



Final Report
2016-22

Annual
Report
2021-22

Contents

- Message from the Founders

- Partnership work

- About us

- Funders, partners, friends

- Highlights of our work

- Our finances

- Reviewing COI products

- Researching COI products

- Delivering a case-specific research service

- Developing and delivering training webinars



Message from the Founders



We established ARC Foundation in October 2016 as a charity to drive up standards in the quality and use of Country of Origin Information (COI). We're very proud of all the progress we've made in furthering this goal during the past five years and in particular the improvements in the quality of UK Government and inter-governmental country information products. In addition, we have assisted legal representatives and those supporting people claiming asylum to access relevant COI research and empowered them to undertake their own COI research. Through our collaboration with our project partner Asylos we have also undertaken innovative COI research helping to close country information gaps thereby contributing to more informed decision making.

So, after five very intense but fulfilling years we have concluded that ARC Foundation's charitable aims could best be realised through the creation of a single centre of expertise on COI in the UK under Asylos' stewardship. Consequently, we have decided to draw a curtain on ARC Foundation's work and transition our projects over to Asylos. We are excited to be joining Asylos' Board to provide strategic direction as it takes this work forward.

Our work over the past five+ years would not have been possible without the advice of our Board of Trustees, the hard work of our Associates, and the trust our project partners, collaborators and various governmental and civil society stakeholders have placed in us.

We want to take this opportunity to thank you all and we wish you well in these challenging times in all of our quests to ensure that those in need of protection are provided with it and treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Best wishes, Steph & Liz



About us

ARC Foundation forms the charitable arm of Asylum Research Centre (ARC), which was set up in 2010 to improve standards in refugee determination procedures by:

- Ensuring that decision makers have access to high quality Country of Origin Information (COI);
- Providing tools and other resources for legal representatives across Europe to assist their case preparation;
- Joining forces with other civil society partners to address concerns in relation to specific countries and risk profiles.

Since its inception, ARC has established itself as an internationally recognised source of expertise in the research and analysis of COI in asylum claims and provides research, project management and training services.

Mission Statement

ARC Foundation's mission is to improve standards in refugee status determination processes and ensure that those in need of protection are recognised as such.

What is COI?

Country of Origin Information (COI) informs decision makers about conditions in the countries of origin of asylum applicants. COI should be accurate, reliable, relevant, current, objective, traceable and transparent and is central to refugee status determination.

[Click for more info
about our trustees](#)

Trustees

Mike Kaye – Chair

(2016—2022)

Freelance Consultant and former Advocacy Manager for **Still Human Still Here**

Duncan Grant – Treasurer

(2017—2022)

Interim Head of Corporate Account Partnership at **Place2Be**

Christine Bacon

(2016—2022)

Artistic Director at **Ice & Fire**

Alfredo Campos

(2019—2022)

General Secretary and Head of Legal Department at **MUN2**

Lucy Gregg

(2019—2022)

Head of Secretariat to the **UK's National Preventive Mechanism**

Raza Halim

(2017—2022)

Barrister at **Garden Court Chambers**

Kalvir Kaur

(2016—2019)

Solicitor at **Freedom from Torture**

David Neale

(2019—2022)

Legal Researcher at **Garden Court Chambers**

Jo Pettitt

(2016—2022)

Former Head of Research and Survivor Activism at **Freedom from Torture**, now freelance Research Consultant

Dr Christel Querton

(2016—2022)

Lecturer in Law at the **University of the West of England** and Barrister at **Lamb Building** (door tenant)

Liz Williams

(2021—2022)

Policy Impact Manager at the **Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre**

Founders & Directors

Stephanie Huber

(2016—2022)

Liz Williams

(2016—2021)

Associates

We are grateful to the following Associates who have provided invaluable research support at various times during ARC Foundation's lifetime:

Ariel Plotkin

Bogdan Ghenea

Dastan Salehi

Emily Wilbourn

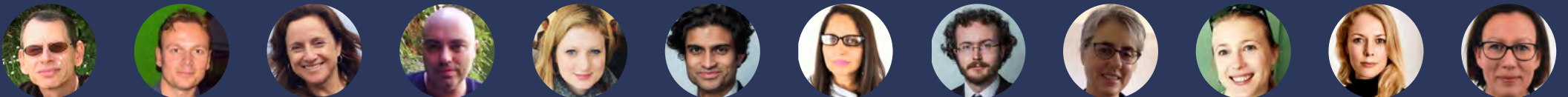
Jo Pettitt

Lizzy Galliver

Misha Nayak-Oliver

Natasha Tsangarides

Rachel Gasowski



Sophie Kloos

Director, Asylos



From the beginning, the partnership between ARC Foundation and Asylos has been about working towards a common goal. Together we have developed new projects to further fair and evidence-based asylum decision-making and have shared our respective knowledge on best practice. With the transfer of projects from ARC Foundation to Asylos we are creating a one-stop-shop for COI research, which makes this research even more accessible for asylum seekers in need. Asylos is incredibly honoured to be entrusted with these projects. It is full of enthusiasm that we are stepping up to continue ARC Foundation's important work. We are excited to develop Asylos into a centre of expertise that combines COI production, training and now also COI review.



Highlights of our work

Reviewing COI products

During the course of ARC Foundation's existence, we reviewed hundreds of country information products published by the UK Home Office [**Country Policy and Information Notes**], the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [**Country Report on Sri Lanka**] and the former European Asylum Support Office (EASO), now European Union Asylum Agency, [**COI reports and Query responses**].

We thereby contributed to the improvement of the quality of country information used in deciding refugee claims, both in the UK and beyond, and helped ensure more people who were in danger of persecution and other serious harm were given the protection they needed.

In addition, our commentaries on the Home Office's Fact Finding Mission report and the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) Country Report, both on Sri Lanka, were submitted as evidence to the Upper Immigration and Asylum Tribunal, and contributed to their critical findings of these reports in **KK and RS (Sur place activities, risk) Sri Lanka (CG) [2021] UKUT 130 (IAC) (27 May 2021)**.

Similarly, our country information repository on prison conditions and treatment of detainees in Ethiopia was used as evidence in the Upper Immigration and Asylum Tribunal in the Country Guidance case of **AAR (OLF – MB confirmed) Ethiopia (CG) [2022] UKUT 1 (IAC) (29 December 2021)**.

Reviewing COI products

ARC Foundation's publications over the last year, some of which were co-authored with the Dutch Council for Refugees or Dr Christel Querton from the University of the West of England, include:

Commentary on EASO COI Queries on the DRC, Iran and Iraq: LGBT persons, January 2022



The collaboration with Dr Christel Querton resulted also in a blog post on Free Movement.



Commentary on the Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) issued on China: Muslims (incl. Uyghurs in Xinjiang), December 2021



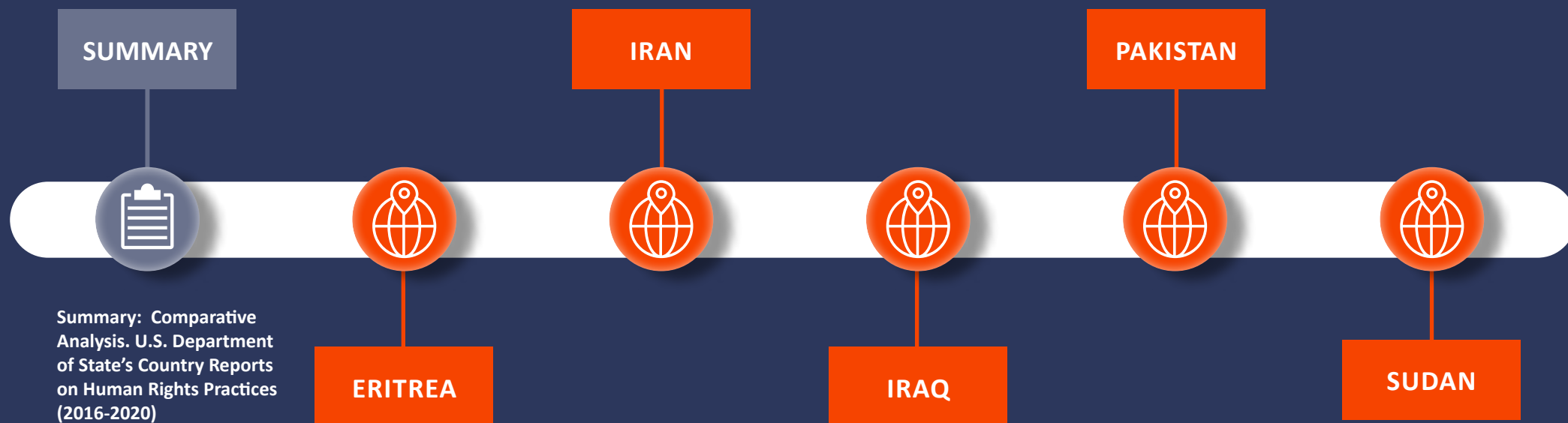
Commentary on the use of quantitative assessments to determine risk in Country Policy and Information Notes (CPINs) issued by the UK Home Office, November 2021

