 19 members of courts and tribunals from 11 Member States were invited to a professional development workshop on qualification for international protection, led by two judicial trainers from Greece and the UK. Following the corresponding [EASO judicial analysis](#), the workshop provided a thorough analysis of the EU standards for the qualification of third country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection.

EASO regional workshops

In addition to the two aforementioned workshops, EASO has continued in late 2019 to strengthen judicial support on a regional level. After a very successful regional workshop held in German in Leipzig in September 2019, **EASO organised the first regional workshop in Italian on 7 November 2019 at the Court of Naples, Italy.**

The workshop focused on challenging topics in the international protection judicial proceedings in Italy. 17 members of Italian courts and tribunals participated in the workshop and followed presentations led by an Italian judge from the Supreme Court in Italy and one from the specialised section on international protection of the Tribunal of Catanzaro. **Topics covered included** subsequent requests or producing new facts as evidence for international protection, **evidence assessment in relation to COI** and the application of the Dublin regulation in judicial proceedings. **The participants were also presented an analysis of the use of COI in judicial proceedings and a briefing on the security situation in Mali and the Ivory Coast through presentations led by two UNHCR officers.**

By way of conclusion for 2019, EASO organised the first regional workshop in Greek covering issues around evidence and credibility assessment in international protection cases. The workshop was held at the newly established International Protection Administrative Court in Nicosia, Cyprus. Based on the [EASO judicial analysis](#) on evidence and credibility assessment and the related [compilation of jurisprudence](#), the workshop was tailored by the two Greek judicial trainers to address the needs of the newly established court. The members of the court were presented an analysis of the legal framework pertaining to the assessment of evidence in asylum cases and engaged in tailor-made case studies.

Find out more about the tailored support that EASO offers to members of courts and tribunals [here](#).

Any questions about the workshops mentioned above or any other aspect of EASO's support to members of courts and tribunals may be addressed to [this email address](#).

Italy Operating Plan 2020

EASO has been providing support to the Italian authorities since 2013, establishing good cooperation in several areas. After several Special Support Plans (2013-2016), since 2017 dedicated Operating Plans to Italy were signed encompassing all technical and operational assistance to the country.

On the basis of the results achieved in 2019 and the needs collected through consultations and constant dialogue with the Italian authorities, EASO's Italy Operating Plan for 2020 intends to continue addressing the consequences of the disproportionate pressure on the Italian asylum and reception system. It also aims at contributing to prepare the system to better respond to potential future situations of pressure.

All activities under this Plan will be closely coordinated with the Italian authorities and with the steady support of the European Commission as well as with the other Agencies which are part of the European Union Regional Task Force (EURTF): the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and Europol.

Context

Over the last years, Italy has witnessed a dynamic migratory situation. The unprecedented influx of migrants to Italy observed in 2014 (170 100 arrivals) and 2015 (153 842 arrivals) continued in 2016 (181 436 arrivals) and 2017 (119 369) and considerably decreased in 2018 (23 370 arrivals) and 2019 (11 471 arrivals).

While the backlog of asylum applications pending a final decision in first instance has decreased, partly thanks to EASO's intervention, the backlog in second instance has grown significantly. Furthermore, despite the substantial decrease in the number of arrivals, a significant number of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international

protection (refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries) remain present in the Italian reception system, and challenges with regards to uniform implementation of asylum procedures throughout the Italian territory are still in place.

Fragmentation in the Italian asylum and reception system affects both information systems and coordination mechanisms among stakeholders. In light of the pressure to which the Italian asylum information system has been exposed, the need for data alignment and integration has emerged. Enhancing such integration would facilitate data availability and improve analyses and reporting for Italian authorities. Similarly, a clear communication flow at central and regional or local levels among Italian asylum stakeholders is pivotal for the management and standardisation of asylum procedures.

Operating Plan: the measures

Measure 1: Support to the quality and standardisation of asylum procedures (including national, Dublin and ad-hoc procedures)

Firstly, EASO's support will focus on increasing the Department of Public Security's (DPS) capacity at a central level to ensure promotion of standardisation of registration procedures. Additionally, there is a need to support the standardisation and sustainability of ad hoc procedures such as evacuations, humanitarian corridors and voluntary relocations.

Secondly, EASO intends to support the National Asylum Commission (NAC) in strengthening the standardisation of its internal procedures and its case management through enhanced quality of COI (Country of Origin Information) research.

Lastly, in continuation with 2019, EASO will improve the capacity of the Dublin Unit to manage and process outgoing Dublin requests and support better detection, efficient management and follow-up of Dublin cases by DPS officials in Questure. Special efforts will be dedicated to spreading and implementing best practices on Dublin applicants and applicants with special needs and vulnerabilities [...]

