EU common guidelines on (Joint) Fact Finding Missions:

a practical tool to assist member states in organizing (joint) Fact Finding Missions

ECS working group on Fact Finding Mission guidelines
November 2010

Background to the guidelines

The Common European Union (EU) Guidelines for the processing of Fact Finding Missions (FFMs) have been developed by a core working group, formed by representatives of Country of Origin Information units working for the following immigration authorities:

- CEDOCA, Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (Belgium (Chair)
- Landinfo – Norway (co-chair)
- Staatendokumentation, Federal Office for Asylum (BAA) – Austria
- Swedish Migration Board – Sweden
- COI-service, UK Border Agency, Home Office- United Kingdom

The reference group was chaired by the Danish Immigration Service and was composed of representatives from UNHCR, ACCORD, the European Commission, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland and Switzerland

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Introduction

As part of the Hague Programme of $4^{th}/5^{th}$ November 2004, the European Council called for the establishment of appropriate structures involving national Asylum Authorities with a view to enhance practical cooperation between European Member States.

Much progress in the field of Country of Origin Information (COI) has already been made in recent years towards the establishment of a Common European Asylum System.

A substantial number of practical cooperation measures have been undertaken, most notably the adoption of a common approach to undertaking research on and presenting COI information on countries of origin and the establishment of the European Country of Origin Sponsorship (ECS).

In April 2007, the "Common EU guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information" were adopted by Member States and are widely used by respective authorities to gather COI. In the same year the European Country of Origin Sponsorship project (ECS) was created, financed by the European Refugee Fund (ERF). The main objective of the ECS is to further develop and maintain an information network that allows all European countries to benefit from greater sharing of COI. With the financial support of the ERF, the ECS has made considerable progress in facilitating increased practical cooperation between Member States.

One of the key goals the ECS has set out to achieve is "promoting, improving and maintaining a high level of COI-quality by developing and using a standardised approach for jointly compiling, assessing and applying COI".

To help reach this goal the ECS wants a further standardisation of COI working methods by drawing up guidelines to support Member States which conduct Fact Finding Missions (FFMs). These guidelines are meant to be a practical tool for preparing and conducting a FFM by Member States (individually or jointly), and should provide assistance to both experienced and less experienced Member States in gathering COI through a FFM.

At the second ECS conference in Lubljana in November 2009 a Working Group (WG) was mandated to draft guidelines on FFMs. The WG consisted of five Member States (Austria, Belgium, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom), with Belgium appointed as chair and Norway vice-chair.

At the same time a Reference Group (RG) composed of ACCORD, European Commission, UNHCR, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland and presided by Denmark was established in order to review the drafts and to provide comments to the WG.

The guidelines are split into two sections: methodology and practicalities. The section on methodology deals with the backbone of any FFM: motivation, Terms of Reference (ToR) (ToR) and choice of Sources, the Interview process, documenting interviews and writing a FFM Report. The section looking at practicalities covers the logistics or day-to-day considerations to be addressed in order to achieve a successful FFM. This includes time frame, team structure, security issues, Code of Conduct, the role of the Back Office and communication.

Each topic has been conceived as a discrete subject and is separated into 'before the mission', 'during the mission' and 'after the mission'. This was done to enable the reader to gain an insight on particular issues without having to read the entire document. It also allows each topic to be adapted to incorporate national needs or protocols. An additional fourth section in each topic highlights any specific issues related to joint FFMs.

All Member States are encouraged to use the guidelines and to regard it as a "living document" that will evolve in the years to come, which will improve with greater experience of FFMs and as best practice is developed by Member States.

The European Commission announced in its Policy Plan on Asylum, adopted in June 2008, its intention to develop the Common European Asylum System, in particular by establishing a European Asylum Support Office (EASO). EASO will be established to strengthen and develop cooperation and should take due account of these measures and the lessons learnt therein.

With this in mind, the ECS project would like to hand over the "Common EU guidelines on Fact Finding Missions" to EASO with the hope that they will indeed be kept as a "living" document.

I. Methodology

1. Motivation

Description of the theme

All research carried out by Country of Origin Information units is driven by a demand for information which is not currently available to decision makers, and Fact Finding Missions (FFMs) are no exception. As FFMs are costly - directly in the financial cost of the mission but also indirectly because of time spent before and after a mission in preparation and writing up any findings - and time-consuming, their costs have to be compared to their expected benefits, taking into consideration other possible ways of obtaining the necessary information.

1.1. Before the mission

1.1.1. Establishing the need for a FFM

The information needs of the Decision Making Authorities form the basis of any COI Unit's work. Accordingly, these authorities must identify their needs for information on relevant conditions in different countries/regions which are a source of migrants – both Asylum seekers and others. After these information needs have been identified, the COI Researcher considers different ways of gathering the needed information – FFMs are not the only means to reach this goal. Other options may be:

- Research material published on the internet
- Requesting assistance from a Foreign Service Mission
- Contacting colleagues abroad, directly or through Country of Origin Information cooperation networks like ECS, Eurasil/EASO, Inter Governmental Conference, etc
- Contacting UN agencies, Non Government Organisations (NGO), International NGOs, IGOs, research institutes, think-tanks, academics, etc

Even though a lot of information may be found through the above means, a FFM can achieve the following:

- Access to Sources and/or information that is difficult to access from abroad
- Direct access to Primary Sources
- and unfiltered information

- Verify and clarify available information which may be limited, anecdotal or conflicting

Other factors to take into consideration include:

- The size of the Caseload
- A need to assess primary sources
- The complex nature of asylum claims
- Competing priorities – apart from the actual costs of the FFM itself, country experts will be tied up with preparations ahead of the FFM and with the dissemination of the gathered information for a period afterwards

1.1.2. Additional benefits from FFMs

FFMs have additional benefits apart from being a useful way to gather Country of Origin Information:

- FFMs enable COI Researchers to establish, maintain, expand and evaluate networks of local Sources for future use.
- FFMs provide COI researchers with invaluable field experience and expand their general knowledge of local conditions.
- Sourced and public FFM Reports add credibility to the information provided by COI Units through validation by sources in the field.
- Being in the field makes COI researchers more aware of local developments and issues that may have an impact on future migration patterns. Experts can also gather information that may answer future questions from the Decision Making Authorities.

1.2. During the mission

During the mission a proactive and open-minded approach will enable COI Researchers to learn more about issues and political developments locally that may assist them in meeting future information needs of decision making authorities.

1.3. After the mission

After any FFM is the evaluation phase. The most important question is whether the FFM achieved its stated objectives through gathering the information needed but it is also important to consider if the FFM provided other useful benefits. These aspects are important both when considering future FFMs in principle, and when considering specific future FFMs to the same country/region.

See also: II.6.3 Communication After the mission

1.4. Joint FFMs

Once a decision to conduct a FFM has been taken, consideration could be given to collaborate with others – either colleagues from other COI Units, or representatives from external organisations. There will be many different reasons for conducting a joint FFM, these include:

- greater access to Sources, by sharing contacts and information
- strengthening ties with the other participants that could provide a basis for other forms of collaboration in the future
- developing an understanding between COI Researchers with regard to the conditions colleagues work under abroad
- improving standards across Member States, through sharing experiences, expertise and knowledge of FFMs

The decision to include external specialized non-government organizations such as national NGO, UNHCR or ACCORD, in addition to the above potential benefits of a joint mission, may also enhance the impartiality and credibility of the FFM.

2. Terms of Reference (ToR) and choice of sources

Description of the theme

Which institutions should be consulted ahead of a Fact Finding Mission (FFM) in order to identify relevant topics and questions to be addressed during the mission? What Sources could be consulted on a FFM to secure sufficient cross-checking of information? Who can provide good suggestions for sources? The Terms of Reference (ToR) form the basis or backbone of any FFM.

2.1. Before the mission

2.1.1. Establishing the Terms of Reference

A preliminary list of topics will already have been identified before the decision to go on a FFM is made, but during preparations ahead of the FFM this list will need to be expanded upon and developed into a Terms of Reference (ToR) document.

The ToR contains the general topics as well as subtopics that should be addressed during the FFM, and will be developed in cooperation with the Decision Making Authorities and other stakeholders. The nature of this consultation phase will vary between Member States, for example some countries are obliged to involve other institutions outside of the decision making authority when consulting on a ToR.

Regardless of national variations, as a general principle the ToR forms the backbone of any FFM and needs to be agreed upon and approved by all stakeholders before the FFM is undertaken.

See also: III.1 Example of ToR and I.3.1.4 Interview Guide

Once the decision has been made to arrange a FFM to a particular country, area or region, it is possible that new ideas for topics to be included in the ToR may arise. When considering these suggestions, the responsible COI Researchers must determine whether the topics are already adequately addressed in existing source material or to include them in the ToR.

During this process, the responsible COI researchers should identify topics not currently addressed by the Decision Making Authorities, but which may still be relevant. This could include for example, topics which have proven difficult to research in the past or topics which have not yet led to a demand for COI but may become important in the future. An understanding of current events and political developments in the country where FFM is to be undertaken may assist in this Assessment. Additionally, it may be helpful to consult with COI colleagues abroad to identify issues which might be of interest and worth investigating based on their experiences of topics arising in their Caseload.

COI Researchers should be aware that some topics of interest may be very sensitive in a local context and that authorities of the country to be visited may react negatively to questions on these issues. This may lead to restrictions on the FFM Delegation, even a rejection of the delegation's visa applications. Important topics which are sensitive to the authorities of the visit should not however be left out of the ToR as to do so could undermine the purpose of the mission itself.

It should be noted that whilst it is not necessary to reveal all the details of the ToR to the authorities of the country to be visited or to forward the ToR document to them, the delegation should be transparent about the purpose of the visit. Should certain topics be too sensitive or too dangerous to enquire about in the country itself other options will need to be considered, such as undertaking investigations in a neighbouring country.

See also: II.3.1.3 Applying for a visa and communicating with the authorities of the Country of Origin

2.1.2. Identifying potential sources

Potential Sources come in many shapes and it is important to be imaginative when working out a list of possible sources. They may include the following, but these suggestions are far from exhaustive and not given in any particular order:

- Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), International Non Governmental Organisations (INGOs)
- UN agencies
- Foreign Service Mission representatives (own country and/or those of countries with close ties)
- Local government representatives and authorities
- Political parties
- Academics
- Lawyers/local bar councils
- Research institutes or 'think tanks',
- Experienced news reporters and journalists,
- Community leaders, religious authorities, representatives of ethnic minorities,
- Local sources you have past experience in working with.

It may also be useful to consult with potential sources not only to be a source of COI for your FFM but also in order to open up new contacts or obtain suggestions on who may be useful for your FFM Delegation to meet. Be imaginative when requesting suggestions for sources.

2.1.3. Deciding between potential sources

It is important to try to secure a variety of Sources in order to be able to cross check information. Try to avoid sources with too similar agendas, standpoints, backgrounds and interests, which can be a challenge – especially when using the 'Snowballing'. It is generally useful to consult at least three different sources that are independent of each other on each main topic of the ToR.

See also: I.3.2.4 Validating information during interview

Make a priority of Sources you expect to provide a different perspective from the ones you have access to from home, as well as sources with first hand experience. Avoid a 'top heavy' source list, i,e, individuals who have a senior position in organisations. It is often a good idea to try to focus on mid-level staff and others who actually work in the field where possible. Note that expatriate sources may have limited experience, despite senior positions – seniority does not automatically equate to experience or understanding of the key topics in your ToR. Equally, make sure that the level of staff interviewed actually has the mandate to speak and to represent the contacted organisation.

Listen to advice from experienced contacts about the choice of sources. Keep in mind that sometimes it may be advisable to meet certain sources for reasons other than their relevance to the focus issues. Meeting them may facilitate the FFM by, for example, fulfilling diplomatic protocol or creating general goodwill for the delegation.

See also: II.3 Security issues

2.1.4. Choice of locations

After the ToR has been established and a 'wish-list' of potential Sources has been identified, it should be considered which places to visit during the FFM. Often many sources will be in the capital of the country to be visited, but it may also be relevant to include other destinations in the country as well. Sometimes it may be appropriate to travel outside of the country of interest for the FFM – important diaspora communities may have settled outside the country and other important sources may be based outside the actual focus country/area. Note that including several locations in the itinerary will both add to the cost of the FFM and make it more time-consuming.

2.1.5. Setting up FFM meetings

It is unusual to delay setting up meetings until the FFM Delegation arrives in the field, but this can happen. Usually, however meetings are set up ahead of the trip, either by the COI Researchers themselves making direct contact with a source, or through a third party, for example the Foreign Service Mission of a Member State or locally engaged actors willing to help, such as UNCHR or Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Providing Sources with the ToR (or relevant parts of it) when contacting them initially is often very useful, as is providing information about how the Interview will be conducted and documented during the mission and how the resulting COI obtained will be used in a FFM Report. Consideration at this stage should therefore also be given to how a source will be referred to in a report and whether there will be need to anonymise a source: the personal security of a source should be paramount.

