



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

RAIO DIRECTORATE

**RESEARCHING AND USING
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
INFORMATION IN RAIO
ADJUDICATIONS**

LESSON PLAN

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RAIO Directorate

RESEARCHING AND USING COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION IN RAIO ADJUDICATIONS

Lesson Plan

LESSON PLAN DESCRIPTION

This lesson plan provides guidelines on the use of country of origin information (COI) in adjudicating immigration benefits, petitions, protection determinations, and other immigration-related requests.

ENABLING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the importance of country of origin information in RAIO adjudications and screenings.
2. Define considerations for assessing the reliability of country of origin sources.
3. Explain when it is necessary to cite country of origin information to support a determination or decision.
4. Identify when country of origin information is material to the claim.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Supplement A – International and Refugee Adjudications](#)

[Supplement B – Asylum Adjudications](#)

CRITICAL TASKS

Task Description
Knowledge of the relevant international human rights conventions related to refugees
Knowledge of the relevant sections of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)
Knowledge of the relevant sections of 8 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)
Knowledge of international human rights laws and principles
Knowledge of U.S. case law that impacts RAIO
Knowledge of the sources of relevant country conditions information
Knowledge of techniques and methodology for conducting research
Knowledge of internal and external resources for conducting research
Knowledge of the SharePoint/RAIO Virtual Library (VL)
Knowledge of Westlaw legal research resource
Knowledge of other internet-based research databases and resources
Skill in conducting research (e.g., legal, background, country conditions)
Skill in identifying the relevancy of collected information and materials
Skill in identifying information gaps, deficiencies, and discrepancies in data or information
Skill in accessing and navigating SharePoint/RAIO VL
Skill in accessing and navigating USCIS and other government databases
Skill in accessing and navigating internet-based research databases and resources
Skill in applying relevant country conditions information to the claim
Skill in determining materiality of facts, information and issues
Skill in managing resources
Skill in organizing case and research materials

SCHEDULE OF REVISIONS

Date	Section (Number and Name)	Brief Description of Changes	Made By
12/12/2012	Entire lesson plan	Lesson plan published	RAIO Training
05/10/2013	Throughout document	Corrected minor typos, formatting, cites identified by OCC-TKMD.	L. Gollub, RAIO Training
11/23/2015	Throughout document	Fixed links, typos	RAIO Training
12/20/2019	Entire lesson plan	Minor edits to reflect changes in organizational structure of RAIO; no substantive updates	RAIO Training
01/28/2025	Entire lesson plan	Reorganization of lesson plan; updated case law and policy guidance (including the use of COI in decision-making); updated links and citations	RAIO Training with the COI Lesson Plan Working Group
01/30/2025	P.12	Replaced “gender” with “sex;” removed content that inculcated gender ideology	RAIO Training

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Throughout this lesson plan, you will come across references to adjudication-specific supplemental information located at the end of the lesson plan, as well as links to documents that contain adjudication-specific, detailed information. You are responsible for knowing the information in the referenced material that pertains to the adjudications or screenings you will be performing.

For easy reference, supplements for international and refugee adjudications are in pink and supplements for asylum adjudications are in yellow.

1 INTRODUCTION

Country of Origin Information (COI) plays a fundamental role in the adjudication¹ of immigration benefits, petitions, protection determinations, and other immigration related requests. Such benefits include, but are not limited to, applications for asylum or refugee status, requests for review (RFRs) of refugee applications, credible or reasonable fear screenings, intercountry adoptions, waivers of inadmissibility, and humanitarian parole requests. COI provides objective evidence against which documentation in the record and the testimony of an applicant can be viewed and evaluated. You can also use COI as part of a framework to help identify whether an individual may be eligible for the requested benefit.

The importance of COI is emphasized in [INA 207\(f\)](#), which specifically provides for the training of U.S. officials adjudicating refugee cases, [INA 235\(b\)\(1\)\(E\)](#) which specifically includes professional training in country conditions for asylum officers conducting credible fear screenings, and by regulation at [8 CFR 208.1\(b\)](#), *Training of asylum officers*. [For division-specific information on training requirements, see [International and Refugee Adjudications Supplement – Introduction](#) and [Asylum Adjudications Supplement – Introduction](#).]

The purpose of this lesson plan is to provide guidance on the role of COI in RAIO adjudications, namely:

1. How to properly conduct country of origin research
2. How to use COI to prepare for and conduct an interview
3. How relevant COI may be used when determining eligibility

¹ While RAIO decisions on requests for review (RFRs) and credible fear and reasonable fear prescreenings constitute determinations rather than benefit adjudications, use of the term “adjudication” and “adjudicator” throughout this lesson plan is, unless specified, intended to apply to such determinations and the officers who render decisions on them.

Most of the language, examples, and resources contained in this lesson plan are focused on Form I-589 asylum and Form I-590 refugee adjudications, as well as credible or reasonable fear screenings. However, please note that there are circumstances within the RAIO directorate where COI is used in other contexts such as in adjudication of Form I-602, *Application by Refugee for Waiver of Inadmissibility Grounds*; Humanitarian Parole requests and Intercountry Adoptions; Form I-730, Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition; as well as other form types, on a case-by-case basis. For example, officers in the Parole Operations Unit may occasionally use COI to confirm or supplement information provided in a humanitarian parole application that the applicant is unable to receive adequate medical care for their medical condition in the country of origin. Additionally, in intercountry adoptions requests, the adjudicating officer may research COI to verify the types of civil documents available in a particular country such as birth, marriage, divorce certificates, adoption decrees, and police or prison records. The scope of the research and the manner in which it is used in the adjudication may be different from the asylum or refugee context, but the research tools and methods are similar, if not the same. The information provided in Sections 4 and 5 of this lesson plan are applicable to COI in all RAIO adjudications and screenings.

2 IMPORTANCE OF COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION

2.1 COI Helps You Elicit Relevant Information and Form Reasoned Decisions

In almost all types of RAIO interviews, COI is essential to properly:

1. Ask questions to fully develop the applicant's claim

Equipped with an understanding of COI, you can better identify the most relevant parts of an applicant's story, and ask specific, informed questions to develop the appropriate parts of the applicant's testimony. This is especially true when a confused or inarticulate applicant has difficulty describing their claim. In such situations, COI provides you with a frame of reference that enables you to form pertinent questions relevant to the applicant's claim.

2. Evaluate the objective or factual basis of the claim and eligibility

Proper use of COI provides a context for analyzing eligibility during the screening or adjudication. For example, COI may be used to evaluate claims of past persecution and enable you to more fully assess the risk of harm to the applicant if they were to return to their country of origin. Additionally, COI helps you identify applicants who may be subject to a ground of inadmissibility or the persecutor bar. In the asylum context, country of origin information can help you determine whether an exception to the one-year filing deadline may exist.

3. Assess credibility

COI helps you ask appropriately probing questions to evaluate credibility. For example, COI may prevent you from erroneously not finding an applicant credible because the applicant’s experiences are foreign to your own experience of how people and governments behave. Familiarity with COI can also help you identify potential credibility concerns or fraudulent claims.

2.2 COI Helps Promote Consistency

The use of reliable COI promotes consistency in decision-making not only for you, but across USCIS. Basing decisions on reliable, publicly available information promotes accountability and fairness, and prevents arbitrary decision-making. This enables you to further support your analysis and decision. Additionally, proper use of COI helps the decision withstand public scrutiny and/or appeal of an adverse determination.