EASO–DGMM Roadmap 2019-2021: EASO and the Directorate General of Migration in Turkey deepen their cooperation

EASO and the Turkish Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) have been working together on matters related to asylum since 2014. Following the successful cooperation between 2017 and 2019, in August 2019 they agreed upon a new, expanded cooperation framework that will run for two years (September 2019-August 2021).

From 2014 to 2019, EASO delivered 34 asylum-related training sessions to over 200 Turkish participants and has translated and/or developed 31 documents and tools for DGMM – including Country of Information (COI) reports, instruments for quality assurance and training modules.

Under the new Roadmap, EASO will support DGMM in developing COI reporting capabilities; addressing the special needs of applicants; and testing a contingency plan to further support DGMM in their efforts to prepare for a possible substantial rise in the number of asylum seekers. EASO and DGMM have also pledged to set up an information exchange system to share good practices and relevant data on asylum.

Training will remain a key area of this cooperation: in 2020, EASO will assist DGMM in launching a series of national trainings on the EASO core modules of international protection. To this end, on 22-24 January 2020 EASO and DGMM have held – in cooperation with the asylum authority of Denmark – a refresher workshop for Turkish trainers.

[EASO Newsletter – Quarter 3 \(July – September\) 2019](#)

EASO publishes a Country of Origin Information (COI) report on Eritrea

*The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) has published a **Country of Origin Information (COI) report on Eritrea**. The report **provides updated information on selected topics (national service, exit from Eritrea, and treatment of returnees)**, relevant for international protection status determination. Between August 2018 and July 2019, more than 14 475 Eritrean applications were registered in the EU+ countries.¹*

This EASO COI report on Eritrea was drafted by the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), Division Analysis. **The report updates and expands on the EASO COI report on national service and illegal exit (in Eritrea) from 2016. It provides a brief overview of Eritrea's latest political developments, in the period 2016-2019, including the *rapprochement* with Ethiopia, the legal framework in force, and the relevant human rights issues. For the**

same reference period, the report then focuses on three main topics: (1) structure and functioning of the national service; (2) legal and illegal exit from the country; (3) voluntary and forced return. Transversally to the above mentioned subjects, the report details forms of punishment and treatment of deserters, draft evaders, persons illegally exiting the country, and returnees. Besides relevant public and governmental sources, the report relies extensively on interviews with key informants and experts, which were mostly carried out in the period May-July 2019.

The report was peer reviewed by EASO and other COI researchers from the following national asylum authorities: Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), Country Analysis; and Sweden, Swedish Migration Agency, Section for Information Analysis. The report was drafted and reviewed in accordance with EASO's COI Report Methodology.

The report can be [downloaded](#) from the EASO COI portal.

EASO regional workshop for members of courts and tribunals in German language

Following a request for support from the German Judiciary, EASO organised a regional workshop at the Federal Administrative Court of Germany in Leipzig on 12 – 13 September. For the first time a regional workshop organised by the Courts and Tribunals Sector of EASO took place in German language.

75 members of EU+ courts and tribunals from Germany, Austria and other EU Member States participated in this workshop and discussed current challenges for the Common European Asylum System using examples from the German and Austrian practice. The workshop covered topics such as distinction between refugee protection and subsidiary protection, membership in a particular social group as reason for persecution, credibility assessment in cases of religious conversion and homosexuality, internal flight alternative and secondary movements of refugees.

During the workshop, the participants were presented the EASO professional development series pertaining to the covered topics, and the EASO material on Afghanistan through a presentation led by an EASO COI expert. They also worked on case studies and exchanged views on the topics of the workshop.

All EASO Professional Development Series, developed by judges for judges, translated in German language may be found on <https://europa.eu/pw98gN>.

Any questions about this workshop or any other aspect of EASO's support to members of courts and tribunals may be sent to: judicialtraining@easo.europa.eu.

EASO Newsletter – Quarter 2 (April – June) 2019

32nd meeting of the EASO Management Board held in Malta

[...] The meeting approved a [procedure for the adoption of Country Guidance Notes](#), and in addition **two new EASO Country Guidance reports, on Iraq and Afghanistan**. Country Guidance reports aim at fostering convergence in the application of the criteria for qualification for international protection for specific countries of origin, based on common analysis and guidance notes of EU+ Member States. More information can be accessed [here](#). [...]