See also: I.3 Interviewing; I.4 Documenting an interview; I.5 Writing reports and II.3 Security issues

During this phase of setting up the FFM problems can arise. It may become difficult to arrange meetings with the appropriate range of Sources necessary to adequately discuss all topics on the ToR. Additionally, problems can arise if there are a limited number of sources who are willing to be named in the FFM Report, or it becomes apparent that the authorities in the country to be visited will impose restrictions on access to certain sources. In some cases, this may force changes in the ToR, a delay in the mission or a further review of the identified potential sources and choice of location(s).

See also: I.4 Documenting an interview and I.5 Writing reports

2.2. During the mission

During the FFM it is important to continuously assess how the mission is proceeding and how useful your identified Sources have been in providing COI against your Terms of Reference (ToR). The sources interviewed may also have made good suggestions for other relevant sources to meet. If possible, the FFM schedule should be flexible in order to make ad hoc meetings during the mission.

FFM Delegations should also think ahead and be proactive: are events taking place in the country during the FFM which may generate future requests for information? If that is the case, collect relevant written material (press clippings, etc) and consider setting up meetings with relevant sources.

Be aware that all Sources have an agenda. Prepare by trying to assess ahead of the Interview what the sources' motivation for meeting might be.

See also: I.3 Interviewing

Additionally, try to develop a wider understanding of the Country of Origin – it can be useful for example to follow local news or read newspapers in order to identify which topics and issues are considered important locally. Furthermore, don't restrict yourself to information given verbally by Sources in meetings:

- Ask sources for relevant printed material and suggestions for other written source material that might be useful. Many civil society organisations produce a lot of useful written information, even though they have few resources to distribute this information over the internet or through other channels.
- Look for local bookstores, where you may find relevant source material only published locally, or which is hard to find elsewhere. This includes books, academic publications, maps, etc.

Check if there are local films or TV series available on DVD or video-CD with dialogue or subtitles in a language you understand. Documentaries are of interest but the output of local entertainment industries also often reflects topics of high interest in the community, which may be of direct relevance for Country of Origin Information.

2.3. After the mission

This phase will be about an evaluation of the preparations made for the FFM, addressing both the ToR and choice of Sources:

- Was the ToR to the point and relevant?
- Did it contain the appropriate level of detail?
- Was it necessary to make changes to the ToR during the mission?
- Did any restrictions on making changes to the ToR limit the usefulness of the FFM?
- Were new relevant topics identified during the mission that demands future focus?
- Were any of the topics in the ToR sensitive in a way that made it difficult to proceed with the FFM.

- Were the sources identified ahead of the FFM relevant, and were they able to provide the needed information?
- If not, could this have been remedied in some way, or was it due to circumstances beyond the control of the FFM Delegation?
- Did the delegation miss out on relevant sources, and can this be remedied on a future FFM?
- Did unexpected things happen that could happen again, and which should be considered when preparing for future FFMs?
- Was the safety of sources jeopardized by the FFM?

2.4. Joint FFMs

When cooperating with COI colleagues and other partners, coordination and dialogue is particularly important. Make sure all participants are aware of their respective obligations and responsibilities, preferably through a written memorandum of understanding ahead of the FFM to avoid misunderstandings.

A Terms of Reference (ToR) for a joint FFM should not be subject to changes during the FFM unless all parties agree.

Inform those you are cooperating with of any sorts of restrictions you are bound by and where you are unable to show flexibility.

3. Interviewing

Description of the theme

The Interview is used to gather information from respondents during a Fact Finding Mission (FFM). It is the preferred methodological approach because it allows the research team to gather a range of views, informed opinions and reports on particular events from a variety of Sources. It is an approach which encourages different perspectives to be documented and compared, from a range of sources on a common topic or subject.

3.1. Before the mission

3.1.1. Background research

Before any mission, appropriate background research will need to be carried out. The research team will be familiar with the country and specific subject matter of the Terms of Reference (ToR). The team should ideally also be aware of cross cultural differences, for example, different meanings attributed to words or ideas (such as gender, rights or violation) or differences in physical interaction (social greetings or eye contact). As a general rule the greater the team's country knowledge, the greater the likelihood of eliciting high quality COI through Interviews.

3.1.2. Interviewer

Consideration should be given to the relative skills and competencies required to be an effective Interviewer. As a basic standard, all members of the research team should be able to take up this role, although there should only ever be one lead interviewer to ensure proceedings are conducted smoothly and without disruption.

Whilst a technical or academic background may be preferable, as a minimum an interviewer must have an interest and respect for people as individuals, an ability to show understanding and empathy for those they interview and, perhaps crucially, a willingness to listen.

Due consideration should also be given to other variables such as gender, age, race, cultural issues and language or accents which may have a bearing on how a respondent inter-relates with the interviewer. Such considerations may be outside accepted Western views on diversity and equality, but it is nonetheless important to bear in mind that the interview involves developing an open and, if possible, candid working relationship between Interviewer and respondent, consequently such factors may have a crucial bearing on the outcome of any Interview.

It is also worth keeping in mind that the lead interviewer often cannot take notes at the same time as interviewing a source.

See also: I.4.1.3 Assigning the role of a specialist and II.2.1.1 Team members

3.1.3. Semi-structured or unstructured interview

One of the key aspects to consider before any FFM is the Interview style that will be used by the research team. There are two broad methods:

i) a Semi-Structured approach, in which the Interviewer will have a list of questions or topics to be covered in a fairly structured and methodical way, which invariably will involve the use of a detailed Interview Guide.

ii) Alternatively, there is a more Unstructured approach, in which the interviewer may have only a brief set of prompts and ask far fewer questions; thus allowing the Sources to answer more freely and for a conversational style which allows the interview to develop naturally and go wherever discussions lead.

Both approaches have their merits and limitations and it may be the case that on the same FFM the different approaches will be used for different interviews. Whilst the FFM team should perhaps not dwell on this technical aspect too long, it is worth considering the relative advantages and disadvantages of each approach, which are listed under
III.2 Comparison between a semi-structured and unstructured interview

3.1.4. Interview Guide

Interview guides will often be drawn up prior to a mission, although should be thought of as a dynamic document that will change as the mission progresses, as new information is uncovered and fresh lines of enquiry are pursued. Interview guides may also vary between Interviews and be tailored to specific interviewees, much the same way as the interview style may differ between Unstructured and Semi-Structured.

As a minimum, an interview guide may comprise a series of written prompts based on the ToR of the mission. Often such a guide will be developed from a series of simple questions in the Interviewer's mind, such as “what do I need to know to gather information on this Terms of Reference (ToR)” or “what information should I gather in order to help assess the risk of persecution?“. Such questions may form and develop through conversations with colleagues, and through further background reading.

Whether an Interview Guide becomes a rigid set of questions will very much depend on the style of Interview being adopted. If a Semi-Structured approach is used, the interview guide will comprise a list of fairly specific questions. In such circumstances it is important that the formulation of these questions is not so specific that it ignores or closes off potential avenues of enquiry before the mission has even commenced. Such an approach could seriously undermine the validity of any findings.

It is also important to remember that any interview guide should be strictly based on the ToR of the mission, to ensure an interview does not pursue irrelevant lines of enquiry outside the mandate of the FFM team.

See also: III.7 Example of a Interview Guide for a Semi-Structured interview

3.1.5. Use of interpreters

In some circumstances Interviews will need to be conducted through an interpreter. In such circumstances due regard should be given to the impact that the presence of an interpreter may have on the respondent. In just the same way as the choice of the Interviewer may have a bearing on the outcome of an interview, so too will an interpreter influence the dynamics of an interview. Consequently due regard should be given to the same variables which may impact on the choice of interviewer, such as gender, age, race, cultural issues and language or accents.

In particular, if an interpreter is locally employed and shares common or differing characteristics with a respondent (for example ethnic, political, or cultural), consideration should be given as to whether this may influence or undermine the interview. For example if an interpreter is from an ethnic group commonly associated with human rights abuses which were perpetrated against the ethnic group of the respondent. Consequently it may be advisable to ‘clear’ or approve the choice of interpreter with a respondent prior to the interview.

As best practice, interpreters should be hired in cooperation with the local embassy or a UN organisation. Interpreters should also be briefed on the Code of Conduct to be observed by the FFM Delegation.

See also: II.4 Code of conduct

Additionally, the use of an interpreter may make the Interview process more stilted and slow, and it may be advisable to adopt a more formal, Semi-Structured interview approach in such circumstances.

3.1.6. Briefing potential Sources: interview process

As part of the consultation process with potential sources, the FFM Delegation should fully explain the proposed Interview process so sources are fully aware of what to expect. What is explained will depend upon what has been agreed with regard to the issues outlined above.

See also: I.2.1.5 Setting up FFM meetings

3.2. During the mission

3.2.1. Framing the mission to the respondent

Before an Interview commences, it is important that a general introduction is given to the respondent. The interview will probably be the first time the Interviewer and Sources have met. Consequently a good introduction will reassure the respondent, putting them at ease so they open up and provide useful information. Equally, the introduction should not be too prolonged or complex as this only wastes valuable time and may raise further concerns or questions by the respondent.

As a general guide, the introduction should explain who the delegation is made up of and why such a mission is necessary. As most FFMs will be conducted by representatives of immigration authorities this may raise concerns in some respondents who may be wary of giving any information which, in their eyes, could jeopardise the safety of Asylum applicants. Often such concerns can be addressed by explaining to them the impartiality of the FFM Delegation and that the FFM team does not have any Policy mandate or operational interest. Although obviously this becomes more difficult if the delegation itself is comprised of persons who have been drawn from parts of the business involved in the decision making process (for example asylum Case Workers). In any case impressing upon the Sources that the FFM is not an exercise in which to 'assist the return of Asylum applicants' but rather a genuine effort to obtain information to allow asylum claims to be properly considered against a Member State's international obligations should help reassure them.

During the introductory exchanges it is also a good time to swap business cards and it may also be useful to bring copies of FFM Report of previous missions conducted by the team or by colleagues. Additionally it may also be helpful to give a bit of background as to the experience of the team in the conduct of FFM and/or COI work more generally, all of which aims to reassure the respondent of the integrity of the mission team and its purpose.

The Interviewer should also be clear with the respondent about whether the FFM team will seek approval from the Sources of the notes taken of the Interview (*see also I.4 Documenting an interview*) and if any Analysis or conclusions will be made in the Report of the FFM. They should also clarify if the report will be publicly available and if so in what language it will be published.

See also: I.5 Writing reports

It is also an appropriate time for the interviewer to check how the source wishes to be attributed in the report of the FFM, and whether they would prefer to be anonymous, which may be something the respondent is anxious about. This should be done both at the beginning and end of the meeting to ensure it is clear how the source wishes to be attributed.

After any interview has concluded it is important time is spent reinforcing many of the points made in the introduction so that the respondent is clear what will happen next. It is also a time to be less formal, to expand on further plans for the mission and 'give a little of yourself', and thanking them for their time and effort.

See also I.4 Documenting an interview

3.2.2. Interview conduct and technique

The Interview is a dynamic interactive process, dependent on the interviewee feeling comfortable and at ease with the Interviewer. The interview environment should be one based on mutual co-operation, trust and respect.

Some common criteria in which the interviewer can achieve this are listed under:

See also III.3 Interview conduct and technique and III.6 Example of a protocol for interviews

3.2.3. Question phrasing and prompting

As a general rule the interviewer's questions should be brief and simple, the shorter the questions and the longer the Source's answers, the better. Whilst the formulation of questions may vary in light of the interview method employed (Unstructured or Semi-Structured), there are still some basic principles which underpin interview questions. Some of these are outlined in: *III.3 Question phrasing and prompting*.

However, as it is unlikely a source will be familiar with Asylum procedures. In some instances the Interviewer may have to explain in detail why certain questions are necessary.

3.2.4. Validating information during interview

It is important that a critical approach is used to test or validate information that the FFM Delegation is provided during the course of a mission. Testing such information will ensure the team obtain accurate, reliable and robust COI. Such a validating procedure may also provide a new depth of understanding to a particular situation or event.

Validating information can be particularly vital when dealing with a specific subject area and where there is a need for absolute clarity on a point. An issue which is unresolved during an Interview will remain unresolved upon publication of a Report of the FFM. Hence if something arises which seems at odds with the team's understanding of a particular topic or issue, it is essential that this is addressed through further questioning so that the viewpoint of the Sources is correctly documented.

A simple validating approach could also involve asking several different sources the same question about a given topic and then sharing with the respondent some of the differing viewpoints the team have documented. When doing this it is important to be tactful so as not to cause offence or misunderstanding, for example, 'that's very interesting, but some people have told us that... '. It is also crucial to bear in mind that the purpose here is not necessarily to challenge what someone has said, or to prove it as false, rather it is to open up a dialogue or debate to further the Interviewer understanding of the issues concerned, which may be more complex or dynamic then had first been thought.

However, if a source has not given the delegation consent to use information attributable to them publicly, or there are any security risks or other sensitivities on a given subject, the FFM team should exercise caution when referring to information mentioned by other sources. Instead only refer to such material in a very general way so as not to jeopardise the identity of a source.