3 ROLE OF COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION IN THE REFUGEE AND ASYLUM PROCESS

It is imperative to consult COI routinely, even when you believe that you are familiar with the current situation in a country. Conditions in many countries are often volatile and subject to rapid change.

3.1 Pre-Interview Preparation

Prior to an interview, review the file to determine the possible basis of claim(s). The resources available for pre-interview preparation and research differ depending on whether you are interviewing at a USCIS office or another location such as a detention center or an international processing site. [For Asylum-specific information on preparing for the interview, see [Asylum Adjudications Supplement – Pre-Interview Preparation.](#)]

There are many excellent sources of COI readily available, from DHS Intranet sources, such as RAIO Research products (papers, query responses, news summaries, and curated COI) available on multiple virtual platforms, to materials available on the public internet. RAIO Research and other sources of COI are discussed later in this lesson plan.

You should become familiar with the RAIO Research’s resources and utilize these materials in your adjudications. RAIO Research’s compilation of sources is often responsive to requests from adjudicating officers regarding topics encountered during adjudications and screenings. As such, RAIO Research’s products are often highly relevant to issues encountered during adjudications and screenings. You may save time by reviewing these resources prior to conducting your own

internet searches. Moreover, RAIO Research vets its sources for reliability, ensuring that sources that are cited are accurate at the time of publication.²

3.2 Eliciting Testimony at the Interview

To ask informed questions during the interview, you must be familiar with conditions in the applicant's country of origin, or, if the applicant is stateless, their last habitual residence. You should consider COI to help substantiate each part of your analysis.

3.2.1 Does the Applicant Meet the Refugee Definition?

Knowledge of and appropriate use of COI, along with knowledge of the legal refugee standard, are necessary to adjudicate a request for asylum or refugee status or to conduct a credible fear or reasonable fear screening fairly and in an informed, objective, and consistent manner. COI can help inform what testimony to elicit and provides evidence pertinent to the applicant's eligibility.³ For example, COI can help you evaluate incidents of past harm or the likelihood of future harm. In some cases, COI, depending on its reliability, may provide an independent basis to assess the applicant's claims of past harm or fear of future harm.

3.2.2 Is the Applicant's Testimony Credible?

Often an applicant has no documentation or witnesses to corroborate a request for an immigration benefit. Country of origin information provides context for asking relevant questions and evaluating the applicant's credibility. The more knowledgeable you are about the applicant's country and any group to which the applicant claims to belong, the better you will be able to formulate questions to probe the applicant's credibility, where appropriate.

Informed questioning may expose inconsistencies and falsehoods in the applicant's claim. Informed questioning may also help re-establish credibility when something appears inconsistent or implausible at first impression.

Example

An applicant claims to have suffered persecution because of his active participation in a political party in 2009. Because you know through COI research that national elections were held in the applicant's country in 2009, you know to elicit information about the applicant's participation in the elections (e.g., whom he supported, whom he opposed, the names of opposition parties, etc.).

² You should cite to sources contained within a RAIO Research publication (rather than to the RAIO Research publication itself).

³ See RAIO Lesson Plans, [Persecution](#), [Nexus and the Protected Grounds](#), [Nexus \(PSG\)](#), [Well-Founded Fear](#), and [Credibility](#) for further information about how COI can help elicit testimony or provide evidence pertinent to the applicant's eligibility.

You can then compare the applicant's testimony for consistency with country reports regarding the election.

You must use caution, however, in evaluating an applicant's lack of knowledge regarding events or organizations in their country. There are varying degrees of affiliation with political parties or organizations, as well as varying levels of communication within organizations. For example, an applicant may be unaware of the clandestine activities of part of his organization due to a high level of secrecy within the organization. Additionally, the applicant may be from a rural area that news does not easily reach, and the applicant's viewpoint may be extremely localized. An applicant's sex, lack of education, or socioeconomic status may also play a role in the type of country of origin knowledge the individual has or can reasonably be expected to have. On the other hand, you may reasonably expect an applicant who was in a leadership role in an organization to be able to provide more information about that organization and its activities and goals.

In evaluating the credibility of statements made by the applicant, you should access the available COI evidence that is relevant to those statements. The COI evidence may provide different degrees of support to a claim. It may also provide more and less support for some parts of the claim than for others. COI may confirm, in detail, some statements made in an interview while directly contradicting others. Likewise, it may provide general corroboration for one part of the claim, while no support (or only limited or indirect support) may be found in available COI for another aspect of the claim.

Just as COI may support an applicant's claim and bolster their credibility, COI may also directly contradict important assertions in the applicant's claim, which would lead to credibility concerns that must be addressed with the applicant. For more information on the use of contradictory COI in decision-making, including its role within the credibility framework, refer to Section 3.3.3, [Country Reports Directly Contradict the Claim](#).

3.2.3 Is the Applicant Possibly Subject to a Bar or Ground of Inadmissibility?

COI is critical in eliciting testimony about potential bars or grounds of inadmissibility.⁴ The applicant's activities may implicate certain grounds of inadmissibility, such as national security issues, terrorist activity, criminal activity, torture, trafficking, genocide, and particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The applicant may also be barred from eligibility for having been a persecutor, if you find that the applicant ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of others on account of a protected ground.⁵

Examples

⁴ See RAIO Lesson Plan, [Overview of Inadmissibility Grounds, Mandatory Bars, and Waivers](#).

⁵ See RAIO Lesson Plan, [Analyzing the Persecutor Bar](#) and the IRAD Lesson Plan, [Inadmissibility Grounds \(Minus TRIG\) and Waivers](#) for additional guidance.

- Through COI, you have learned that many students at an applicant’s former university were informants who caused other students to be arrested and tortured. You should elicit information to determine whether the applicant participated in or assisted in the persecution of others.
- If you know that the military unit to which an applicant belonged engaged in persecution of others, that knowledge will make you more effective in eliciting the information necessary to determine whether the applicant is barred as a persecutor.
- If you know that the opposition group to which an applicant belonged sometimes engaged in terrorist activities, you will be more effective in eliciting the information necessary to determine whether a terrorism-related ground of inadmissibility applies.
- If there is a question as to whether an applicant may have been firmly resettled, country of origin research will be helpful in learning about the rights conferred by a particular status granted to an individual and whether those rights are honored in practice. This information will provide an objective basis for you to evaluate whether the applicant has been firmly resettled.⁶
- If the record reflects that the applicant may have been convicted of a crime, you may need to research penal codes for additional information about the conviction, in order to determine if the applicant is subject to a bar or criminal inadmissibility ground. An applicant may be subject to a criminal inadmissibility ground without a conviction if they admit to the essential elements of a crime. Reviewing the penal code is essential for eliciting such an admission.
- You should allow the applicant to explain conditions, events, groups, or other pertinent information with which you are unfamiliar. You should remain open to the possibility that the applicant is providing information not available elsewhere. For example, when an applicant testifies about a group or organization with which you are unfamiliar, it is helpful to ask the applicant to provide the name of the group or organization in their native language, as well as the translated version; any nicknames or acronyms for the group or organization; and the names of group leaders. Eliciting information from the applicant about conditions and groups should not be a substitute, however, for conducting COI research before and, when necessary, after the interview. Use the information provided by the applicant to help direct your research.