Commentary on the Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) issued on Sri Lanka: Religious Minorities, December 2021

Commentary on the EASO COI Query on Iraq: What is the security context and treatment of Christians in Iraq? 22 October 2020

Reviewing COI products

ARC Foundation also undertook an ambitious comparative research project which reviewed how the U.S. State Department assessed human rights violations in five countries under the Trump administration as compared with the last year of the Obama administration. This comparative research highlighted several nuanced changes to the U.S. Department of State's country assessments since 2016, which could have been easily overlooked. However, when taken together these changes have the effect of suggesting improvements in the human rights situation which our analysis indicated is not consistent with the situation on the ground.



Reviewing COI products

Common themes were observed in the five reports across the years in relation to how the U.S. Department of State addressed specific human rights violations and how it dealt with human rights abuses affecting particular profiles. These primarily related to: torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; women, including their reproductive rights; children; persons with disabilities; LGBTI persons; and statelessness.

Thematic Review:
U.S. Department of State's
Country Reports on Human
Rights Practices (2016-2020),
September 2021

**THEMATIC
REVIEW**



**BLOG
POST**

Published jointly with
the European Network
on Statelessness,
October 2021

David Neale

Legal Researcher at Garden Court Chambers
and ARC Foundation trustee



Prior to the Asylos and ARC Foundation report on trafficked boys and young men in Albania, there was a gap in this area of COI, and the vulnerabilities and protection needs of trafficked Albanian boys and young men were often ignored. Many people were wrongly refused asylum, leading in some cases to destitution, homelessness and/or re-trafficking. Thanks to the **Asylos/ARC Foundation report**, trafficking-based asylum claims by Albanian boys and young men are now much stronger. The report has saved lives.



Researching COI products

Strategic COI reports

In collaboration with Asylos, we published Strategic COI reports that addressed the absence of high-quality, publicly available information for people claiming asylum with particular risk profiles. These reports combine relevant publicly available material with new information generated by interviewing a range of individuals with expertise on the topic.

The Ghana report covers six research areas: the legal context; law in practice; state attitudes and treatment; LGBTQI+ civil society organisations; and the situation of transgender and intersex persons. It includes interviews carried out with nine different interlocutors ranging from academics, LGBTQI+ activists and NGO directors based in Ghana, the UK and the US. The report's findings fill a gap in COI literature about the treatment of LGBTQI+ persons fearing the state and thus contribute to a more informed and complete picture of the situation.

The Nigeria report paints a troubling picture of the situation for children and young people with disabilities in Nigeria, despite the recent adoption of legislation by the State to comply with their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Sources highlight the multiple forms and layers of discrimination, by state actors and within communities and families, and the prevailing lack of protection or access to redress, that affect children and young people with disabilities in Nigeria, severely impairing their lives and in many cases putting them at (further) risk of exploitation and harm.

Through consultations with legal representatives in the UK, ARC Foundation and Asylos became aware of the absence of relevant COI about persons with disabilities and the misconceptions about disability issues which exist in the inter-national protection legal sector and contribute to the rejection of meritorious claims by persons with disabilities. Together with the steering committee, including persons with lived experience, lawyers and academics, who also assisted with the Nigeria report, we developed eight research principles hoping to encourage COI researchers, legal representatives and decision-makers alike to take a more holistic and informed approach to researching international protection claims involving persons with disabilities. We believe this will lead to an improvement in the availability of good quality COI research and better quality decision-making.



Ghana: State treatment of LGBTQI+ persons, March 2021



Nigeria: Children and Young People with Disabilities, October 2021



Principles for conducting COI research on disability, December 2021

Researching COI products

Afghanistan COI Repository

Following the recapturing of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021, we launched the emergency initiative Afghanistan COI Repository, in partnership with Asylos and Clifford Chance and with support from Refugee Action. This document is updated on a weekly basis by a pool of research volunteers and contains a list of national, regional and international sources. This initiative ensures that even when the situation on the ground is constantly changing, relevant, accurate and current country information is easily accessible to asylum seekers, legal representatives and decision-makers.