Additionally, it may also be useful to ask a respondent to clarify or give more factual background to support a statement. This will often be the case where a declaratory statement or Policy position has been given on a particular topic. Requesting additional factual information to back up a statement or position will help give a clearer perspective or a rationale to what has been said, and may also remind the respondent why they have a particular viewpoint. In some instances it may challenge their own assumptions or bring out any potential bias or advocacy on the part of the respondent in a neutral, nonconfrontational way. Similarly by requesting documentary or statistical evidence, this may further help support statements of opinion or Policy. This is often referred to as the "show, don't tell approach".

If the research team has decided to apply the Principle of Approved Notes, this will also provide another opportunity to clarify topics or statements made by Sources, which, after consideration following the Interview, were unclear.

3.2.5. Impartiality

Just as important as validating information given during an interview, is ensuring the impartiality of the Interviewer. If the integrity of the interview process is undermined, so too will the integrity of the information obtained through the interview. Risks to the interview process include:

Sponsorship influence: There may be a perception that 'clients' for the research would prefer certain outcomes which may suit operational objectives. It is important that the research team guards against any tendency to 'please', and does not seek to shape or direct interviews in a manner designed to produce a pre-determined outcome. The interview process should remain an open, transparent information gathering exercise which fulfils the ToR, whether that suits the wider business objectives of the client, should not be a concern for the FFM team.

Team influence: In the same way it is also important that the FFM Delegation does not succumb to analysing findings during a mission or draw premature conclusions which could cloud the impartiality of the interviewer and how they conduct future interviews. Although the understanding of a FFM team will inevitably evolve through the course of a mission, it is important that every Interview applies the criteria set out above, and that it sticks to the ToR to ensure a level of consistency.

Sources influence: Through close personal interactions with their sources, Interviewer may be prone to co-optation by them, identifying so closely with their subjects that they do not maintain a professional distance. This may distract the interviewer from keeping the interview on track and allow the interview to drift from the mission's ToR to the respondent's own agenda. In this regard, having professional boundaries is a key requirement to maintaining impartiality.

3.2.6. Interview settings

Other factors to consider which may have a bearing on the outcome of an Interview include practicalities such as where the interview takes place (formal or informal environment), what the Interviewer wears (formal or casual clothes), who is present or what time of day it may occur.

In some instances, for a variety of reasons, the respondent may not wish to be seen talking with a FFM Delegation. In such circumstances it may be necessary to conduct an interview in a private location such as a hotel room.

3.2.7. Follow-up interviews

There are no hard or fast rules as to how long an Interview should last, which could be anything from 30 minutes to several hours. A FFM delegation will ordinarily only meet a source once during a mission and this meeting should provide adequate time to document all the information a source has to give. However it is important to ensure that your schedule has flexibility built into it for additional meetings.

Follow up interviews may be used for a variety of reasons such as: the respondent appears tired, irritated or unable to focus; the interview team needs to research an arising issue before meeting again with a source; or simply that the interview has run on for several hours and it is apparent the source still has much useful information to give. Whilst any follow-up interview will take up valuable mission time, this must be weighed against the merits in persevering with an interview, the overall value a source can give and whether such information could be obtained from other interviews that have been arranged during the mission.

A follow-up interview has the added benefit of allowing the respondent time to consider what has been said previously and add information which would not otherwise have come to light. Alternatively it may be more productive to contact a respondent in writing or by telephone.

3.2.8. Handling reluctant Sources

Given the sensitive subject matter often being investigated during a FFM it is possible that problems may arise in handling reluctant Sources, either because they are particularly vulnerable or prominent figures. When dealing with such sources it should always be remembered that the Interview is voluntary, and the FFM team should appreciate and respect any reluctance a respondent may have in discussing a given topic. If a source appears unwilling to divulge information, or becomes upset during the course of an interview, the Interviewer will need to be sympathetic and not ‘force the point’, taking a break or changing the course of an interview as required.

Nonetheless there are a few suggestions which may assist in encouraging a reluctant source to give information. At all times it should be remembered that the personal safety of the source is paramount. For further details refer to: *III.5 Techniques for handling reluctant sources.*

See also: II.3 Security issues

3.3. After the mission

After the mission, it is a common courtesy to follow up each Interview with a thank you note or email to the Sources for their time and effort. It may also be appropriate once the mission Report has been published to send a copy to either every respondent, or a selected group who were considered most useful. Where a report is publicly accessible via the internet, it may be more cost effective and easier to email the respondents about the publication and provide details of where it can be accessed.

Maintaining good stakeholder relations with respondents after any mission, aside from being a common courtesy, can also be useful to develop and maintain your COI Unit's contacts in the field.

3.4. Joint FFMs

Joint missions will require agreement of the Interview approach adopted by the fact finding team, whether Unstructured or Semi-Structured interviews are used and to what extent an Interview Guide is developed. As with missions conducted by an individual COI unit/country, this should be settled in advance of the mission.

Additional consideration will need to be given to the different skills, experience and subject knowledge which exists among delegates from each of the partners on mission. This may determine roles within the FFM team, and who is best suited to take up the responsibility of lead Interviewer. Where certain partners in the FFM Delegation have a particular interest or expertise in a specific area or aspect of the ToR, it may also be appropriate that they decide the interview approach, and lead on the design and execution for those related interviews.

Practicalities such as the language in which the interview will be conducted should also be agreed in advance.

4. Documenting an interview

Description of the theme

Crucial to the integrity and accuracy of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) process, which can often be overlooked, is how a FFM documents an Interview or records what has been said.

4.1. Before a mission

4.1.1. Note Taking versus Tape Recording

One of the first aspects to consider under this theme is what method will be applied in order to document or record information that is said during an interview. Tape Recording an interview will provide the most accurate and reliable record of what was said during a meeting, it will also allow the Interviewer to focus exclusively on the interview process itself (and not on taking notes) and additionally will save time during the mission as notes do not need to be 'written up'.

However the use of written notes offers a degree of informality over Tape Recording which, given the highly sensitive subjects often covered in a FFM, can inhibit what a respondent is willing to go 'on record' as saying. Additionally tape recording can present logistical problems in having to arrange for an interview to be transcribed. This can make comparing or verifying information given during a mission more difficult.

The following part of this guidance looks exclusively at note-taking.

In considering a Note Taking approach it is preferable that notes are made in the same language in which the interview was conducted and that a recognised 'working language' is agreed upon. This is to minimise the risk of information being distorted or misrepresented when translated into a written note form.

See also: *I.3.1.5 Use of interpreters*

Additionally due regard should be given to whether notes made during an Interview will be consolidated or 'written up' after the interview and, if so, whether these will be typed up or hand written.

See also: I.4.2.3 Writing up notes: best practice

4.1.2. Level of detail

Consideration will need to be given to the level of detail that will go into the Note Taking of each Interview. One option may be for near Verbatim Notes to be taken throughout the course of the interview. This approach may be labour intensive but it will ensure accuracy of information and a high degree of transparency, as such this approach would sit well within the principles of COI. Alternatively a FFM team may choose to limit what is recorded.

However there is a risk that the more 'selective' the documentation process becomes, the less accurate the interview notes will be, increasing the risk that the final record of the meeting will fail to give a full account of what was said. Worse still, a more 'selective' note-taking approach could reflect what the FFM team judged to be most important as opposed to what was actually said or become a distorted representation of what the team thought had been said. In taking a selective approach there is the possibility that the notes of an interview may become a 'subjective recollection' of what the Interviewer found interesting or useful, as opposed to an accurate record of what a respondent actually said. This may ultimately damage the credibility of a Report of the FFM.

However in some circumstances it may be more suitable to take only brief notes. For example, some Sources may object to having their every word recorded or, more practically, it may not be possible to take detailed notes due to the environment in which the interview is being conducted.

Whether detailed notes are being taken throughout interviews or not, it is advisable to record 'word for word' what a source has said on those specific areas or issues which are key to your Terms of Reference (ToR). This is to ensure transparency of information and avoid any ambiguity on contentious matters.

4.1.3. Assigning the role of a specialist Note Taker

If a more comprehensive Note Taking method is preferred by the FFM Delegation, it will be useful to have a designated Note Taker role assigned to one of the delegates, in much the same way as you would have a designated Interviewer. The note taker will be someone who is proficient at minute-taking, and has a good grasp of the subject matter and country of the mission. *See also: II.2 Team structure*

Due to the importance of ensuring accurate notes are taken during an Interview, it may also be advisable that other members of the FFM delegation who attend an interview take notes of their own, including the lead Interviewer if possible.

It should also be noted that the team member assigned as Note Taker for one interview, may not necessarily perform the role for other interviews.

4.1.4. Writing up and approving interview notes

The FFM Delegation will also need to agree whether they will ‘write up’ hand written notes after each Interview and, if so, whether they will share and agree or ‘sign off’ these notes with a source, prior to publication in a Report of the FFM. Asking a source to approve interview notes ensures accuracy and transparency over what is attributed to each source. If the FFM delegation prefers not to seek approval or ‘sign off’ of notes in this way they may choose to adopt other methods for obtaining agreement from Sources. For example, allowing the respondent an opportunity to comment on the relevant sections or quotations from notes to be included in a report which are attributable to that source or only seeking approval from a source where there is disagreement within the FFM delegation over what was said.

However, the most transparent FFMs are those that have sought and obtained the approval for the interview notes from sources. Using approved notes will also give greater credibility to a FFM report as a source of COI than reports that use notes which have not been approved by sources, particularly if a mission is conducted by a research team with limited experience in carrying out original COI research.

4.1.5. Briefing potential Sources: documentation process

As part of the consultation process with potential Sources, the FFM Delegation should explain the documentation process to sources, including how the notes will be approved, if this approach is taken, and used. This part of the FFM methodology should also be repeated during the Interview for clarity. For further information on explaining how the interview will be documented to sources, see paragraph 4.2.1.

See also: Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information

Additionally, prior to the mission the delegation should clarify with agreed sources if they are willing to be named as a source in the FFM Report or if they want to be referred to anonymously. The greater the number of Sources prepared to be named the greater the transparency of the FFM report as a source of COI.

See also: I.2.1.5 Setting up FFM meetings; I.5 Writing reports and II.3 Security issues

4.1.6. Practicalities

A consideration should also be given to the working environment in which notes can be written up (if such a method is to be employed) and where practically the team would be able to do this. Often this can be done in the hotel or a local office if available. Additionally, thought should be given to the availability and access to any equipment that might be needed to record and write-up the notes, eg, computers, camera, access to a printer, USB stick to save notes, internet and fax access.

4.2. During the Mission

4.2.1. Explaining how the interview will be documented

At the start of the Interview, as part of the 'framing' process, it is advisable that the Interviewer spend some time explaining how the interview will be documented, even if this has already been done prior to the mission.

What is said will very much depend on what the FFM Delegation has agreed, with regard to the issues set out above. However it is important this is done, both to reassure the Sources and put them at ease, and so that practically they are aware of the fact-finding process and what will happen after the interview has finished. A few points to note are:

- If notes are to be approved by a source, this should be clearly stated both at the start and end of any interview so there is no confusion. If deadlines for the approval are foreseen this should be communicated to the respondent at this stage.
- Clarify how the source wishes to be referred to in any written notes and in the Report itself; reiterating to the source any potential risks which may arise from being named and offering again the option of being listed anonymously. This should be done both at the start and end of the interview to avoid any confusion. A few examples of how a source can be listed, from the most transparent to the least, are as follows:
- Individual and organisation named
- Organisation only
- Semi-anonymous reference e.g.: an international NGO in [the Country of Origin]
- Entirely anonymous reference eg: a source who did not wish to be named or source A

See also: I.5.1.8 Named v anonymous , I.3.2.1 Framing the mission to the respondent and Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information

4.2.2. Approving notes during a mission

If the Principle of Approved Notes is to be applied during a mission, any minor changes to the content or deletions made to notes sent for approval by a source should generally be respected. Invariably such changes can occur, not because drafts notes are inaccurate, but rather because of a source's reluctance on reflection to be attributed to certain, possibly contentious material.

However if a source revises entirely the content of notes or changing large portions of text, possibly to suit their own interests or agenda, this will undermine the integrity of the Interview itself. In such circumstances the research team will need to consider whether it can rely at all on information from that source, or may seek to add a remark in the Report to highlight any such discrepancies and allow the reader to draw their own conclusions.

Additionally it can often be the case that respondents may be difficult to get a hold of to approve notes, or too busy to review notes properly. It may be preferable therefore to agree a deadline with the source by when s/he should provide any feedback, after which the FFM team will assume the notes to have been 'approved'. Under such circumstances however, it is vitally important that every effort is made to confirm that a source has actually received the notes in the first place.

Once notes have been approved by the Sources they cannot be altered in any way. When using notes in a report, the COI Unit author may wish to explain or clarify certain points. Any such inclusions should be made within squared brackets eg, [.....] or footnotes, to avoid confusion.

4.2.3. Writing up notes: best practice

If it has been agreed by the FFM Delegation that notes will be written up or consolidated after an Interview, it is advisable that notes are written up as quickly as possible, while the interview is fresh in the team's minds.

Ideally this would occur the same day as the interview, and is commonly done in the evening when there is some 'down time' from interviews. At the very latest, interview notes should be written up two or three days after an interview has taken place.