3.3 Using COI Research in Decision-Making

During the interview, COI can help guide you in eliciting testimony relevant to an applicant’s eligibility for the requested benefit. After you complete the interview, you

⁶ See RAIO Lesson Plan, [Firm Resettlement](#), for additional guidance.

must evaluate the testimony provided by the applicant in light of COI. Even in the absence of credible testimony, you must evaluate whether COI is evidence that independently establishes facts necessary for the analysis you are conducting.

When making a decision, COI may play a critical role. While non-exhaustive, in certain situations COI may help establish:

- A government's unwillingness or inability to control a nongovernmental persecutor
- A persecutor's awareness of the applicant's possession of a protected characteristic
- A persecutor's capability to persecute
- A persecutor's inclination to persecute
- The existence of a pattern or practice of persecution
- Nexus to a protected ground
- Some prongs of some particular social groups
- Feasibility and reasonableness of internal relocation
- Possible involvement in acts of persecution
- Possible offer of firm resettlement in another country
- The potential applicability of certain other bars and/or grounds of inadmissibility
- Protection claims under the Convention Against Torture⁷

In certain situations, due to factors specific to the applicant's individual situation, COI may not be as helpful in establishing:

- The type and seriousness of harm the applicant has experienced
- That certain applicants possess certain protected characteristics
- The prongs of less established or nontraditional particular social groups
- The reasonableness of internal relocation for some applicants

⁷ See [8 CFR 208.16\(c\)\(3\)](#)

COI may also impact a given case in any of the following ways:

- COI may match certain assertions in the claim in detail
- COI may corroborate the broad outlines of the claim but not details specific to the applicant's personal claim
- COI may directly contradict certain assertions in the claim
- COI may neither corroborate nor contradict some aspects of the claim
- COI itself may constitute evidence in some cases sufficient to establish facts that satisfy one or more eligibility elements, without additional testimonial evidence about those facts.

3.3.1 Country Reports May Match a Claim in Detail

It is unusual for COI to corroborate specific details of a claim, even a valid claim. Still, this does happen occasionally, in both valid and fraudulent claims.

Example

An applicant claims he is a member of a specific ethnic group that has been the target of government attacks for several decades. His application includes claims that his small village was attacked on a specific date and that he was able to escape without harm by hiding in the hills outside of his village. The applicant testifies that his village was burned in the attack and most residents did not survive.

In the example above, COI reports corroborate specific details of the applicant's claim, including the date of the attack, the name of the applicant's village, and that the village was attacked by security forces as part of a larger week-long campaign against multiple villages populated by people who are members of the applicant's ethnic group. Therefore, in this instance, the country reports are consistent with details of the applicant's claim.

An applicant's claim that matches COI reports in detail may be a very carefully crafted fraudulent account, or a genuine claim. Either way, you must assess the credibility of the applicant's testimony regarding his connection with this ethnic group and village. The above claim would initially appear to be valid; however, you must evaluate each claim on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration the entire record of evidence. For example, did the applicant credibly testify to other information that was relevant to the claim? Was he consistent and detailed about what he observed during the attack? If information about this attack is available through an internet search, does the information available from reliable sources corroborate his story? (See Section 4.3, [Reputable Sources for Internet Research](#) for additional guidance on conducting internet research.)

3.3.2 Country Reports May Corroborate the Broad Outlines of the Claim, but Not the Specific Details of the Applicant's Personal Claim

In most of the cases in which available COI *generally* corroborates an applicant's claim, information on the *details specific to the applicant's* personal claim will not be readily available. COI that generally corroborates an applicant's claim is evidence in support of the applicant's story. If the applicant's own testimony is plausible, detailed, internally consistent, and corroborated in its broad outlines by COI, further corroboration of specific details is not necessary.

Examples

An applicant describes how his remote village is the target of an attack by local police. The RAIO officer was unable to find reports about this specific attack; however, country reports generally indicate that members of the police have carried out human rights abuses against political opponents and others. Additional questioning allows the applicant the opportunity to provide a credible account of a situation in a region previously not mentioned in human rights or news reports - an account that is consistent with a pattern of abuses reported in other areas.

Country of origin information indicates that female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) is widespread in a particular country, but more prevalent in the north. An applicant claims that FGM/C is practiced by her ethnic group, which is from the south. Unless, after further research, you uncover specific reports indicating that the applicant's southern ethnic group does not practice FGM/C, you should accept that COI corroborates the applicant's claim.

An applicant from Country X testifies that his brother was arrested by the Government Intelligence Agency at a checkpoint while leaving the country and that he was arrested because he had formerly lived in a rebel-controlled area of Country X. COI reports document that the Government Intelligence Agency does arrest citizens of Country X while leaving the country at this border crossing, but does not document the applicant's brother's arrest specifically. COI reports do not specify the reason that motivates these arrests. Further questioning of the applicant about why he believes his brother was arrested for this reason, and if he knows about any other similarly situated people who have been arrested for similar reasons, will help further develop the record.

COI may broadly support an aspect of the applicant's claim in the sense that COI may indicate that something *similar to* what was described does occur or has occurred, but COI may not indicate that *precisely* what was described does occur or has occurred. For example, a COI source may indicate that the government of a certain country "uses violence to suppress many of the country's numerous ethnic minority groups." The source also discusses two of these groups in particular and provides information about the government's actions. However, the applicant is from an ethnic minority in that country

that was not specifically discussed in the source. Likewise, COI may indicate that persons of a certain religion suffer from “societal discrimination” in a given country, while the applicant claims that police interfered with their religious practices by closing down their place of worship.

Adjudicators should consider the extent to which COI is relevant to the facts of the case in front of them, and, as appropriate, adjudicators may draw reasonable inferences from COI in order to establish substantive elements. For example, as explained in the RAIO Lesson Plan, [Nexus and the Protected Grounds](#), “Reasonable inferences regarding the motivations of persecutors should be made, taking into consideration the culture and patterns of persecution within the applicant’s country of origin.” In such cases, the relevance of the COI to the particular claim made by the applicant must be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis, in light of the evidence as a whole. (See Section 3.3.4, [COI neither Corroborates nor Contradicts the Claim.](#))

3.3.3 Country Reports Directly Contradict the Claim

When you rely upon COI directly to contradict an applicant’s claim, you will need to ensure that the source(s) relied upon is (are) reliable. It is best to provide multiple, reliable sources for the COI used to contradict an interviewee's assertion. It is preferable to use at least two reliable sources; however, there is no bright-line rule on the number of sources required. The number of reliable sources used to contradict an interviewee’s claim may also affect the amount of weight you attribute to that contradiction.⁸

Credibility

COI may support an applicant’s claim and bolster the credibility of their testimony. Alternatively, COI may directly contradict important assertions in the applicant’s claim (i.e., as an inconsistency), which would lead to credibility concerns that must be addressed with the applicant. If COI clearly contradicts aspects of the applicant’s claim, and the applicant is unable to explain the discrepancy, the concern may be weighed as part of an adverse credibility determination, wherein an applicant’s testimony may be found not credible based on the totality of the circumstances and all relevant factors.

Example

The applicant claimed to have been an active member of a political party since 2001. Multiple country reports establish that the political party was not formed until 2005. Because country reports directly contradict the applicant’s claim, her claim that she was an active member of that party is inconsistent with COI.