EASO publishes two new country guidance notes on Iraq and Afghanistan

*EASO has published the **'Country Guidance: Iraq'** and the updated **'Country Guidance: Afghanistan'**. The documents reflect the common assessment of EU Member States of the situation in two of the main countries of origin for applicants applying in the EU. **They are based on recently published EASO Country of Origin Information Reports and provide a detailed analysis in terms of international protection needs and qualification in accordance with the applicable EU asylum legislation.***

The **'Country Guidance: Iraq'** is the third country guidance document, produced since the pilot development was completed in June 2018. It adds to the series of tools for policy-makers and decision-makers, with a country-specific analysis regarding the main actors of persecution or serious harm in Iraq, refugee status and subsidiary protection needs of some of the relevant profiles of applicants from Iraq, actors of protection, and the possibility of internal protection alternative in particular parts of the country. Exclusion from international protection is also addressed. The **'Country Guidance: Afghanistan'** updates and replaces the pilot country guidance document, published in June 2018.

This update focuses on the sections concerning indiscriminate violence in a situation of an armed conflict (Article 15(c) QD), and internal protection alternative. **Some additional changes have been made with reference to the**

available up-to-date country of origin information, in particular with regard to the profiles of applicants of Hazara ethnicity. Minor changes have also been introduced in parts of the horizontal framework of the common analysis. These changes do not generally impact the assessment of the situation in Afghanistan as per the previous version of the guidance from June 2018.

The '[Country Guidance: Iraq](#)' and the '[Country Guidance: Afghanistan](#)' are non-binding. Their aim is to assist in the examination of applications for international protection, and, ultimately, to foster convergence in the decision practices of Member States. It is Member States' responsibility to examine each application for international protection individually, objectively and impartially, on the basis of the individual circumstances of the applicant and the situation in the country of origin at the moment of the decision.

For more information concerning this area of activities see <https://www.easo.europa.eu/country-guidance>.

Experts from the Provincial Directorates of Migration Management in Turkey discuss information needs and best practices in their daily work

On June 26-27, EASO's Information Analysis Sector and External Dimension Sector, along with the Turkish Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) co-hosted in Ankara a conference on the organization and workings of asylum systems in EU+ and Turkey. Also involving representatives from the Provincial Directorates of Migration Management in Turkey (PDMMs), the meeting provided –through a combination of presentations and interactive discussions- a forum for the exchange of experience-based insights into questions pertaining to the function of national asylum systems [...]

In regards to existing information needs, participants made reference to increasing accessibility to COI products relevant to their work; the creation of structured processes for regular communication among key stakeholders toward effective information exchange; the importance of technological solutions for verification of applicants' identity and authentication of documents submitted by applicants; and the need to increase awareness of particular asylum-related matters among all service providers dealing, in different capacities, with asylum applicants [...]

EASO publishes the updated Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology and Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO COI reports

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) has published an updated version of the 2012 EASO COI Report Methodology. This methodology was developed for the purpose of producing and publishing different types of EASO COI reports. **The use of this methodology is binding for the production of EASO COI reports.**

EASO aims to cooperate with EU+ countries¹ in order to meet target users' needs and share the burden through joint efforts to produce COI. **The EASO COI Report Methodology constitutes a code of conduct for participants in each phase of the COI production process.**

The methodology explains the guiding principles for COI in the first chapter, which are: Neutrality and Objectivity, Relevance and Usability, Transparency and Publicity, Validity and Quality. After a chapter on the initiation and production process of EASO COI reports, the methodology focuses on researching and drafting COI. Here, quality standards for sources and information are explained and elaborated, as well as the selection and validation of sources. The third chapter discusses the phase of researching and presenting information, focusing on drafting methods such as summarising and synthesising, and on referencing sources. The final chapters discuss quality control, editing and proofreading, publication and follow up of a COI product. Finally, annexes on review and a glossary of the used terms are presented.

The first version of this COI report methodology was published in June 2012. Since then, EASO has developed a portfolio of distinct types of COI reports, depending on specific user needs and available resources. As a result, EASO identified the need to clarify certain concepts and revise the methodology. A working group was formed by EASO composed of COI experts from seven EU countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Slovak Republic, Sweden), who discussed the key issues and provided input for the revision.

The new draft of the methodology was sent for comments to EASO's COI Strategic Network, UNHCR and civil society organisations specialised in producing COI. Finally, EASO organised a COI methodology conference in Brussels on 15-16 November 2017 with COI practitioners from the EU+ countries, international organisations, and civil society. At the conference, EASO facilitated discussions and sought feedback from participants on aspects of the new methodology. Taking into account the results of these consultations, the revised methodology was finalised and endorsed by the EASO Management Board on 29 May 2019.

The EASO COI Report Methodology can be [downloaded](#) from the EASO COI portal via the following link: https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2019_EASO_COI_Report_Methodology.pdf.