Planning sufficient time to write up notes will require effective time management, dividing work appropriately among the team. The process through which notes are written up and agreed by a team will no doubt vary based on the working practices of the FFM Delegation. A common approach adopted is for one member of the team to produce a first draft (invariably this will be the Note Taker if one has been assigned), and for this to be circulated to other attendees to comment, discuss and make appropriate changes. A final version of the draft notes can then be agreed to confirm the content of what was said. Other points to consider when writing up notes include:

Language: simple, clear, unambiguous language should be used, avoiding jargon or unnecessary acronyms. It may also be advisable to write up notes in the style similar to that used in the Report of the FFM, particularly if notes are very detailed. This will avoid further extensive redrafting of material when it comes to bringing together notes to form a report.

Additionally, such an approach may be preferable where notes are to be approved by a source as it will reduce the likelihood that the respondent will have any further concerns once the Interview notes are reproduced in the report of the FFM.

Structure: It may be also advisable to restructure notes in some way, once the content has been agreed by the FFM team. This may be organised along thematic lines or under key topics as guided by the ToR.

Referencing: notes should include details of the interviewee (their name, role and organisation) together with the date of the meeting. Other information could include the time and place of the meeting and details of attendees (including who conducted the interview, who was assigned as note-taker (if applicable), language used and name of interpreter (if applicable)). In circumstances where the respondent has asked to remain anonymous, only limited details should be given.

4.3. After the mission

In the event it has been agreed to seek approval of notes before they can be used, the FFM team will need to ensure this has been done or that the agreed date to raise any concerns has passed.

Additionally, it may be necessary to contact respondents with a list of further questions as new information comes to light during the course of the mission, which in turn may raise further research questions. This may be necessary either after the mission, or during the mission, but following an Interview. These follow-up questions can be posed through an email or phone call. If the latter method is used, it is preferable that this is followed up in writing so there is a documentary record of what has been said.

4.4. Joint FFMs

Agreement of the method and practice of Note Taking will need to be clarified between partners in the FFM, including whether notes will be signed off by Sources and the language in which notes will be written.

During the mission it is advisable to conduct Interviews and to take notes in an agreed working language. It is also important that as far as possible the agreed working language is used when comparing meeting notes. [To reiterate, all notes relating to how an interview is recorded should be made in the agreed working language].

5. Writing reports

Description of the theme

This section will discuss factors to take into account when writing a Report of a Fact Finding Mission (FFM). Authors need to decide how they will construct a report, deciding upon matters like methodology, publishing, citation, structure, language and format. Reports will often have to be written in short time frame.

5.1. Before the Mission

The following points should be considered and agreed upon prior to the mission:

5.1.1. Author(s)

Consideration will need to be given to who in the FFM Delegation will write the Report after the field work. In the majority of cases this will be the country expert or experts who arranged and conducted the FFM. In some circumstances there may be a need to split responsibilities for writing sections of the report, for example along thematic lines or areas of expertise, for which individual delegates in the FFM team were the responsible lead.

5.1.2. Language

The chosen language of the Report should be decided in advance of the FFM. If the report is to be published externally, it should be considered whether to write the report in a commonly-used international language, such as English or French, or write the report in the language of FFM delegation and provide a translation into an international language. Using a widely-used international language will make the report accessible to a larger audience. It will also enhance the international image of the COI Unit and assist in the sharing of COI between Member States.

Sources should be informed of the language of the report in advance of the mission.

See also: I.2.1.5 Setting up FFM meetings and I.5.3.4 Publishing

5.1.3. Time Frame

Working to an agreed deadline when a Report will be completed and published, following completion of the field work, is essential to any successful FFM. To assist in this process a planning schedule or project plan should be developed before the mission.

Ideally the Report will be made available as soon as possible after the completion of the FFM but a realistic time frame will need to be drawn up which includes time taken for quality assurance and approval of the report, prior to publication.

It should also be noted that the findings of a FFM team cannot be predicted and it may be that the COI gathered during a mission is not sufficient to produce a FFM report against the Terms of Reference (ToR). In such circumstances it may be necessary to visit another location and/or consult with additional Sources. Consequently, planning schedules can be subject to change and COI Units will need to maintain a degree of flexibility in planning missions and producing reports.

5.1.4. Methodology / type of Report

Each Member State will produce and organise FFM reports to meet the needs of their key stakeholders. Variations will occur when reports are produced for different audiences. Whether the FFM report is an internal file note, or a published specific or general country report, the outline and structure should always aim to meet the needs of its target audience.

Additionally, reports will vary given the different types of subjects under investigation. For example, a FFM which examines a specific thematic issue, such as Forced Genital Mutilation issues or obligatory military service, will be structured and organised differently to those dealing with a broader set of issues, such as women’s rights or the military. Despite these variations, the FFM report should always be laid out in a manner which is consistent with the key elements of the Terms of Reference (ToR), to ensure transparency in the FFM process.

FFM Report will need to be in accordance with national regulations or requirements, nonetheless it is still possible to identify three different types of FFM report:

- **COI without Analysis or Policy:** The report contains information given during Interview/field research with no further analysis on the findings. The benefit of this is that it ensures maximum transparency and that there is no bias or misrepresentation of information, allowing the Decision Making Authorities to interpret the information as they wish. However, if findings are contradictory or unclear, the report will not interpret or explain.
- **COI and Analysis, no Policy:** There are two options. The report contains: i) only information collected during the FFM; or ii) information collected during the FFM with additional information from other existing COI

Sources, already available through other means than the FFM. This type of Report provides country information and also gives an analysis or 'Interpretation' of what the author considers relevant. This approach is less transparent and increases the risk of bias in a report, but may be of greater use to decision makers as it also gives a degree of interpretation to the COI.

If applying such a method it should be made clear to the reader what is 'interpretation' and what is COI from the interviewed Sources. Furthermore it should also be made clear how and why the author has come to a particular interpretation.

- **COI with Analysis and Policy:** COI, with analysis and policy would be considered the least transparent and most susceptible to bias. This type of report is not recommended for reasons of objectivity, impartiality and Independence of the COI Unit. There should always be a clear distinction between COI and policy.

5.1.5. Quotation rules and material used

In advance of the mission, consideration should be given to how a potential source will be referred to in a Report and whether they are prepared to be a named source. This should be identified and agreed in advance, although of course the personal security of the source should be given paramount importance.

However the greater the number of Sources prepared to be named the greater the transparency of the FFM report as a source of COI.

See also: I.2.1.5 Setting up FFM meetings

Consideration should be given to whether interview notes or other documentary material obtained during the mission will be included as an annex to the FFM report.

See also: Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information

The information obtained from the Interviews conducted during the mission will usually form the basis of the FFM Report, although additional, secondary sources may also be used. Secondary Sources may include documentary material gathered during the mission, for example published reports of Non-Government Organisations or local newspapers , as well as other secondary COI obtained by desk-based research, which can be used to provide context.

See also: I.4 Documenting an interview

5.1.6. Format and Structure

FFM Reports should be consistent with other publications and reports produced by the COI Unit/immigration authority and should maintain a consistent corporate identity. Agreement of the format and structure of the report in advance of the mission will allow for the report to be quickly produced after the mission.

Whilst the structure and format of a FFM report will vary between Member States, it should follow a common sense layout.

An example is provided: III.8 Example of an FFM report template

5.1.7. Publishing

Ideally, a Report of the mission should be published and placed in the public domain, although the decision to publish the report, needs to be in accordance with national rules and obligations.

However in a few, limited cases it may be necessary for certain parts of a report to be restricted and for that specific COI not to be released into the public domain. However this should be exceptional and limited.

Publishing the report will strengthen the credibility and transparency of the COI Unit and assist COI units of other Member States.

Moreover, the publication of the report will ensure 'equality of arms' between applicant and decision maker.

5.1.8. Named v anonymous Sources

As a general rule, Sources should be named (providing the source's name and organisation s/he represents) in order to give credibility and transparency to a FFM Report. However the personal security of the source should be of paramount. If it is not possible to quote a source by name, it may be possible to list only the organisation the person is representing. If a source is to be listed anonymously this can be done in various ways. For example "a doctor", "a lawyer", "a police officer", "a human rights defender", possibly providing some further indication of where they were located or the city they were interviewed in. Or it may be appropriate to refer to them as just an international NGO in [the Country of Origin]. Alternatively they could be listed as "a source who did not wish to be named" or even "source A".

See also: I.4.2.1 Explaining how the interview will be documented and Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information

It is important to keep a detailed record and audit trail of all contact with Sources and information obtained. This is good practice in producing robust and transparent COI and will ensure that if the Report is challenged, for example during a court hearing, the COI Unit can demonstrate the accuracy and integrity of the FFM process and information obtained.

5.2. During the mission

During the mission, the FFM Delegation should ensure the agreed method used to document or record the Interview is applied and that the information gathered is relevant to the Terms of Reference (ToR). This should allow the FFM report can be written up after the mission without delay and to ensure this is achieved the progress of the FFM should be reviewed continuously.

5.3. After the mission

5.3.1. Timing

It is essential, that the work on the final Report starts immediately after the operational part of the mission and that the report is published as soon as possible. Commencing work on the FFM report immediately will additionally have the advantage of keeping the context and understanding of the FFM foremost in the mind of the author.

5.3.2. Methodology and structure

The format and structure of the Report which was agreed in advance of the mission should be implemented unless there are specific reasons following the mission for this to be changed.

Similarly the type of report to be produced (COI without Analysis or Policy; COI and analysis, no policy; or COI with analysis and policy) should also be adhered to, unless there are clear reasons why this would be no longer suitable.

The FFM report should be laid out in a manner which is consistent with the key elements of the ToR and in a way which makes it as readable as possible for a broad audience.

In addition, because many readers simply want to pick out a particular issue, the use of an theme-structured approach may be appropriate. It should also be made clear within the disclaimer if the Report is a compilation of facts gathered during the mission only or if it includes Analysis of those facts.

See also: I.5.1.4 Methodology / type of ; I.5.1.5 Quotation rules and material used, 5.1.6 Format and Structure, and III.8 Example of an FFM report template

5.3.3. Proof reading and review

Before a Report is published it is best practice for all members of the FFM Delegation to have had the opportunity to review and amend the pre-publication drafts.

If the Principle of Approved Notes has been applied (*see: I.4 Documenting an interview*), it is not advisable to let interviewees review the report. However, time permitting if there is a Foreign Service Mission of the Member State in the country where the FFM was conducted it is advisable to give them sight of the report before publication so they can prepare any diplomatic response or press handling lines if necessary.

Finally, the agreed quality assurances standards applied in the national office should be applied to all FFM reports.

5.3.4. Publishing

As stated in the earlier sections of this section, it is recommended that the Report should be published unless there are reasons for not doing so. Usually an online version of the document would be the preferred method of publication, but a printed version of the report may also be produced (although this will incur additional costs).

Consideration should also be given to publishing a translation of the report into a commonly recognised international language.

See also: I.5.1.2 Language

5.4. Joint FFMs

Before a joint FFM, agreement will need to be sought on various technical matters related to the FFM Report, such as type of report and methodology, structure and formatting, and language. What is agreed will invariably be a compromise between the participants. Consideration will also need to be given to how the report will be written, over what time scale and who will be the main authors. If this is not agreed in advance, it could undermine any joint FFM at a later point.
All these agreements ideally will be written down and approved by the participating partners before leaving on a mission, which could be set out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

After the mission a joint FFM Report will require additional time alocated for quality assurance and approval. Translations may also be required. Consideration should also be given to the differing writing styles of the participating authors, which may cause further delays. However such difficulties can often be avoided with good planning and effective teamwork throughout the mission.

1. Time Frame

Description of the theme

Deciding when to carry out a Fact Finding Mission (FFM) and how much time to spend in the field; raising awareness of factors that influence how much time will be needed to reach the objectives of the FFM.

1.1. Before the mission

1.1.1. Timing of the FFM

Identify the appropriate time to conduct the FFM. Take into consideration that conducting a FFM in the middle of a rapidly changing situation may result in the findings becoming out-of-date before any written Report is finished. However, delaying a FFM can also have considerable consequences for the Decision Making Authorities, if they are obliged to put a large Caseload on hold while waiting for the FFM to be conducted.

Identify and avoid periods when it can be difficult to conduct the FFM, like national holidays (independence days, local new year celebrations, etc.), election campaigns/elections,[1] censuses, religious holidays (Christmas, Ramadan, Divali, Ashura, etc.), holiday periods important for expatriate staff (summer holidays, periods with large staff changes, etc.) and periods with difficult weather conditions (rainy season, cold winters.). If such periods are difficult to avoid, prepare for eventual challenges ahead of the trip if possible.

1.1.2. How much time is needed in the field?

The scope or range of topics included in the ToR will be the main influence on the amount of time needed during the mission to complete the field work. Several different focus topics involving different Sources will usually mean the FFM will be longer.

FFMs generally last from one to two weeks, or 5-10 working days. However, practicalities such as long distance travel to remote destinations will add travel time and may extend the mission.