Caveat

⁸ See RAIO Lesson Plan, [Evidence](#), for more information about assigning weight to evidence in your adjudications.

The applicant should always be given an opportunity to address this type of discrepancy since there may be a good explanation for the contradiction. For instance, in the above example, the party may have been formed in 2005 by the merger of several pre-existing parties, to one of which the applicant belonged.⁹

Also note that if COI merely casts general doubt on an applicant's assertion, this is not a credibility concern. For example, if the applicant describes engaging in peaceful party activities in their area, but COI discusses some party members engaging in acts of violence in another region, which may indicate that the applicant is barred from refugee or asylum status as a persecutor, you should ask more questions about the applicant's activities at that time, the location of those activities, and possible joint activities with the branch in the part of the country where violence was taking place. The applicant's assertion that they did not partake in violence is not necessarily an implausibility or an inconsistency with COI here, though the applicant would be expected to testify in detail.

Elements of the Refugee Definition

COI can support or undermine any element of an applicant's claim. For example, COI could support or contradict the failure of state protection, or the unavailability of internal relocation. A third example might be, in the context of a well-founded fear analysis, if country reports specifically contradict an applicant's claim that they are at risk of persecution, then the fear of future harm may not be objectively reasonable, even if the facts the applicant relayed are credible.¹⁰ Greater weight can be given to COI that appears in multiple reports. In such cases, you should cite reliable COI explaining that the applicant failed to establish a well-founded fear.

Example

An applicant fears that she is at risk of governmental persecution on account of her Catholic religion. However, reliable COI indicates that Catholicism is freely practiced in her country and that a Catholic political party is a powerful influence in the government. Additionally, there have been no reports of governmental threats, arrests, or harassment of Catholics for many years.

You must be careful to distinguish between country reports that *specifically contradict* an applicant's claim from reports that *generally fail to support* a claim. COI that is inconsistent with an applicant's testimony should be presented to an applicant, and the applicant's response to the apparent contradiction should be evaluated for reasonableness within the credibility framework. Country reports that generally fail to support a claim may inform your questioning but should not be presented to an applicant as a credibility concern unless inconsistent with an applicant's testimony.

⁹ See RAIO Lesson Plan, [Credibility](#), for additional guidance.

¹⁰ See RAIO Lesson Plan, [Well-Founded Fear](#), for additional guidance.

Country reports would not address the applicant's situation under several potential circumstances. These include, but are not limited to, reported information that differs from the applicant's situation regarding location, timeframe, and groups at risk. It could also be because the source is silent on certain types of conduct and does not provide information on that conduct one way or another. Another possibility is that the source is relevant to the applicant's situation, but the source is otherwise unreliable because of bias or lack of quality. Think critically about whether your source truly speaks to your applicant's purported facts before concluding that an inconsistency necessarily exists.

In *Galina v. INS*¹¹, the Seventh Circuit was highly critical of the BIA for its overreliance and misapplication of COI, which did not specifically contradict an asylum-seeker's claim. The Seventh Circuit noted that the BIA improperly relied on a 1998 country report to show that the persecution by a political party that drove the applicant and her husband out of Latvia in 1994 is unlikely to recur, without showing that there was an improvement in the human rights situation in Latvia by comparing reports between 1994 and 1998.

3.3.4 COI neither Corroborates nor Contradicts the Claim

As previously noted, it is relatively uncommon for COI to corroborate the specific details of an applicant's claim (e.g., that a particular individual was attacked in a certain place on a particular date). More frequently, COI indicates that the *kind of events* an applicant described do occur or have occurred (e.g., that police have raided churches and arrested persons attending a service, or that the military has shelled villages inhabited by an ethnic minority group, killing and wounding civilians.)¹² That COI does not record the occurrence of a kind of event that an applicant describes does not contradict the claim that a particular event of that kind occurred. For example, that COI does not indicate that police have arrested labor rights demonstrators does not contradict the assertion that an applicant was arrested while demonstrating for labor rights.¹³

Furthermore, applicants are *not* required to provide COI demonstrating that the event or kind of event they claim to have experienced has, in fact, occurred. Applicants may meet their burden of proof based on testimony alone if such testimony is credible, persuasive and refers to specific facts, even if COI or other record evidence does not support it.

However, there are circumstances when COI neither supports nor contradicts the claim. The nature of COI is such that COI sources typically do not explicitly state that a particular form of persecution *is not occurring* or that it *used to occur but has now ceased*

¹¹ *Galina v. INS*, 213 F.3d 955, 958 (7th Cir. 2000)

¹² See Section 3.3.2, [Country Reports May Corroborate the Broad Outlines of the Claim, but Not the Specific Details of the Applicant's Personal Claim.](#)

¹³ See Section 3.3.3, [Country Reports Directly Contradict the Claim.](#)

occurring. In some such circumstances, COI that may not contradict a claim may be silent on the sort of situation claimed by an applicant. In such cases, an adjudicator should not weigh such COI in favor or against an applicant.

If, upon conducting the necessary research, the adjudicator finds that COI support is lacking, the applicant's testimony must be sufficiently persuasive and make reference to specific facts to carry the burden of proof on its own, or in conjunction with other non-COI record evidence.

Example

An applicant claims that they support a mainstream political party and were attacked by members of a rival political party that is associated with an insurgent movement in their country that fought against the government in a civil war which ended approximately 20 years ago. COI indicates that, in the years immediately following the end of the war, student groups associated with the former insurgents were documented to have attacked members of the applicant's party. Violence against supporters of the applicant's party is not documented in present COI sources, although such sources do not specifically say that no supporters of applicant's party have been targeted by political rivals, which is not something that COI sources would generally state explicitly.

Present COI does not provide support or contradiction for the applicant's claim, meaning that the applicant must meet their burden of proof on the relevant element based on testimony alone, or in conjunction with other non-COI record evidence.

3.3.5 COI Without Additional Testimonial Evidence

As explained in the RAIO Lesson Plan, [*Evidence*](#), in some cases, COI may be sufficient to establish a particular fact that is relevant to the adjudication. It is not necessary for an applicant to testify to every fact that the adjudicator finds.

4 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

4.1 RAIO Research

Within RAIO, RAIO Research is a center of expertise in COI, including human rights conditions, in support of USCIS and DHS. The mission of RAIO Research is to provide officers with credible and objective information on human rights and COI to support the timely adjudication of applicants' claims. In addition, as the primary research body of DHS on human rights-related matters, RAIO Research assists other components of USCIS and DHS with research needs in related areas.

To address criticism and concerns that officers were relying on their own subjective concepts of COI in refugee-producing countries, or on reports motivated by foreign policy considerations, regulations were promulgated in 1990 that required the Director of International Affairs to maintain a human rights documentation center. Pursuant to [8 CFR 208.1\(b\)](#), the Resource Information Center (RIC), now referred to as RAIO Research, was founded. RAIO Research gathers and makes available COI from a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental sources, including print and broadcast media, academic journals, human rights monitoring agencies, and refugee advocacy groups. RAIO Research provides information independent of other government agencies to ensure that foreign policy considerations and other non-objective considerations do not play a role in the adjudication of asylum requests. RAIO Research also regularly liaises with COI units in other countries through country information sharing and participation in the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum, and Refugees (IGC). RAIO Research provides this information to RAIO staff through the [RAIO Research SharePoint](#).