Since the launch of the Afghanistan COI Repository in September 2021 and up to December 2021 there have been:

- 3,990 unique page views on the Afghanistan project page
- 1,637 total downloads of the Afghan COI Repository
- 50–200 unique users per week downloading the repository
- 14 volunteer researchers giving over 200 hours of their time
- 2 partnerships that developed with legal organisations in the US



Researching COI products

Thematic Source Database

In September 2021, we updated our open access thematic sources database which aims to support legal representatives and others undertaking COI research by making country information publicly available, alongside a repository of COI experts.

Prison Conditions in Ethiopia

As we continued to notice an important gap in highlighting conditions in detention and treatment of detainees, we published a COI report on prison conditions in Ethiopia.



Thematic Source Database



Prison Conditions in Ethiopia, February 2021

COI Update

Throughout 2021, we continued to send out our monthly newsletter, the COI Update, to over 1,000 subscribers. This provides an update of UK Country Guidance case law, UK Home Office publications and developments in refugee producing countries, focusing on those nationalities which generate the most applications for asylum in the UK.

Developing and delivering training webinars

Together with Asylos, we developed and delivered Country of Origin Information (COI) training webinars which equip legal representatives and those assisting people claiming asylum conducting COI research with tools to develop a research strategy, identify relevant sources, and develop practical research techniques.

We also expanded our training by offering a separate child-focused COI module for those conducting research on children and young people and a separate module focusing on disability in the context of international protection claims and disability-focused country of origin information.

Between November 2019 and February 2022, we trained over 520 participants and of those who provided feedback (157), 97% found our webinars to be 'excellent' or 'very good', to 98% feeling more confident in researching COI after attending our training.



Delivering a case-specific research service

ARC Foundation also provided a case-specific research service for individual asylum and human rights claims, examining human rights, legal, social, political and humanitarian issues in various countries of origin.

Since ARC Foundation's was established, we have been commissioned to provide COI research for the following Country Guidance cases:



Partnership work

Throughout ARC Foundation's existence we set up close partnerships and collaborated with a range of stakeholders to promote higher COI standards and exchange good practice on COI production and usage including through:

Managing a **child-focused COI working group**, based on the success of a previous Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity or Expression (SOGIE) COI working group, which met with the UK Home Office Country Policy and Information Team responsible for issuing asylum policy guidance on particular countries and profiles.

Creating a joint **online resource platform** together with Asylos and Clifford Chance to increase understanding of and access to COI reports.

Whilst this work was initiated in 2020 through the assistance of Refugee Action, this collaboration continued into 2021, attracting pro-bono support from the technical team at Thomson Reuters Foundation.

It is foreseen that the COI Platform will become operational in 2022 providing a resource for existing COI reports published by all participating actors, as well as a one-stop research request service for case-specific reports.

Managing and maintaining our free members-only space, the **COI Forum**, through the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD) ECOI.net, to exchange COI-related information, queries and create networking opportunities.

Membership of:

European Asylum Support Office's Consultative Forum

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

European Network on Statelessness (ENS)

Funders, partners and friends

Throughout ARC Foundation's existence we have received generous financial assistance from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, for which we are incredibly grateful.

We are also appreciative of the constructive relationship and trust we've managed to foster since 2016 with the Home Office Country Policy and Information Team and colleagues at the then European Asylum Support Office (EASO).

Lastly, we are incredibly grateful to our wonderful and supportive Board of Trustees, Iris Teichmann for designing our publications, and colleagues at:

- Asylos
- The Dutch Council for Refugees
- The Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)
- The European Network on Statelessness (ENS)
- The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)
- UNHCR Geneva



Our finances 2021

Income

Grants	£49,809
Other research service	£20,130
Other services	£1,843
Total	£71,782

£71,782

Expenditure

Grants	£74,532
Other expenses	£2,309
Total	£76,841

£76,841

Reserves

Reserves	£3,354
Total	£3,354

£3,354

Transparency note: The remaining balance (reserves of £3,354) was used in 2022, as agreed with the relevant funder, to enable the successful transition of key ARC Foundation projects to Asylos and to pay any outstanding administration costs associated with winding down a charity.



ARC Foundation is a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation in England. Charity number 1170807.
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