[1] Unless the election or election campaign itself is of interest.

Although the duration of an Interview cannot be predicted, given the nature of the interview process (see also: *I.3.2.7 Follow-up interviews*), to assist in planning it is reasonable to schedule 1-2 hours per meeting. Given the time needed to travel between interviews, write-up notes, have meals and manage other mission logistics it is rarely realistic to set up more than 4 meetings per day. This may also vary based on the type of interview adopted (Semi-Structured or Unstructured).

See also: I.3 Interviewing and I.4 Documenting an interview

Conducting an FFM in a field location with long distance between meetings or heavy traffic may mean fewer meetings are possible per day. This challenge can to a certain extent be avoided if the FFM Delegation arranges a single central location to be used to conduct interviews, for example an office in the Foreign Service Mission. In considering such a proposal the personal security of the Sources needs to be considered.

See also: II.3 Security issues

Additionally it should be considered that some countries dislike FFM delegations travelling by land or unaccompanied by local officials and can even restrict domestic travel formally (for example visas may not allow travel outside specific locations). This can all add time onto a mission.

Local work habits also influence when people are available for meetings. Find out when the local working day begins and ends, and which days of the week are working days – are they the same for all Sources (for example western foreign service missions and local ministries may not have the same working week or working hours)?

Cultural and individual factors may also influence how long meetings take. Remember that things not directly related to the focus topics of the FFM also take time, and need to be respected. Aside from the introductions and other formalities before and after a scheduled Interview, the FFM delegation may need to attend formal dinners, diplomatic engagements or attend presentations from other stakeholders, all of which can take time. In some cultures, formalities will also take longer, so be prepared – when travelling to a place where you are not familiar with cultural codes - to consult people with local experience.

See also: I.3.2.1 Framing the mission to the respondent

Providing Sources with useful information ahead of the mission, about the delegation, its objectives, working methodology and Terms of Reference (ToR) will all save time during the mission (for further information on this see: *I.2.1.5 Setting up FFM meetings).*

The punctuality and reliability of different Sources may also vary, both individually and from country to country. Additionally sources may be unprepared to be flexible with the FFM Delegation, if for example they are running late for an interview. Some sources may show little flexibility in such matters, possibly to give an impression of their own self-importance, whereas others may be very flexible and accommodating, possibly because they are more concerned with having an opportunity to air their views.

All sources will have their own objectives or reasons for meeting, and may want to address issues of little interest to the FFM. Be prepared to compromise but try to keep to the agenda as politely as possible.

See also: I.2 Terms of Reference (ToR) and choice of sources

Using an interpreter during Interview can also become problematic and could mean you will need almost twice as much time to conduct the interview.

Various factors can impact on how long the mission may take, so the FFM team should have sufficient flexibility in their schedule to complete the field work.

1.2. During the mission

1.2.1. Be prepared for changes in the programme

Ask local contacts if the meeting schedule has enough flexibility to account for traffic, logistics or unexpected events like strikes, demonstrations, bad weather, etc. Adjust the program if possible. Have a ‘plan b’ for using time in a useful way when meetings are cancelled. Bring the Sources’ contact information to be able to notify them of changes in the programme, delays, etc.

1.2.2. Be prepared for unexpected events during meetings

The following are examples of unplanned for events that might occur. Some Sources, especially smaller NGOs or opposition parties, may attend an Interview with an unexpectedly large number of representatives, who may all expect to be heard in the meeting. The source may have misunderstood the role of the FFM Delegation and/or its objectives, even when they have been briefed thoroughly ahead of the meeting. Both NGOs and government representatives may assume that the FFM delegation, as representatives of their country, may be able secure for them financial assistance. Such unexpected events are a reality of the FFM so be prepared to deal with such eventualities.

1.3. After the mission

Evaluate the preparations made ahead of the FFM. Did the FFM team have sufficient or too much time to gather the information needed to fulfil the ToR? If the time was not sufficient, was the FFM Delegation able to remedy this, for example, by splitting up and conducting parallel meetings? Was the FFM conducted at an appropriate time of year? Were the preparations sufficient, or were important issues overlooked or forgotten that should be taken into consideration when preparing for future FFMs? Did unexpected things happen that could happen again, and which should be considered when preparing for future FFMs?

1.4. Joint FFMs

Coordinate well with travel partners, especially regarding preparations. Make sure to agree on a time frame early in the planning process.

2. Team structure

Description of the theme

The issue of the team structure has to be dealt with in advance of a mission. Matters of relevance are: skills, competences, country and/or topic knowledge and expertise; recruitment; and team-size. To guarantee the best possible teamwork, a clear understanding should be reached on leadership of the mission and responsibilities of each participant.

2.1. Before the mission

2.1.1. Team members

Deciding what the appropriate skills and competencies for the team members who will comprise the FFM Delegation will vary between Member States. However as a general guide the delegation should be made up of persons who meet all or most of the following general attributes:

- *Expertise:* on the Country of Origin and/or topics listed in the Terms of Reference (ToR): This is a crucial requirement and it would be difficult to justify a team member participating on an FFM who did not have this expertise.
- *Impartiality, objectivity and Independence*: delegates need to be able apply these fundamental tenets of research in order to produce robust and transparent COI. Therefore delegations should usually be composed of COI Researchers because of their background and training. Conversely it is less advisable to include individuals involved in the decision making process in the delegation because of the danger of bias. However, if they are included it is essential that they respect these core principles of COI research.
- *Communication and team work skills:* These skills are not only important vis-à-vis Sources but very much within the team to ensure harmony and good morale.
- *Writing skills (and time*!): As the FFM is a process reliant on documenting information, both through the interview process and in placing these findings in a FFM Report, it is important that the FFM delegation have effective writing skills.
- *Expertise in conducting FFMs and Interview techniques:* This is preferable, but it is also acknowledged that Member States may lack experience in

conducting FFMs. If a FFM Delegation does lack practical experience in interviewing, there should be appropriate time given to training and seeking ways of minimising the impact of inexperience by, for example, contacting Member States which have conducted FFMs for assistance or considering a joint FFM.

- *Empathy and sensitivity:* Interviewers need to be able to adjust to and have an awareness of the culture, environment and people of the Country of Origin.
- *Resistance to stress*: The ability of potential delegates to cope with the demands of a mission - third countries, a lot of work, potentially threatening environments.

The competencies of interviewer, Note Taker and author of the FFM Report are additionally covered in the respective methodology sections of these guidelines.

See also: I.3.1.2 Interviewer; I.4.1.3 Assigning the role of a specialist and I.5.1.1 Author(s).

Other points to consider in deciding the membership of the FFM include health (vaccinations; mental health – stress); nationality (political or technical complications); religion (security problems or complications); gender (for example many societies are patriarchial and male interviewees may be reluctant or less forthcoming if questioned by a female FFM delegate); and age (respect for age and its association with seniority is strong in many cultures, so it may not be appropriate, or less effective, for a young FFM delegate interviews an 'older' respondent).

2.1.2. Composition of FFM team

Each Member State will have different practices in recruiting its FFM team members. In many cases a FFM Delegation will be made up of staff taken exclusively from the COI Unit of the Member State and it will be this unit which will also take a lead on overseeing and managing the FFM.

However, there may be a need, for example due to a specific topic in the Terms of Reference (ToR), or a national practice or legal provision, for other non-COI unit staff to be included in a FFM delegation. Also some countries do not have a separate or dedicated COI unit. In such circumstances Decision Making Authorities may be included in the FFM delegation. In such cases there must be a clear distinction between COI and Policy so as to ensure that the participation of those with a decision making background would not infringe on the objectivity, impartiality and independency of the FFM. In these circumstances it is also important to explain and stress these standards of objectivity to Sources.

See also: I.3 Interviewing

Some mission may also include persons from other governmental or non-governmental bodies and organisations such as the UNHCR. The inclusion of 'external' personnel may be done to enhance the credibility of the mission. The need for such 'specialists' may arise from a specific topic in the ToR (for example a need for a language analyst, doctor, academic, or persons with a specialised knowledge drawn from I/NGOs).

In some cases, Foreign Service Mission personnel will accompany the delegation. The role of FSM personnel should be made clear to the delegation and the interviewees. The role of embassy staff can be explained to Sources at the start of an Interview.

2.1.3. Size of the delegation

The size of the FFM Delegation will be largely determined by the scope and range of topics that require investigation under the Terms of Reference (ToR). However other factors can also influence the size of the delegation, such as difficulties in travelling around the country of the FFM, which may require a larger delegation so that the team can split up and carry out interviews separately, or a short duration to the FFM, which again may require a the delegation to split up in order to complete the field work rapidly. In addition the personal safety of the delegation may also dictate the size of the team required. Some possible suggestions on the size of the fact finding delegation are as follows:

- Big team (> 4)

Advantages: comprehensive knowledge; space for specialists; possibility to split up; wide range of skill sets to choose from (lots of Note Taker and/or Interviewer).
Disadvantages: a large delegation attending an Interview could adversely affect the interview environment; difficult to move around together, plan and adapt to unforeseen events; additional management and logistical burden will require better managerial oversight of FFM team; higher costs which may not be matched by a proportionate increased output.

- Medium team (3-4)

Advantages: costs will be lower; possibility to split up if required; greater flexibility to plan and adapt to changes than a small team; good range of skill sets to choose from (for example several note takers, interviewers)

Disadvantages: limited scope to include specialists; costs may still be higher than smaller FFMs; and delegation size may still be too big for all delegates to attend every interview.

- Small team (< 3)

Advantages: maximum flexibility to plan and adapt to changes; low profile; low costs; easier to manage security; low logistical burden; Sources are likely to feel comfortable meeting with all delegates during an Interview.
Disadvantages: risk of illnesses or poor performance could seriously undermine the mission; possible lack of knowledge or expertise; inability to split up if required due to unforeseen circumstances.

It is recommended that a FFM Delegation should be no less than two persons, so that the role of Interviewer and Note Taker can be separated.

2.1.4. Team building, Leadership and Responsibilities

The smaller the team and more equally balanced its members in knowledge, experience and seniority, the less there will be a need for a rigid managerial structure within the FFM Delegation. However, where the range of skills, experience and competencies within the delegation is more varied, or the delegation itself is much bigger in number, the greater the need will be, for a more definite hierarchy or management chain.
In every case, even where there is a more informal management structure to the delegation, there should always be chosen a 'Head of Delegation' which in many cases will be a country expert who has planned and developed the methodology of the FFM. Factors concerning this decision could be: FFM experience; seniority and position; age; country expertise; gender or language skills. The head of delegation will be responsible for:

- Planning and logistics (*see III.8 Unexhaustive practical checklist*), identifying resource needs (staff, equipment)
- Security-related decisions and sharing of security-related issues
- Time-related decisions (postponements, additional interviews, etc.)
- Assignment of tasks (particularly if a prescriptive management approach is adopted; many of the duties should be clearly identified before the mission)
- Conduct and discipline (*see: II.4 Code of conduct*)
- Implementation, review and delivery against the Terms of Reference (ToR)
- Communication with Back Office
- Public relations with the local authorities

Some of these tasks may be delegated to team members or external personnel (for example the Foreign Service Mission), or may be delegated to members of the FFM team even during the mission.

See also: I.3 Interviewing

If there is a Protection Expert as part of the delegation, it should be made clear that they will take over the lead if an emergency arises.

One way in which the Head of Delegation may prepare and develop team building before the mission is through a pre-FFM workshop or meeting which would take place some weeks prior to the mission departing. This workshop should deal with points like: information sharing, sharing of responsibilities, leadership, ToR, outline of the Report, timeframe, selection of relevant Sources, interview techniques, etc.

2.2. During the mission

During the mission, team members of the FFM Delegation and the Head of Delegation should carry out the tasks which have been identified and allocated in advance. However, it may be necessary to rearrange responsibilities and roles during the mission. The head of delegation should also assess how team members are coping with the demands of the mission and adjust the work load or demand placed upon the team. Of course it should be remembered that the FFM itself will have a challenging schedule and so the opportunity to take 'time off' is likely to be limited. It is therefore important that team members are carefully selected to ensure they can cope with the demands of a FFM. Finally, it must be clear at the outset of the mission that the head of delegation as in-situ supervisor can suspend the work of team members if necessary (for example illness). S/he should also enforce the rules within the Code of Conduct.

See also: II.4 Code of conduct

2.3. After the mission

A debriefing session should take place in the country of the FFM after the Interview have been completed and/or back in the home country as soon as possible. In addition, the responsibilities concerning drafting of the FFM Report should be reviewed subject to what happened during the mission. Evaluation of the overall performance and the performance of the individual team members should also take place and of the selection process used to identify members of the team.

2.4. Joint FFMs

2.4.1. Before the mission

A joint FFM Delegation will be composed of persons representing the partner agencies participating in the mission. This will be persons from Asylum Authorities of other countries, usually Member States, or from external institutions such as the UNHCR. As is the case with a national FFM, a joint FFM will require a Head of Delegation. This should be agreed upon by the participants and normally will be the individual who has the greatest interest in the topics covered in the Terms of Reference (ToR). Alternatively, it might be the individual with the greatest experience in FFMs.