RAIO Research's workload is divided into geographic regions. Currently, there are five geographic regions, each assigned dedicated researchers. RAIO Research's researchers are responsible for the following:

- Collecting information about their region from a wide variety of sources
- Disseminating information to the field through papers, query responses, and other sources
- Helping to coordinate field trainings on COI and research techniques

RAIO Research serves as a resource to RAIO staff, providing technical assistance, information dissemination, and responses to questions where COI may be difficult to obtain. For questions involving legal issues, RAIO Research coordinates with Law Library of Congress (LLOC) Foreign Law Specialists who provide foreign and legislative information services upon request. LLOC responses are posted on the RAIO Research SharePoint and made available to the field.

In addition to compiling and disseminating research, RAIO Research liaises with RAIO field offices to train staff on conducting research on country of origin and human rights information, and organizes speaker series with subject matter experts.

When specific COI is needed that cannot be found through the recommended search methods, RAIO Research can be contacted to conduct additional research. Queries for information can be submitted to RAIO Research through RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov. You may also email the specific researcher(s) responsible for the region pertaining to your question. Their email addresses may be found on RAIO Research's [About Us page](#). Additional division-specific procedures for contacting RAIO Research may be found in the [Asylum Adjudications Supplement – RAIO Research](#).

4.2 Public Sources

Country of origin information is available from many public sources on the internet. Generally, you will consult publicly available sources to obtain COI. You should use only public sources, as opposed to sensitive or classified information, when citing COI. Sources include:

- Government reports (such as those offered by the [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.K. Immigration and Nationality Directorate](#), and [Danish Immigration Service](#))
- Intergovernmental reports (such as those offered by the [United Nations](#) and [International Organization for Migration](#))
- Media reports
- Academic journals
- Non-governmental sources, such as:
 - Refugee advocacy groups
 - Human rights monitoring groups
 - Humanitarian aid agencies
 - Election monitoring groups

4.2.1 Multiple Sources

All COI should be viewed critically and corroborated by multiple sources whenever possible. You should be aware of what a preponderance of the reporting reflects about a certain region or event before drawing conclusions from a single source.

4.2.2 Current and Historical Reports

In addition to knowledge of current conditions in the countries that applicants are from, in many instances you will also need information regarding historical events in order to evaluate a claim properly. An applicant may present evidence of past events that should be examined in light of both current and historical reporting.

When evaluating claims involving very recent events, you must conduct research using the most current information available, especially when conditions are deteriorating in a country. Conditions in a country of origin rarely improve markedly overnight, but they can deteriorate rapidly. However, if you are seeking to corroborate a specific historical incident, you must consult earlier sources—those from the appropriate timeframe—to find the information that you need. As a general rule, if using COI to analyze past events, cite to COI that is relevant to the timeframe of the past event. If using COI to analyze well-founded fear, cite to current COI.

4.3 Reputable Sources for Internet Research

Some websites specialize in collecting COI or human rights reports from a variety of sources. These sites are excellent places to start your research:

- [ecoi.net](#) is the European Country of Origin Information Network, a collection of materials with a focus on information for asylum and refugee status determinations.
- [Refworld](#) is a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) repository of COI. However, as of January 2019, Refworld is no longer maintaining and updating its COI collections. Refworld will focus instead on its “collections of national legislation and jurisprudence relating to refugee law.”

There are other country of origin research collections available online. Some are maintained by universities, like the University of Minnesota and the University of Connecticut, and others are privately managed. Whenever you use information from an online collection, you should use only materials that clearly identify the original author and/or publisher.

Other websites publish their own independently researched, primary source materials. These sources can often provide the most accurate accounts of conditions in a particular country.

- The [U.S. Department of State \(DOS\)](#) publishes a variety of reports. Though mostly known for its annual Human Rights Reports, the DOS also releases annual reports on religious freedom, terrorism, human trafficking, general country background information, fact sheets, visa reciprocity, and document availability. The DOS releases periodic topical reports and oversees the [Humanitarian Information Unit \(HIU\)](#) that drafts reports, maps, and statistics about humanitarian crises all over the world.
- [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) is a leading human rights organization with representatives worldwide. It regularly publishes reports on violations of international human rights.
- [Amnesty International \(AI\)](#) is another prominent human rights organization that releases annual and periodic reports with reliable COI.
- [International Crisis Group \(ICG\)](#) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that reports on conflicts and country of origin information around the world.
- [Janes](#) is a subscriber-based intelligence service that produces original reports on foreign governments and NGOs. It is accessible through computers on the DHS network.

There are many other organizations that publish reports detailing conditions in foreign countries, or on specific regions or topics. Some have established international

reputations for providing reliable information. All organizations and reports should be evaluated independently for reliability. Links to reliable foreign government internet sources, such as the Danish Immigration Service and the U.K. Border Agency, can be found in RAIO Research's [Encyclopedia of Internet Resources](#) on the RAIO Research SharePoint.

Newspapers, periodicals, and online publications can also serve as source material for COI. Most well-known news organizations have standards to ensure accuracy, and publish retractions when mistakes are made. However, you should distinguish between objective news reporting and opinion pieces, as discussed in Section 5.1, [Assessing Source Reliability](#).

5 RESEARCH METHODS

5.1 Assessing Source Reliability

Any source of information is only as useful as it is reliable. A source of information that distorts facts to promote an agenda or routinely makes factual errors should not be relied upon. If a source generally bases its reporting on the facts as agreed upon by a majority of observers, it gains credibility.

The Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) maintains Researching Country of Origin Information, a standardized training manual that is used by COI units around the world.¹⁴ This training manual provides the following questions to consider in determining a source's reliability:

- Who provides the information?
- What information is provided?
- Why is the source providing this information?
- How is the information generated?
- When was the information gathered and when was it provided?

Materials found in online encyclopedias can be a valuable starting point; however, the underlying sources referenced must be consulted for reliability, and ultimately cited, in your decision.

Materials supplied by RAIO Research may be presumed reliable, as well as the sources therein. All other sources should be evaluated carefully.

¹⁴ Austrian Red Cross/Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), [Researching Country of Origin Information](#), Training Manual, 2013 Edition (Vienna, Austria: 23 October 2013); ecoi.net is managed by [ACCORD](#).

Additional guidance to assist in the determination of a source's reliability can be found in the RAIO Lesson Plan, [Evidence](#).

5.2 Evaluating the Reliability of Unfamiliar Sources

There are many issues that should be considered to determine the reliability of an unfamiliar source.

5.2.1 Agendas

You should consider the agenda of a source when evaluating the facts reported by that source. That a source may have a certain perspective or bias does not mean that it should be assumed to be factually wrong.

Example

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists has an agenda to protect journalists, but it is this agenda that motivates the organization to compile a detailed list of journalists who have been attacked and imprisoned.

You should look behind the rhetoric and political objectives that influence an organization's effort in order to distinguish between what the organization's agenda is and whether it makes a good-faith effort to present facts in a credible manner.

5.2.2 Print and Broadcast Media

COI obtained from media sources should be reviewed with caution, and you should be aware of the potential for distortion of truth by the media due to censorship, manipulation, and lack of expertise.