Simultaneously and accompanying the EASO COI Report Methodology, the EASO COI Writing and Referencing Guide was published. The guide is aimed at COI researchers who (co-)draft EASO COI reports written in English. The guide is intended to be a clear, useable, and practical desk companion for researchers/drafters. The purpose of this guide is also to support a diverse community of EU+ COI drafters, harmonise approaches to EASO writing/referencing, and work consistently across EASO COI publications.

The Writing and Referencing Guide was created after researching best practices and elements of existing COI style guidelines from EASO, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden, UNHCR, ACCORD, Canada, and others. A wide range of professional referencing and citation systems were also consulted. The European Commission English Style Guide and the EU Interinstitutional Style Guide were also used in the development of this Guide, among others. In 2017 and 2018, a working group composed of COI experts from seven EU+ countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Slovak Republic, Sweden) discussed and provided input to the content of this Guide. It was reviewed for internal consistency by a COI expert from Estonia. The EASO COI team and management also provided feedback.

The Writing and Referencing Guide can be downloaded from the EASO COI portal via the following link: https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2019_EASO_COI_Writing_and_Referencing_Guide.pdf.

[EASO Newsletter - Quarter 1 \(January-March\) 2019](#)

EASO Management Board welcomes strengthening of Agency's good governance

[...] Amongst the important decisions taken by the Management Board was the endorsement of a **new Country Guidance on Nigeria**. This publication, which is the second of its type following a similar publication on [Afghanistan](#), represents the joint assessment of the situation in Nigeria by EU+ Member States. The ultimate aim of [country guidance publications](#) is to foster convergence in the application of the criteria for qualification for international protection. Furthermore, the meeting also endorsed EASO's new External Action Strategy. [...]

EU asylum figures 2018: Applications return to 2014 levels, decreasing by 10% over previous year

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) has published its [2018 asylum trends overview](#). Data shows a lower recognition rate of applications (34% compared to 40% in 2017) and pending cases at less than half of the peak recorded in autumn 2016. While overall applications continued to fall in 2018, citizens from Iran, Turkey, and several visa-liberalised countries lodged more applications than in 2017.

[...] More than one-in-ten of all applicants was a Syrian national, compared to 2015-2016, when Syrians made up more than one-in-four applicants. Afghanistan and Iraq completed the top three countries of origin in 2018. [...] One-in-three decisions made in 2018 was positive, granting either refugee status or subsidiary protection. This compares to a recognition rate of 40% in 2017. Nationals of Syria, Yemen and Eritrea had the highest recognition rates, whereas the lowest shares of positive decisions were for Georgians and Gambians.

More information can be found at the following links:

[EU+ asylum trends - 2018 overview](#)

[Key findings](#)

[Interactive visualisation](#)

EASO steps up operational support for Cyprus

[...] The new Operating Plan for Italy was signed by Mr. Addou, on behalf of EASO, and the Head of the Department of Public Security, Franco Gabrielli, the Head of the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration, Gerarda Maria Pantalone, and the Ombudsperson of Children and Adolescents, Filomena Albano, on behalf of Italy.

Under the plan, EASO will maintain the technical and operational assistance provided to Italy since 2013. Notably, in 2019 the Agency will continue to support Italian Authorities in the processing of applications for international protection, as well as enhancing their capacity to absorb the backlog of cases accumulated during the spike in arrivals in recent years. Amongst others, EASO will also continue to support Italy by processing Dublin procedures, **strengthening the Italian Country of Origin Information Unit**, and implementing a system to monitor and manage the reception system. Furthermore, EASO will continue to support the Italian Ombudsperson for Children and Adolescents with capacity building activities for volunteer guardians.

2019 EASO COI Methodologies/Guides

[*Country of Origin Information \(COI\) Report Methodology*](#), June 2019

[*Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information \(COI\) Reports*](#), June 2019

2019 EASO COI publications

COI Report: [*Syria – Actors*](#), December 2019

COI Report: [*Syria – Security situation*](#), November 2019

COI Report: [*Pakistan – Security situation*](#), October 2019

COI Report: [*Afghanistan – Security situation*](#), June 2019

COI Report: [*Côte d’Ivoire Country Focus*](#), June 2019

COI Report: [*Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City*](#), April 2019

COI Report: [*Iraq - Security situation*](#), March 2019

COI: [*Iraq - Security situation \(supplement\) - Iraq Body Count - civilian deaths 2012, 2017-2018*](#), March 2019

COI Report: [*Iraq - Targeting of individuals*](#), March 2019

COI Report: [*Iraq - Internal mobility*](#), February 2019

COI Report: [*Iraq - Key socio-economic indicators*](#), February 2019

2019 EASO COI Guidance publications

Country Guidance: [*Iraq*](#), June 2019

Country Guidance: [*Afghanistan*](#), June 2019

Country Guidance: [*Nigeria*](#), February 2019