A joint FFM will comprise mainly or exclusively of country experts. Where the team members have a specialised area of expertise, this may assist in certain Interview, and it is appropriate to match the Interviewer and Sources to be interviewed accordingly.

See also: I.3 Interviewing

As a joint FFM will comprise mainly or exclusively of COI Researchers, consultation with Decision Making Authorities in advance should take place.

A joint FFM will, even more than a national FFM, require careful planning and prior agreement on a number of issues including deciding upon the working language, agreeing on the preferred methodology and clarifying how the findings of the FFM will be presented, for example in a publicly disclosed Report. Special focus should also be given to any entry visa restriction which may affect some of the participating partners in the joint FFM.

2.4.2. During the Mission

It is common sense to use the working language which was agreed in advance not only while working but also when off duty.

2.4.3. After the Mission

The difficulty of working with different languages may continue to be an obstacle while writing and reviewing the final Report. The team members should therefore always stick to the agreed working language throughout this process.

3. Security issues

Description of the theme

Assessment of feasibility, protection of delegation, protection of Sources and the role of the Back Office.

3.1. Before the mission

There are several security issues relevant for a FFM Delegation:

- Crime: robberies, scams, violent crime, kidnapping
- Transport: vehicle safety, traffic accidents, airline security
- Terrorism and political violence

The personal protection of the Sources prepared to meet with the FFM delegation, will also be a major issue to consider before the mission. Assessment of such risks will allow the delegation to determine whether a mission is feasible: the personal security of sources should be paramount.

See also: I.2 Terms of Reference (ToR) and choice of sources and II.3.2.6 The security of Sources

3.1.1. Assessing the situation in the focus country / area

To do this, collect available travel advice from different sources. Consult with knowledgeable sources: Foreign Service Mission, the police and/or army intelligence of the Member State, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) etc. Check whether your foreign service mission or UN agencies in the Country of Origin and other relevant sources have classified the travel area as ‘high risk’.

Consideration should also be given to whether the delegation should travel on a diplomatic passport and if it would make travel safer and easier. Travelling on service/official passports as government representatives is generally preferable when undertaking a FFM to travelling on a private passport.

3.1.2. Awareness building in the delegation

Briefing the FFM Delegation on relevant crime, traffic and terrorism issues should be carried out before the mission, usually by the Head of Delegation. The point of such a briefing should not be to scare participants but to make them aware of the possible risks involved in travelling to the area in question. A false sense of security will be a problem in the event that difficulties do arise. Delegates should also make family and 'significant others' at home aware of any risks.

3.1.3. Applying for a visa and communicating with the authorities of the Country of Origin

When applying for an entry visa the FFM Delegation should provide factual information about the purpose of the visit. It is essential that the delegation does not misrepresent the nature of the visit. The level of detail provided will vary from country to country.

See also: I.2.1.1 Establishing the Terms of Reference

3.2. During the mission

3.2.1. General precautions

It is advisable to keep your Foreign Service Mission, Back Office and family/'significant others' at home informed of important changes in the itinerary. Leave a copy of your travel document at the FSM and take general precautions as briefed.

Remember that you are on an official mission, that you represent your country and therefore should behave accordingly.

Be cautious when taking photographs – many things may be considered sensitive and could be illegal to photograph (bridges, airports, police officers, armed forces, etc.). People may also object to being photographed for a number of different reasons (privacy, sensitivity, cultural and religious issues).

If a member of the delegation doesn't feel safe in a certain situation, such matters should be dealt with accordingly by the Head of Delegation; these team members should not be compelled to continue with the FFM, or that aspect of it.

3.2.2. Precautions against crime

A common sense approach should be taken to avoid becoming a victim of crime. The situation will vary from country to country but a few general observations include: try not to stand out more than necessary - dress appropriately and discretely; do not flash valuables more than absolutely necessary; ask Foreign Service Mission staff for help with storing valuables if possible, otherwise use hotel safes; split up money in different locations, and be careful when using ATMs or exchanging money; know who to contact in case of crime (for example Foreign Service Mission or local police); keep valuables in carry-on luggage while travelling; avoid higher risk areas, nightlife and becoming intoxicated.

3.2.3. Travel and transport precautions

When travelling around a Country of Origin, the FFM Delegation should practice ‘hub’ security at airports, train stations, bus terminals or any location where there is a large gathering: make sure you know where exits, security guards and secure areas are located. When ‘checking in’ is required, do this early to avoid any unnecessary problems. When travelling around the delegation should be on guard – be suspicious but do not act suspiciously, beware of ‘helpers’ who do not carry identification, etc, and if incidents do happen move away safely.

When travelling on passenger transport, for example flights, trains, buses or hired cars, check the safety record of the operator. Do not use airlines with bad security records and avoid travelling in hazardous weather conditions if possible.

3.2.4. Hotel security

Use your work address when registering. At arrival and departure, exit transport as near the entrance as possible, go straight in and keep an eye on luggage. Beware of offers of assistance from people who do not carry identification. When checking in to hotels try to avoid leaving your passport at reception if possible and if required to submit it for security checks retrieve it as soon as possible. Request rooms on lower floors (in case of fire) and away from lifts/stairs (crime precautions). Make sure you know emergency procedures, fire exits, routes, equipment.

During the stay, keep the room key with you, if possible. Beware of unexpected visitors to your room, verify employees and their uniforms. Be prepared for emergencies, have essentials and valuables ready. Get away from the area in an emergency and have relevant contact information ready.

3.2.5. Espionage and data security

When operating in the country of the FFM the FFM Delegation should be aware that phones, mobile phones, hotel rooms and meeting rooms may be listened in to by the intelligence services of the country. To minimise the risks associated with this, delegates should avoid sensitive topics rather than avoiding those places that may be ‘bugged’. Also keep in mind that Sources may be questioned and asked by the security services in the country about the work of delegation members.

See also: I.3.2.6 The security of Sources

When communicating information the FFM Delegation should make sure that their information technology (IT) (i.e. computers, etc) equipment and communication means (mobile phones and e-mail) comply with the appropriate security standards of the Member State. This could include password-protection, biometrical protection and encryption.

In some circumstances it may also be advisable to use a local mobile phone and SIM-card for local communications. Such a device may cost less to run and may also not be subject to being 'wiretapped' or 'scrambled'.

The delegation should be aware of general security risks and act appropriately. Some suggestions include: make sure you leave notes, laptop computers and other devices containing possibly sensitive information out of view and access to non-authorised persons; beware of being 'targeted', for example encounters with people saying they wish to practice languages, learn more about you/your country/employment/migrating to your country, buy you a drink, talk politics or religion; avoid new non-work related relationships and 'pillow talk' and beware that you may be followed in the country and might be necessary to avoid moving in any fixed patterns.

3.2.6. The security of Sources

The personal security of the Sources should be paramount iand under no circumstances should their personal safety be jeopardised. To mitigate risks to source security the delegation should try to be flexible and meet sources in places where they are less conspicuous and attract less attention. When there is good reason to believe that the security of a source may be at real risk, the meeting should be cancelled.

When documenting the Interview (and subsequently writing the FFM Report) consideration should also be given to whether a source should be referred to anonymously.

See also: I.4 Documenting an interview and I.5 Writing reports for information relating to how a source should be referred to in written material.

3.2.7. Arrest and detention

To avoid being arrested and detained the FFM Delegation should obey the laws of the country of the mission. Do not give anyone a pretext or justification for arresting you or holding you back. If you are detained by the authorities, stay calm and do not over-react. As a priority ask to speak with your Foreign Service Mission and request to speak with legal representation and an interpreter if necessary. Have relevant contact details with you (but not family details).

Additionally, the FFM Delegation should be aware of the levels of corruption within the country of the mission and that arrest and detention by the security services may have criminal motives.

3.3. After the mission

The FFM delegation should evaluate how security-related issues were handled during the mission. Any specific incidents or occurrences should be examined and lessons learnt identified.

See also: II.6.3.4 Internal meetings

3.4. Joint FFMs

Conducting a joint FFM may raise additional security concerns to a national mission, for example the delegation may be larger, more visible and therefore more vulnerable. Additionally it should be kept in mind that individuals representing different countries and organisations may be viewed differently by persons in the country of the mission which could raise further security issues.

4. Code of conduct

Description of the theme

There are basic rules of conduct when going on a mission: FFM Delegations are representing the authorities of the Member State and must act professionally at all times.

4.1. Before the Mission

The FFM delegation should spend time discussing matters of ethics, behaviour and conduct before the mission and agree upon some basic rules which can be compiled into a "Code of Conduct". This may include a list of cultural 'dos and don'ts'.

It should also be considered how the code of conduct could be elaborated upon – for example, should the code be made more specific to cover each person or role in the team and should the code of conduct be signed by team members to certify they have read and understood the code?

Consideration should be given in advance who will be required to abide by the code of conduct – delegates only or also to drivers, interpreters (with additional prior briefing on terminology and on how to behave professionally) and Protection Expert?

During the recruitment for the FFM delegation consideration should also be given to potential team members awareness and understanding of appropriate behaviour in meeting and interviewing Sources with different national and cultural backgrounds. This should include:

- *In depth knowledge* of the Country of Origin and topics discussed, appearing as an elementary courtesy towards the interviewee
- *Discretion*: never revealing information given off the record, keeping personal details confidential
- A high degree of *sensitivity* to gender-related issues, cross-cultural understanding and human rights generally
- *Diplomacy*: double talk with authorities, ability to politely refuse personal invitations
- *Impartiality / objectivity / Independence* (not subject to policy pressure): why not ask the Foreign Service Mission opinion on "personal" meetings? Beware of manipulation of the Interview by politicians for popularity or electoral aims. Do not express opinions in public that might cast doubt on

impartiality and objectivity. Impartiality connotes absence of bias, actual or perceived.

- *Integrity*: a member of the FFM Delegation should avoid involvement in any activity that is incompatible with his/her duties and responsibilities and that might call into question his/her capacity to perform those duties and responsibilities (use of alcohol and/or drugs, nightlife, etc). In that respect, the delegation is considered on duty at all times.
- *Honesty*

See also: II.2.1.1 Team members

4.2. During the mission

Professional conduct, in line with the agreed Code of Conduct, will need to be observed by delegates throughout the duration of the mission. Points to bear in mind include:

- *Appropriate dress code* – respecting both local cultural conventions and the particular circumstances
- *Accuracy* when introducing the delegation – its identity and objectives
- *Compliance with the law*, both of the Member State and the country of the mission
- *Be respectful* when taking photographs, seeking agreement from relevant parties in advance and similarly with regard to possible publication
- *Appropriate behavior* when conducting day-to-day business (for example not exchanging currency illegally outside the officially recognized facilities)
- Avoidance of real or apparent *conflict of interest*
- Safety and security
- Be mindful that the FFM *represents the national authorities* of the mission when providing personal opinions, and comments by team member may be taken to represent those of their country

Breaches of the code of conduct can result in the Head of Delegation disciplining team members for inappropriate behavior or even dismissing a delegate from the mission. In particular, behavior that risks the safety of the delegation or a source, or which could undermine the successful outcome of the FFM, should be dealt with firmly.

4.3. After the Mission

A Code of Conduct will continue to apply after the mission, for example when delegates meet to discuss the FFM Report.

4.4. Joint FFMs

When considering a joint FFM thought should be given by the participating parties on a code of conduct. However because the participating partners will be representing different, separate organisations, such a code will in practice be applied more voluntarily or through consensus, as a clear line management structure will not exist.

If a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been drawn up between the participating parties this should include some reference to the code of conduct and the remit of the Head of Delegation in enforcing such a protocol.

5. Back office

Description of the theme

In some cases, it may be useful to be able to rely on an extra colleague who will handle daily tasks during the mission. This extra colleague could also work as a communicator on COI as well as on mission-related issues: informing the office and informing the delegation.

5.1. Before the mission

The possibility of having a back-office support function for a mission will largely depend on the size of the COI Unit and the availability of resources. Key factors to determine whether a Back Office will be required include the nature of the mission or how long the mission is scheduled to last. A back office is certainly something to consider in the case of longer missions which may last several weeks. A back office function may be employed not just during the mission, which ordinarily will be relatively short, but be considered as an option both before and after the mission – namely for the whole FFM process, which could last several months.

The level and type of support the back office will give the FFM Delegation should also be considered. This could include both cover for day to day activities in the COI unit and involve support to the FFM delegation itself, for example providing research and Analysis of COI during the mission as required or dealing with administrative functions like making travel reservations. Whatever the role of the back office, this should be identified and agreed before the mission departs.

Since the back-office will rarely comprise more than one person, this person should be familiar with the country of the mission and speak a common language with the delegates on the FFM.

The role of back office should not conflict or duplicate work being done by the foreign services mission in the country of the mission, which may also be assisting the FFM.

5.2. During the mission

The role of the Back Office will continue and doubtless become more important during the mission.

Practically it will also be essential that relevant contact details are submitted to the back office throughout the mission, so that the FFM Delegation can be contacted at any time. An updated itinerary with any changes to the programme of meetings should also be made available to the back office.