- **Censorship:** The media in refugee-producing countries, and some countries of first asylum that may be experiencing domestic problems, may be inhibited and cautious due to local censorship and the local media's practice of portraying the government favorably. The squelching of local media coverage of human rights abuses is common in countries where such issues are prevalent.
- **Manipulation:** COI from some countries, particularly from government or state-media sources, may be created deliberately or planted to create an impression that is contrary to objective facts. The government or a government-associated source in question may plant inaccurate media reports because it deems the coverage advantageous to the government's policy or political goals.
- **Lack of expertise:** It may be difficult to determine whether the underlying facts of a story are accurate because journalists are often unfamiliar with local law, human rights law, and/or the history or political details of certain conflicts. Journalists may fail to look beyond what was presented to them, and often do not have the time or

resources to verify all of the information they receive. Therefore, they may misrepresent an issue out of ignorance.

Sources from the government of a refugee-producing country should be reviewed with caution. U.S. Department of State reports and materials from RAIO Research are reliable sources that can be referenced when the accuracy of other sources is in doubt.

5.2.3 Considerations for Unfamiliar Sources

The following questions are helpful in evaluating the reliability of an unfamiliar source:

- Is the information generally consistent with other reporting, or can it be otherwise corroborated?
- Does the author employ a research methodology that can be judged? Are quotes cited in context of the entire document from which they are pulled? How close was the author in time and place to the events described?
- Is the tone of the report balanced or does it sound angry or vindictive? While it is important to consider the tone of the report, remember to also look past the rhetoric and try to determine the facts.
- Is there any information available about the group that prepared the report and does such information indicate any bias on the part of the group?
- If the source is an NGO, what is its philosophy?
- If the source is an intergovernmental or quasi-governmental organization, what is its mandate?
- If the source is a newspaper or magazine, what is its political bent?
- If the source is a government source, what is the government's record in the area of human and civil rights? Can its information be corroborated? Does freedom of the press exist? What, if any, foreign policy considerations may be at play that might influence the reporting on a particular country or region?
- If you are evaluating an unfamiliar website, critically reflect on the following:
 - What does the URL tell you about the site?
 - Who is the author/publisher of the site?
 - What are the goals of the site, its host, or its author?
 - What is the mission and vision of the site, its host and author?
 - How current is the information on the site?

- Does the bias of the author/publisher affect the usefulness of the information?
- Are there other websites/sources that corroborate the information presented?

5.3 Research Tips

There are many useful techniques to follow to make the country of origin research process as effective and efficient as possible.

5.3.1 Becoming Familiar with the Types of Information Available

Due to time constraints, it is imperative that you become familiar with the wide array of sources that are available and how these sources can be used most efficiently. It is also important that you know which sources to consult in different situations such as [RAIO Research](#), the [DHS Library](#), or external internet sources. [For division-specific guidance, see the [Asylum Adjudications Supplement – Become Familiar with the Types of Information Available](#).]

- Use electronic resources to the greatest extent possible because key terms can be searched easily.
- Use search engines to locate information on the internet.
- Use RAIO Research’s [Encyclopedia of Online Resources](#) on the RAIO Research SharePoint to determine which internet sites are most relevant to the type of research you are doing.
- Check the [Country Pages](#) of the RAIO Research SharePoint for relevant postings on the country and topic being researched.
- Consult specialized databases available on the internet. Information on these databases will not show up in the results from normal search engines. For example, [Westlaw](#) is a specialized database that can be searched for news and journal articles that often cannot be found easily on the internet. There are other specialized databases that you have access to that may be useful, such as the Protected Internet Exchange ([PiX](#)), [Janes](#), and other subscription services offered through the [DHS Library](#) such as EBSCO and ProQuest.
- Review other specialized databases that are maintained by RAIO Research.
- The RAIO Research SharePoint also contains RAIO Research’s [News Summary Bulletins](#) and other articles and reports that are archived from the internet. These articles and reports pertain specifically to conditions in the country of origin that may impact adjudications.

5.3.2 Focusing Your Research

You should keep in mind what specific COI is needed to enable you to make a decision on a case. You should not spend valuable time reading information that is unrelated to the applicant's claim. This may best be accomplished by first searching key terms on the internet or other electronic sources of COI. When searching within an electronic document, be sure to use the “find” (Control + F) function to locate the relevant text quickly in the document. It may also be appropriate to consult RAIO Research when you have encountered too much information and cannot synthesize it for your particular needs. RAIO Research can assist in analyzing and clarifying the information gathered.

5.3.3 Knowing When to Stop

At a minimum, you must have a general understanding of current conditions in the applicant's country to make a reasoned decision. COI will be a part of the evidence in every decision and should be considered in the totality of circumstances.¹⁵ You should conduct sufficient research to establish the general context of the applicant's claim and to ensure that your knowledge of conditions in the country is up to date.

5.3.4 Saving and Reusing Your Previous Research Efforts

Once you have conducted useful research, you should take a few minutes to organize and store your research so that it can be reused in the future, if applicable. This can be done by bookmarking websites (if possible) and/or creating a list of links to sources.

6 CITATIONS

6.1 Citing COI from the Relevant Timeframe and Location

When citing to COI to supplement or support any element of eligibility, it is important to select COI citations from the most relevant timeframe and location.

Citations regarding past events should generally be published around the same timeframe as the event being discussed. However, there is no bright-line rule regarding the publication date of a source, and you may come across an in-depth study of events that happened several years before the study was published, such as a book or dissertation. At a minimum, it is important to ensure that a COI source regarding a past event is accurate for the timeframe in question, even if it is not perfectly contemporaneous with the event in question.

Similarly, with respect to the impact of COI on possible future events, publication dates should be as close in time to the present as possible. Regardless, the foremost priority should be to ensure that a COI source being used to support a conclusion regarding possible future events accurately reflects current country conditions and supports your conclusion about possible future events.

¹⁵ See RAIO Lesson Plan, [Evidence](#).

While it is not always possible to locate COI citations that address the exact timeframe in question, you should strive to use COI that is as close as possible to that timeframe. The more relevant the timeframe of the COI cited is to the fact you are using it to establish, the more weight that COI would be given as evidence in the case. [For division-specific guidance on the chronological relevance of COI citations, see [Asylum Adjudications Supplement – Citations.](#)]

The relevant location addressed in a COI citation will depend on why the COI is being cited and what element of eligibility it is being used to support or contradict. Sometimes COI will address conditions that are relevant for the entire country, such as information about the policies of the current ruling government and their impact on its citizens and residents. Other times, when seeking information about a specific event for example, it is preferable to locate COI that is as specific to the location of that event as possible. One caveat—make sure that the COI you are citing is actually addressing the correct location. For example, to address an incident that occurred in the city of Basra, Iraq, it may or may not be relevant to cite COI from Basra Governorate. Also keep in mind that some locations may be known by more than one name, and also that location names may change over time (e.g., the reorganization of provinces in the Democratic Republic of Congo).

6.2 Linking COI to Specific Elements of the Claim

When citing to COI in your written assessment, include a brief statement about the element of eligibility or ineligibility which the COI is being cited to support or establish. For example, “COI reports support that the applicant’s military unit was involved in persecutory acts while he was serving.” [For division-specific guidance on citing COI in relation to the One-Year Filing Deadline, see [Asylum Adjudications Supplement – Citations.](#)]

6.3 Quoting or Summarizing Relevant Information from COI

Once you have located relevant COI to cite, you may include a brief quotation from the source of the relevant information. The use of online sources allows you to simply cut and paste a quotation directly from the source. To quote two non-consecutive passages from a COI source, add ellipses between them. You may also briefly summarize the relevant information in the COI source.

Example

According to the Department of State Human Rights Report, “rape between spouses is punishable only when the spouses have permanently separated. The government reportedly enforced the law through arrest of alleged perpetrators in some reported rape cases, but information regarding any subsequent prosecutions was not available.” See US Department of State, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Eritrea, 20 March 2023. Available at <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2089067.html> (accessed 18 December 2023)

For division-specific guidance on quoting COI in the Asylum context, see [Asylum Adjudications Supplement – Citations](#).

6.4 Citing COI that Supports Your Decision

The contents of the COI you cite must support the reason for which it is being cited. If you summarize the contents of the source, the summary must accurately reflect the contents of the source. Never use material selectively. For example, you should avoid “cherry-picking” only the material that supports your assertion or ignoring material that disputes it. Avoid taking material out of context, distorting the overall message of the source, or claiming that the source says something that it does not say.

Example (of what not to do)

A Department of State report indicates that religious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution of country X. The report further states that, in practice, violence against Jehovah’s Witnesses is common and that the government does not punish perpetrators of such violence. It would be *incorrect* to make the following statements:

“According to the State Department, religious freedom is guaranteed under the laws of X. [cite]. Therefore, it is not reasonable for the applicant to fear she will be persecuted because she is a Jehovah’s Witness.”

6.5 Verifying Links

It is important to ensure that any links you use as part of your citations are accurate and functional. Test cited links to internet sources to ensure that they refer to the intended material. Check links to ensure they are not broken.

6.6 COI Citation Format

While RAIO does not require adherence to a specific citation format, the following basic components should be included in your COI citations:

- Author or authors, which may include an organization like UNHCR or a government entity like the Department of State
- Date of publication
- Title of the material
- For sources accessed on the internet, you should also include the date you accessed the material, as well as the link to the material

Some COI databases, like ecoinet, make tools available to generate citations for material found on their site. These tools generally include each of the above components needed to properly cite a source for RAIO adjudications.

7 CONCLUSION

Knowing how to research COI and when to apply it is important in all stages of the interviewing and decision-making process. Familiarize yourself with the resources available to you. If the COI is from an unfamiliar online site, make sure to assess the source for reliability. Country of origin information provides you with objective evidence to assess an applicant's application for an immigration benefit. The more background country information you have, the better prepared you will be to elicit testimony and to make decisions.

8 SUMMARY

8.1 Importance of Country of Origin Information

Knowledge of the legal standards of each immigration benefit which you are responsible for adjudicating must be complemented with knowledge of relevant COI in order to adjudicate fairly, and in an informed, objective, and consistent manner.

Knowledge of COI is essential to your being able to:

1. Elicit relevant information in the interview
2. Evaluate whether an applicant's claim has an objective, factual basis
3. Assess the credibility of the applicant
4. Determine overall eligibility fairly

8.2 Role of Country of Origin Information in the Refugee/Asylum Interview Process

It is imperative that you routinely consult COI, even when you believe you are familiar with the current situation in a country. Conditions in refugee-producing countries are often volatile and subject to frequent change.

You must consider all relevant evidence, including the testimony provided by the applicant at the interview and evaluated in light of COI, in order to determine an applicant's:

1. Credibility
2. Claim of past persecution or fear of future persecution
3. Involvement in acts of persecution
4. Possible firm resettlement in another country

5. Admissibility

8.3 Sources of Information

There are many excellent sources of COI readily available to you as an adjudicator, including:

1. RAIO Research
2. Online collections and databases
3. Publicly available sources on the internet

8.4 Research Methods

When conducting country of origin research, it is important to consult a variety of sources to gain as comprehensive an understanding of the country as possible. You should be aware of what a preponderance of the reporting says about a certain area before drawing conclusions about conditions in that area from a single source.

1. Consider the agenda, mandate, or political leaning of a source.
2. Can information provided by a source be corroborated by other reputable sources?
3. If using a media source, consider the political context of the source (e.g., possible censorship or a political agenda), the possibility for manipulation, and the expertise of the reporter.
4. If you are evaluating an unfamiliar website, consider the following:
 - What does the URL tell you about the site?
 - Who is the author/publisher of the site?
 - What is the mission, vision, or goal of the site, its host, or its author?
 - How current is the information on the site?
 - Does the bias of the author/publisher affect the usefulness of the information?
 - Are there other websites/sources that corroborate the information presented?

8.5 Citations

Citations should be relevant to element of the claim that is under consideration. You may summarize and/or quote COI from a source. If you summarize the contents of the source, the summary must accurately reflect the contents of the source. You must check any links in your citations to ensure they are accurate and functional.

Citations should be relevant to the timeframe of the claim. As a general rule, if using COI to analyze past events, cite to COI that is relevant to the timeframe of the past event. If using COI to analyze well-founded fear, cite to current COI.

While RAIO does not require adherence to a specific citation format, the following basic components should be included in your COI citations:

- Author or authors, which may include an organization like UNHCR or a government entity like the Department of State
- Date of publication
- Title of the material
- For sources accessed on the internet, you should also include the date you accessed the material, as well as the link to the material

SUPPLEMENT A – INTERNATIONAL AND REFUGEE ADJUDICATIONS

The following information is specific to international and refugee adjudications. Information in each text box contains adjudication-specific procedures and guidelines related to the section from this Lesson Plan referenced in the subheading of the supplement text box.

RECOMMENDED READING

1. Joanna Ruppel, Chief, Refugee Affairs Division, *Clarifying Guidance on the Use of Country of Origin Information (COI) in Refugee Adjudications* (April 30, 2019).

SUPPLEMENT

International and Refugee Adjudications Supplement – Introduction

The importance of training about COI is emphasized in [INA 207\(f\)](#).

INA 207: Annual admission of refugees and admission of emergency situation refugees.

(f) Training

(1) The Attorney General, in consultation with the Secretary of State, shall provide all United States officials adjudicating refugee cases under this section with the same training as that provided to officers adjudicating asylum cases under section 208.

(2) Such training shall include country-specific conditions, instruction on the internationally recognized right to freedom of religion, instruction on methods of religious persecution practiced in foreign countries, and applicable distinctions within a country between the nature of and treatment of various religious practices and believers.

Use of COI in Refugee Adjudications

You will receive a Pre-Departure Briefing (PDB) prior to each circuit ride. A portion of the PDB addresses general information about the populations that will be interviewed and the issues that often arise during interviews (e.g., common grounds of inadmissibility, armed groups known to be associated with a certain population, etc.).

During PDB, you may be provided COI resources relevant to the populations you will be interviewing. These COI resources can be used to streamline citations to

COI when in the field, when time to research COI for each individual case will be limited. When using COI citations that have been provided to you, pay special attention to selecting the citations that apply to the case you are analyzing. For issues pertaining solely to a particular case, you may need to conduct individualized COI research while in the field to inform your interview or supplement your adjudication.

Refugee applicants who fled their country of nationality (or country of last habitual residence, if stateless) many years prior to their USCIS refugee interview may no longer be familiar with current relevant COI and may focus their attention during testimony on the situation that originally caused them to flee their country. Other refugee applicants may have fled with their family when they were young or were born after their family fled from their country, often living in refugee camps for many years; these refugee applicants also tend to be less familiar with current COI in their country of nationality. When interviewing refugee applicants like these, you may need to supplement applicant testimony with COI citations to establish one or more elements of well-founded fear, where COI supports the applicant's subjective fear.