See also: II.3 Security issues

Where censorship is a problem in the country of the mission, the back office can provide an essential role in providing current information on developments whilst the delegation is in the country. This may prove vital to the Terms of Reference (ToR). Additionally a back office may be used to communicate to the delegation new questions or avenues of research to be investigated.

In this way the back office provides an essential role in keeping the FFM delegation informed on any unforeseen developments.

5.3. After the mission

Depending on what has been agreed prior to the mission with regard to the role of the Back Office, it will usually be the case that the back office will continue to provide support and assistance to the FFM Delegation after the mission. This will assist in a FFM Report being produced in a timely manner.

See also: I.5 Writing reports

5.4. Joint FFMs

Participating states should consider before the FFM whether a joint mission will require a back office support function and if so who or how this will be provided. The role of the back office in a joint FFM would roughly be the same as for a national mission, namely transmitting up-to-date COI to the mission and communicating, and dealing with issues arising in support of the delegation itself.

6. Communication

Description of the theme

Reporting *on* the mission should not be confused with the results *of* the mission. However both elements are essential to Fact Finding Missions (FFMs) when looking at the issue of communication.

6.1. Before the mission

When planning to carry out a FFM the Member State should consider who to inform about the proposed mission, for example, other national government departments such as related Asylum Authorities, Foreign Service Missions, the Foreign Ministry and EU member states. Communication with such bodies may have various benefits, such as developing Sources contacts; improved exchange of information; advice on security protection and enhanced cooperation with other Member States (in particular other COI Units).

Additionally, consideration should be given to the role of the Back Office, and how communication will be facilitated during the mission between the delegation and back office.

See also: II.5.1 Back office – Before the mission

6.2. During the mission

The FFM Delegation should get in touch with the back office, according to schedule agreed prior to the mission, reporting on the progress of the mission with respect to the Terms of Reference (ToR), with regard to security issues or simply to exchange other information. Ordinarily there will be at least one person providing support to the FFM via the back office. This person should remain available on a mobile phone at all times, even during evenings and weekends.

The nominated person employed in the back office role will invariably act as an information channel, filtering information for example between the FFM Sponsors (Policy, decision makers, etc) and the delegation itself. However in some circumstances there may be a need for the delegation to speak directly with other individuals in the Asylum Authorities to clarify certain matters.

The means of communication used during the mission should be selected carefully, bearing in mind the possible security risks.

See also: II.3.2.5 Espionage and data security

6.3. After the mission

Following the completion of the field work, other national government departments (related Asylum Authorities, state security, army intelligence, foreign department, etc) or partner states, may want to know when the FFM Report will be completed and published. Several steps in communication are listed below which may be followed. These can vary according to national priorities:

6.3.1. Post mission briefings

An oral briefing should be presented upon return by the FFM Delegation; preferably this should be done as soon as possible when everything is still fresh in mind of the delegates. This presentation typically would target internal stakeholders of the Member State (the board of the asylum office, decision makers, fellow country experts, the legal department, etc). The briefing will inevitably provide only a preliminary ‘snap-shot’ on the most obvious or immediate findings of the FFM and may be fairly short in duration. The aim here is not to give an Analysis of the COI, which will require a more detailed consideration, but rather to explain the general political, social and economic circumstances that were found in the field (not all COI Units will give analysis, either via presentations or in publications – *see also: I.5 Writing reports).*

Often it can be useful to make these briefings visual and informal, for example based on photographs, maps or videos, which involve the audience more. The presentation should also outline the key topics or issues that the FFM mission Report will cover, which in turn will be dictated by the original Terms of Reference (ToR). Adopting such a briefing approach can be invaluable because it prepares the audience and key internal stakeholders on the likely structure and findings of the FFM report.

The post FFM briefing can also be an occasion to explain who the delegation met with what methodology or approach was preferred.

6.3.2. Newsletters

A short article in the office’s newsletter can also promote the mission and make a greater number of people aware about the FFM.

6.3.3. Communication of the FFM Report

The findings of the mission itself shall be gathered into a Report, for further information on how this should be done see: *I.5 Writing reports*.

Additionally it may be decided to have an oral presentation to highlight the report. Communication of the FFM report in such a way will differ from a post-FFM briefing in both style and content. The FFM report presentation for example, will be far more structured and focused on specific Caseload-related issues, providing Analysis of the COI to assist the Decision Making Authorities (if such an approach is adopted by the COI Unit).

Furthermore this briefing would then not only target the asylum office, but could include local media, NGO representatives, UN agencies, think tanks, academics and other national government departments potentially interested in the issue (for example related Asylum Authorities or Foreign Affairs Ministry). It also could be presented several times and adapted to different audiences.

6.3.4. Internal meetings

An internal meeting, gathering representatives from the FFM Sponsor (Case Workers, Decision Making Authorities, legal department, etc), the FFM Delegation and COI management should also be considered. This meeting would assess the value of the mission in terms of information obtained, methodology and the adequacy of internal procedures and other practicalities. Identifying 'lessons learnt' should be an important component of this meeting and various communication methods should be applied in order to disseminate best practice around the COI unit and to other COI units to assist European-wide cooperation.

6.4. Joint FFMs

The lead partner co-ordinating the joint FFM will invariably also have responsibility over issues of communication but of course all participating parties will need to agree over communication matters.

One of the most important aspects to consider with regards to communication for a joint FFM, will be the working language to be used.

Lessons learnt should also be follow up after the joint FFM between the participating parties.

1. Example of ToR

(limited to list of subjects from the Danish FFM on S/C Iraq, February 2010)

Terms of Reference (ToR):

1. **General security situation and presence of insurgent groups and Al Qaida**
   - South/Central Iraq
   - Baghdad and its districts
   - Ninewa, Salah al Din, Diyala, Tameen (Kirkuk), including the disputed areas
   - Risk of indiscriminate violence
   - Names of leaders of insurgent and terrorist groups
2. **Security and human rights for ethnic and religious communities**
   - Non-Arab ethnic communities: Kurds (incl. Faily Kurds), Turkmen, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Shabaks
   - Arab ethnic communities: Sunni and Shia Arabs, Palestinians
   - Religious communities: Christians, Sabean Mandeans, Yazidis, Jews
3. **Security and human rights for other groups**
   - Persons occupying specific professions:
     - Scholars, professors
     - Government officials
     - Journalists
     - Judges, lawyers
     - Medical doctors
   - Persons cooperating with:
     - Iraqi armed forces
     - The GoI authorities
     - The MNF-I and/or US forces
   - Persons working for foreign companies
   - Former Baath Party members
   - Risk to relatives of above-mentioned categories/persons
4. **Availability of protection from authorities against non-state actors**
     - Person involved in family disputes, including honour crimes and forced marriages
     - Persons involved in private conflicts such as property disputes, neighbour disputes
     - Persons threatened by militias
     - Persons at risk of forced recruitment

5. Judiciary and access to fair trial

- Independence of judiciary and judges
- Access to fair trial
  - Persons suspected of insurgent/terrorist activities
  - Persons involved in private disputes

6. Internal Flight Alternative in S/C Iraq

- Within Baghdad
- Between the governorates, including disputed areas

2. Comparison between a semi-structured and unstructured interview

Unstructured	Semi-Structured
Advantages: **a.** Useful when the main purpose of the mission is for a more generalised update on a situation or topic, or where you want the informant to develop avenues of further research by gaining an understanding of respondents own 'subjective' perspective or viewpoint. **b.** Allows for greater spontaneity during an Interview. **c.** A good alternative if the respondent is reluctant to talk freely, as it sets a more relaxed tone to the interview.	**Advantages:** **a.** Works well when you have a more specific ToR and where factually answers are required to more detailed questions. **b.** Such an approach may also be preferred where there is a need for a degree of consistency between interviews, for example if comparisons intend to be drawn between interviews or different Interviewer used. **c.** Where the expertise of the team on the subject matter concerned is fairly limited, a more structured approach will be simpler and more straightforward for the interviewer to apply, reducing the need for a high degree of specialist knowledge or country expertise.
Disadvantages: **a.** Can become a fruitless pursuit, in which inquiry can degenerate into little more than anecdotal gossip, producing masses of information which fails to fully answer in any meaningful way the issues set in your ToR. **b.** If the Interviewer has only a limited understanding of the country concerned, or the subject matter being discussed, it may be difficult for them to engage in discussions or dialogue in an unstructured way. An interview may suffer from embarrassing pauses as the interviewer struggles to make sense or understand what is actually being said, which may in turn irritate the respondent.	**Disadvantages:** **a.** Can fail to appreciate the diversity and variety of perspectives that each source may offer. Promising lines of enquiry may be easily ignored as the interviewer sticks to a formulaic set of questions, or worse still respondents are forced into the predetermined framework of the interviewer so large, relevant areas of experience are never examined, whilst what is disclosed could be misrepresented or distorted because the full picture is not known. **b.** A structured line of enquiry could stagnate an Interview. A series of negative responses; 'No', 'Never' and so on is likely to kill an interview. A semi-structured approach, may also lead to topics being discussed which have already, or in part been covered elsewhere in the interview, which may irritate or confuse the respondent.

3. Interview conduct and technique

Commonly recognised criteria which may allow the Interviewer to develop a positive Interview environment are as follows:

Clear: Poses clear, simple, easy, and short questions; speaks distinctly and understandably, does not use academic language or professional jargon. In addition refrains from using leading or complex questions which can confuse the respondent.

Gentle: Allows subjects to finish what they are saying, lets them proceed at their own rate of thinking and speaking. Is easy-going, tolerates pauses, indicates that it is acceptable to put forward unconventional and provocative opinions (although this could involve the use of leading questions implicitly).

Sensitive: Listens actively to the content of what is said, hears the nuances of meaning in an answer, exploring further as appropriate. The interviewer is empathic and able to judge when a topic is too emotional to pursue in the interview.

Open: Hears which aspects of the interview topic are important for the interviewee. Listens with an evenly hovering attention, is open to new aspects that can be introduced by the interviewee, and follows them up if relevant.

Steering: Knowing what it is important to acquire information about, the interviewer controls the course of the interview and is not afraid to interrupt digressions from the interviewee. Often sensitive or complex issues should be left until later in the interview, although equally it is preferable to end an interview in a positive or light-hearted way.

Critical: Does not take everything that is said at face value, but questions critically to test the reliability and validity of what the interviewees say. But ensures this is done with respect and that such questions do not alienate or irritate the respondent.

Remembering: Actively listens to what the subject has said during the interview, can recall earlier statements and asks to have them elaborated on without interrupting the respondent. Can also relate what has been said during different parts of the interview, making relevant connections between different parts of the interview.

Balanced: Does not talk too much, which may make the interviewee passive, and does not talk too little which may result in the interviewee feeling he or she is not talking along the right lines.

Clarifying: Manages throughout the interview to clarify and extend the meanings of the interviewee's statements, by providing Interpretation of what is said, which may then be disconfirmed or confirmed by the interviewee.

4. Question phrasing and prompting

Introducing Questions: Opening questions such as "Could you describe the situation on the ground for X…?' May yield spontaneous, rich information on what respondents themselves consider the main aspects of the issues investigated. Further questioning can then proceed to following-up points arising in the response to the initial question.

Follow-up Questions: The respondents' answers may be extended through a curious and persistent approach from the Interviewer. This can be done through direct questioning of what has just been said. Also a nod, or "mm'" or a pause can indicate to the respondent to continue with the description. Repeating significant words of an answer can lead to further elaborations.

There are additionally various types of follow-up questions which can be used to gather further information from a respondent. Follow up questions are invaluable because initial questions can often produce only a brief, cursory response. Even if the respondent is willing to divulge more information, it may simply be that this information does not immediately come to mind. Additionally the respondent may require the positive reinforcement of a follow up question to assure them the information they are giving is useful and of value to the interviewer. However there is always the risk a follow up question, may become a forward, or leading question, eliciting a response the interviewer is deliberately intending to provoke. Due care should therefore be taken in applying follow up questions. Types of follow up questions include:

- *Probing*: The interviewer may pursue further information by probing the content of answers without stating which aspects are of particular interest and hence leading the respondent. Questions such as this would include: "could you say something more about that?"; "can you give a more detailed description of what happened?"; "do you have further examples of this?"
- *Specifying*: Where necessary, the interviewer may also follow up with specifying questions, such as 'can you say how much would need to be paid as a bribe to secure release'?
- *Direct*: Here, the interviewer directly introduces topics and dimensions, such as 'would you yourself feel safe to travel from a to b?' Such direct questions may preferably be postponed until the later parts of the Interview, after the respondents have given their own spontaneous descriptions.
- *Indirect*: Would again aim to focus the respondent onto a specific subject, but would do so in a more discrete manner, such as "is it common for people from a

to travel to b?' which may stimulate in the respondent a recollection that travel between a and b is not something people commonly do because it is not safe. Such an approach in some respects may be more successful in eliciting information than direct questioning, simply because it phrases the questions in a fresh perspective and does not require the respondent to make a direct statement on a subject which he may be ill prepared to do.