When analyzing well-founded fear using pattern or practice to establish the objective basis for the applicant's subjective fear, additional COI citations may be necessary to meet the standard of proof, as the applicant may not be able to testify to the seriousness and widespread persecution of similarly situated people. COI banks can be particularly helpful when analyzing the refugee cases of applicants who belong to groups that are subject to organized, systematic, or pervasive persecution, such that the pattern or practice analysis may apply.

Citing Country of Origin Research During a Circuit Ride

As a matter of policy, you are required to document the use of COI when it is a determinative factor in deciding any element of eligibility in refugee adjudications. You may also cite COI, when appropriate, to supplement testimony or other evidence. This will enable the reviewing officer to understand the analytical framework and evidence you applied in making the decision.

When relying on non-testimonial evidence, you must cite that information and the eligibility element to which it relates.

SUPPLEMENT B – ASYLUM ADJUDICATIONS

The following information is specific to asylum adjudications. Information in each text box contains adjudication-specific procedures and guidelines related to the section from this Lesson Plan referenced in the subheading of the supplement text box.

SUPPLEMENTS

Asylum Adjudications Supplement – Introduction

8 CFR 208.1(b):

The Director of International Affairs shall also, in cooperation with the Department of State and other appropriate sources, compile and disseminate to asylum officers information concerning the persecution of persons in other countries on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, torture of persons in other countries, and other information relevant to asylum determinations, and shall maintain a documentation center with information on human rights conditions.

Asylum Adjudications Supplement – Pre-Interview Preparation

When conducting an interview in a USCIS office with readily available access to Intranet and internet sources

In preparation for conducting an asylum interview, you should review the general government structure, basic political situation, and human rights conditions in the country from which the applicant fled, or the country of last habitual residence. This can be done in a reasonable amount of time by referring to resources available on your desktop computer through the Intranet and the internet, as well as an in-house library. Materials gathered and prepared by RAIO Research, available through the Intranet and in each office's library, can assist in providing the necessary background information. You should develop and maintain an in-depth familiarity with a wide variety of sources so that you can consult the most relevant source in the shortest amount of time available for pre-interview research.

You should keep in mind that there are some useful sources that may be found only in the local office library. Maintaining familiarity with the contents of the local office library can enhance your range of useful sources.

If you are unfamiliar with a group to which the applicant belongs, a word search on the internet using a reliable search engine, such as ecoi.net, or of Intranet sources, such as the RAIO Library, may provide basic information that will enable you to ask informed questions at the interview. Bear in mind, however, that information found on the internet should be evaluated carefully for reliability. Information found on the internet or via other electronic sources, such as the Intranet or databases, may be out of date. In addition, neither the internet nor other electronic resources can contain information about every group in the world. The fact that a group is not found in the sources consulted does not mean that the group does not exist.

When conducting off-site interviews, prior to any circuit ride, you should review files or anticipated claims, when possible, to determine whether they contain claims involving a country or group with which you are unfamiliar. Because many off-site interview locations (such as detention facilities) will not be conducive to conducting country of origin research, you should prepare for these interviews while still in the Asylum Office, where information is accessible. It may be useful to conduct a search of electronic sources for events or groups relating to the claims, print the pertinent pages, and bring them to the off-site interview. Copies of the annual reports on specific countries done by various human rights and government organizations can be accessed electronically and downloaded to take to an off-site interview.

Asylum Adjudications Supplement – Citations

In the Form I-589 and Asylum Merits Interview context, COI must be cited in the written decision if it is relied upon in making the decision.

When you rely upon COI to directly contradict statements of fact put forward by an applicant, you must cite reliable sources. Generally, you should aim to cite more than one reliable source that speaks to the relevant timeframe.

One-Year Filing Deadline

No applicant is to be denied a full asylum interview based solely on one-year filing deadline issues. A full and thorough asylum interview includes a pre-interview check of country conditions and post-interview research where necessary. *See also* Affirmative Asylum Procedures Manual (AAPM), Section III.P.2. b., November 2007.

Generally, you must consult country conditions information relevant to the applicant's claim to determine whether there are changed country conditions

material to the applicant's eligibility for asylum. While the burden of proof is on the applicant to show that there are changed circumstances, many applicants may not be able to articulate those circumstances. Remember that it is your affirmative duty "to elicit all relevant and useful information bearing on the applicant's eligibility for asylum."

Your decision must be supported by the written assessment of the case. Because changed conditions may provide an exception to the one-year filing deadline, all referrals on the basis of the one-year filing deadline must address pertinent country conditions and must analyze whether there has been any change in country conditions. When an applicant has established an exception to the one-year filing deadline, you must include a brief explanation of how the applicant overcame the one-year filing deadline. If the exception(s) established are based on country conditions, country reports must be cited.¹⁶

Previous Denial of Asylum by EOIR

In cases involving a previous denial of asylum by EOIR, where the established changed circumstances relate to country conditions, you must cite to country conditions reports to support the finding. See AAPM, Section III.P.3.f.i.

See also Memorandum dated January 4, 2002: [*Procedures for Implementing the One-Year Filing Deadline and Processing Cases Previously Denied by EOIR*](#), issued by Joe Langlois, Director, Asylum Division.

Summarize

It is not necessary to quote extensively from country of origin reports. A summary of the relevant information relied upon may suffice.

Example

Reliable reports indicate that the Egyptian government arrested, detained, and abused internet bloggers. See United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Egypt*, 11 March 2008, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/47d92c5216e.html> [accessed 22 January 2025].

Note: When using sources in electronic form, where cutting and pasting is available, it may be quicker to pick an appropriate selection and quote it directly.

Ensure that information is current or chronologically relevant

Information relied upon should be current or chronologically relevant to the events relayed by the applicant. When citing to an annual human rights report, reference

¹⁶ See Asylum Lesson Plan, [*One-Year Filing Deadline*](#).

to the latest available edition is generally preferable, unless reference to an earlier version is needed to substantiate past persecution or a specific historical incident.

Asylum Adjudications Supplement – RAIO Research

The following guidance on contacting the RAIO Research is taken from the Asylum Affirmative Procedures Manual, Section II. M. 2, The Country of Origin (COI) Research Section:

AOs should discuss with their SAOs the submission of queries to RAIO Research, as case processing may be delayed in order to complete the research. In addition, AOs should copy their [Training Officers] on the submission of queries to the RAIO Research so that [Training Officers] are aware of research needs and questions in the office. Queries are best sent by email to RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov. RAIO Research will provide a response to the requestor and publish all query responses in the monthly News Summary Bulletin and on RAIO Research's SharePoint. Access to certain query responses may be limited to certain user groups if the query response contains sensitive information.

The Asylum Division's Affirmative Asylum Procedures Manual contains procedures for communication with RAIO Research that were last updated in September 2021. RAIO Research provides a brief video explaining the new procedures.

Asylum Adjudications Supplement – Becoming Familiar with the Types of Information Available

- Consult your office's library for hard copy reports when information is needed to verify events that occurred prior to the mid-1990s, as these reports are often not archived on the internet.
- Consult RAIO Research, when you are unable to find information on the internet or in your local library and the information is necessary to arrive at a decision on a case.