Clarifying questions: Clarification of answers can be done by rephrasing an answer, for instance: "If I interpret you correctly, you mean that...?" or "is it correct that you consider that?" or "Just to clarify that point ...." Such questions are not about soliciting further follow up information, but rather are intended to reinforce or clarify an initial response so there is no ambiguity.

Silence: Rather than making the Interview a cross examination by continually firing off questions, the Interviewer can sometimes employ silence to further the interview. Where appropriate, pauses in the conversation can allow the respondent time to associate and reflect, then break the silence themselves with significant information.

Structuring questions: The interviewer is responsible for the course of the interview and should indicate when a theme has been exhausted. The interviewer may directly and politely break off long answers that are irrelevant to the topic of the investigation, for example by saying, "That's been very helpful. I would now like to introduce another topic".

Visual prompts: Additionally an interviewer may wish to take along to the interview a visual prompt to stimulate a respondent in another way, for example a photograph or newspaper cutting related to a particular event or issue.

5. Techniques for handling reluctant sources

Framing: during introductions express to the respondent how important their view point is, and the value such insight will provide in the Asylum decision making process and understanding of asylum claims.

Setting: arrange to meet the respondent in a location and at a time that they feel comfortable with, possibly a private location such as a hotel room. Also be mindful that the respondent may not want to meet with you for very long.

Confidentiality: reinforce to a source that they can be referred to anonymously and that their identity would not be disclosed outside the fact-finding team. Additionally encourage the use of hypothetical examples as opposed to actual accounts or events being disclosed.

Style & Questioning: A gentler, softer and more Unstructured interview technique may be preferred with fewer questions. Follow up questions may also be more subtle and indirect.

Leave sensitive or emotional subject matter until later in the Interview, but not until the end, as it is good the interview finishes on a positive note.

Explain to the Sources what you already know on a given topic and that it is ok to put forward provocative or unconventional opinions. In such a way you enable, or set the scene for, discussion of sensitive information. Although it should be noted this will inevitably require the use of leading questions.

Recording method: Briefer notes may also be taken during such interviews (if notes are being taken and not Tape Recording)

6. Example of a protocol for interviews

OFPRA drafted this protocol on the progress of Interview for its mission with CGRS and BAMF to the Democratic Republic of Congo in december 2009.

Interview Guidelines
Prepared for the 2009 DRC Mission by OFPRA + BAMF & CGRS

Greetings

1. Presentation of the mission members

✓ Give names and official capacity

➢ Hand over the document « Composition of the delegation and of the DRC desks » to the interviewee(s)
➢Hand over our business cards to the interviewee(s).

2. Presentation of the mission

✓ 'The OFPRA, the BAMF and the CGRA, that is to say the respective asylum authorities of France, Germany and Belgium, are closely cooperating in a mission to the DRC led by France. For France and Belgium, this mission is also part of an enhanced European cooperation project called "European Country of Origin Information Sponsorship" (ESC project)'.

Mission objectives

✓ The objectives of this information gathering mission are:

→ Updating information gathered during previous missions (ARGO 2007 and others).
→ Collecting information on new themes
→ Maintaining and extending the contact network of our research units.
→ Information collected will help the decision process concerning asylum claims from DRC nationals.

➢Any questions?

3. Confidentiality

✓ Explain that the information collected during today's interview will be written down in a Report.

✓Explain that the interview report will be submitted to the interviewee later on, so that he/she can communicate his/her reaction and ask for modifications, in a certain time limit.

✓Explain that the interview report will be classified as public or restricted. Public means that it will be accessible to all, restricted means that only staff from the asylum authorities will have access to it, to the exclusion of third parties (lawyers, asylum applicants…).

➢Present to the interviewee the agreement form between him/her and the asylum authorities and ask him/her to fill out the form and sign it.

4. Interview

✓A mission member designated beforehand will act as main Interviewer. He/she conducts the interview, but other mission members may also ask questions if necessary.

✓Mission members see to it that the interviewee's personal details (phone + email) are written down on the interview information card, as well as his/her official capacity and the date and place of interview.

✓ All the mission members present take notes (questions + answers, Verbatim Notes as far as possible). The person conducting the interview can rely on his colleagues, if need be (when asking a question for instance).

✓If this applies, ask the interviewee if he/she has received the questions sent by email beforehand.

✓Explain that the interview will focus on these questions but that other subjects may also be touched on.

✓Do not hesitate to interrupt the interview and ask the interviewee to restate an answer more clearly or to give more details and concrete examples.

✓ Do not hesitate to take the interviewee back to the main subjects if he/she is digressing.

✓Do not hesitate to ask clarifications when answers seem contradictory.

5. After the interview

➢Do you have any questions?

✓Restate the confidentiality clauses.

✓Restate that the interviewee will be sent an interview report by email after the mission.

✓Check if the interviewee has documents (specimens, reports etc,…) he is willing to give us (if NGO reports or brochures, do not hesitate to « buy » these, but ask for an invoice).

Thanks + Photos!

PLEASE NOTE: Only pictures of the interviewees (if they agree). Mission members should not appear on a picture together with interviewees.

Reminder ✋

Visits to detention centres

➢ If possible, all mission members should participate in the visit.

➢ A distribution of tasks among members should be agreed on beforehand: some will draw up a map and a description of the place, while others conduct the interview, take notes. Someone should also take care of « protocol » with the interlocutor.

7. Example of a Interview Guide for a Semi-Structured interview

OFPRA drafted this questionnaire for its mission with CGRS and BAMF to the Democratic Republic of Congo in December 2009. It was tailored according to the topic (in this case the MLC opposition party) and the interviewees (in this case, members of the party).

Préparation de la Mission RDC – 2009, Questionnaire Partis politiques (MLC)

- Pouvez-vous nous présenter les grandes lignes du parti actuellement ?
- Pouvez-vous nous présenter les actions récentes de votre parti sur le terrain politique ?
- Quelle est la position et la préparation de votre parti en vue des futures élections présidentielles (candidats ?)

Au fait, est-ce que Jean-Pierre Bemba continue à exercer une influence importante sur le fonctionnement du parti, ou son incarcération l'en empêche-t'il ?
Qu'en est-il d'une libération provisoire ? Un pays s'est-il porté candidat pour l'accueillir ?

- Votre parti a-t-il récemment participé à des manifestations/meetings politiques ?
- Dans l'affirmative, lesquels ?

- Quel est le degré de militantisme requis par votre parti pour qu'une personne puisse adhérer et se voir délivrer une carte de membre ?
- Quelles sont les connaissances politiques attendues d'un militant, en fonction de ses responsabilités au sein du parti ?
- Comment vos militants de base travaillent-ils sur le terrain depuis l'arrestation de J.P. Bemba ?
- Parmi vos militants, quelles sont les catégories les plus exposées à des tracasseries/menaces/persécutions ?
- Dans quelles circonstances (exemples) ?
- Disposez-vous d'une liste de militants actuellement détenus ?
- Serait-il possible de recueillir le témoignage d'un militant ayant été récemment interpellé et incarcéré ?

Sont-ils dispersés sur plusieurs lieux de détention ou concentrés dans un seul ?
Quelles sont les ONG auxquelles vous vous adressez pour défendre les droits de vos militants ? Connaissez-vous le nom des interlocuteurs auprès de ces ONG ?

- Que pouvez-vous nous dire sur la situation des ressortissants de l'Equateur actuellement ?
- Sont-ils inquiétés ? Dans l'affirmative, pouvez-vous fournir des exemples ?
- Que pouvez-vous nous dire sur les mutuelles regroupant des ressortissants de l'Equateur ?
- Que pouvez-vous nous dire sur la situation actuelle des ex-DPP de J.-P. Bemba ?

- Disposez-vous d'un organigramme actualisé par province ?
- Disposez-vous de spécimens (cartes de membre, cartes de cotisation, etc.) Qui sont les personnes habilitées à délivrer de tels documents ?
- Disposez-vous des coordonnées des présidents de fédérations ?

- Quel(s) document(s) produisez-vous à l'appui d'un militantisme, notamment des attestations en appui d'une demande d'asile ?
- Quelle(s) sont les personnes habilitées à produire ce type de document ?
- Afin de vérifier l'authenticité des documents qui nous sont soumis, quelle personne faut-il contacter ? Est-ce bien toujours Monsieur Tumba, comme nous l'a indiqué JJ Mbungani ?
- Au sein de vos représentations en Europe, quelles sont les personnes habilitées à authentifier ces documents et à nous répondre ?

- Seriez-vous disposés à ce que nous participions à la réunion de l'une de vos sections locales ?

8. Example of an FFM report template

Possible Report structure/contents (also see annex 1 of the EU COI common guidelines)

- Executive summary
- Table of contents
- Disclaimer
- Terms of Reference (ToR) of the mission (including the reason for the visit)
- Name of the participating authorities and alternatively the name of the delegation members, including brief particulars as to their relevant (optionally: mandate of the sending authorities)
- The dates of the visit and the cities/sites visited (travel route)
- Brief background information to enable readers to contextualise the evidence (optionally: Asylum relevant issues, e.g. number of asylum applications, appeals, etc.)
- The methodology used during the visit, especially regarding Interview
- List of the organisations and categories of people interviewed (if possible and safe)
- Identification of any other Sources of information relied upon
- Complementary secondary sources should be identified as such
- The findings of the report structured by issues
- Acknowledgments (where possible and safe)
- Optionally: significant developments after the mission; interviews in the appendix

9. Unexhaustive practical checklist

	IT
	Tape recorder, USB stick/keys to ensure data transfer among team members, extension lead, adaptator if necessary
	camera + transfer wire to pc : among the FFM team, make sure you have a common method to efficiently store pictures
	Secured cellular phones + loader have a local number ASAP to communicate towards sources foresee enough credit Insert emergency numbers both private and professional Insert contact details of main Sources to meet Insert hotel details
	Secured laptop with according wires, storing : Available COI related to the ToR, Extensive contactlist of Sources Scanned version of passport, planeticket, insurances, medical passport WHO …
	STATIONARY
	Expense vouchers, Expenses notebook, Stapler, Stabilo highlighters, perforator, notebooks, pencils, post-its, cisors, slat, adhesive tape
	Businesscards Order of mission, Mandate to carry along during the FFM Letter to ambassador prior to and after mission Activity report of home office, any public document you can offer your contacts Geographical maps
	HEALTH
	Pharmacy containing sleeping pills for the journey, painkillers, antibiotics, thermometer, anti-malarians if applicable,… WHO passport if applicable (yellow fever) Health insurance Plan vaccines well ahead
	ID
	Passport Take caution because of sometimes lenghty visa application procedures
	TRANSPORTATION
	Visa application Planeticket Travel insurances Inform about efficient local means of transportation (taxi, car rental, airportshuttle…)
	MISCELLANEOUS
	Money : inform about the used currencies according to type of expense Estimate the expenses, carry enough / not too much cash enquire about inflation Adequate clothing / jewelry Flashlight Gifts : Books, money, ties, some specialties from home country… (left overs of pharmacy and stationary) Time : synchronize all team members'watches, cameras, laptops etc ensuring punctuality but also facilitating a chronological storage of photographs Hotel reservations

10. Glossary

Term	Definition	Synonym / Antonym	Source of definition
Analysis	(The statement of the result of) a critical evaluation or study of facts, usually made by breaking a subject down into its constituent parts and then describing the parts and their interrelationships	Statement Finding Judgement Opinion based on reflection Antonym: Synthesis	*Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information* (COI)
Assessment	The comprehensive judgement (on the situation in a country) that takes into account all relevant parameters, as well as their mutual interdependence and their individual importance in comparison with the whole (which as such is the subject of the assessment).	Appraisal Judgement Valuation	*Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information* (COI)
Asylum (application for)	The application made by a third-country national or a stateless person which can be understood as a request for international protection from a Member State, under the Geneva Convention. Any application for international protection is presumed to be an application for asylum unless a third-country national or a stateless person explicitly requests another kind of protection that can be applied for separately.	International Protection; Refugee Status Determination	EMN glossary
Asylum Authorities	The government department in charge of asylum related affairs.	Immigration authorities (responsible for asylum); asylum board	Agreed by ECS Working Group

Back Office	Logistical and/or practical support provided to the FFM Delegation from the commissioning authority or Sponsor	Administrative and general support	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Caseload	The number or volume of cases handled by the competent authority (asylum or other)	Casework; immigration/asylum intake;	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Case Worker	Public servant processing individual Asylum claims		
Code of Conduct	A set of principles and expectations that are considered binding on any person who is a member of a fact finding delegation		Agreed by ECS Working Group
Contact Person	Person – official or private – furnishing useful information (to a researcher) on different domains in which he not necessarily has proven and reputed skills.	Informant, Sources, respondant	Definition extracted from the Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI) for the term informant
COI Unit	Specific department from the Asylum Authorities or an Independent Department responsible for collecting and providing COI for asylum related matters.	COI department, country division	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Country of Origin	The country being researched in the Fact Finding Mission (FFM)	Host country Focus country	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Country of Origin Information COI	Information used to analyse the socio-political situation in countries of origin of applicants for international protection in the Assessment, carried out on an individual basis. The relevant facts are obtained from various Sources, including laws and regulations of the country of origin and the manner in which they are applied.	State of origin information	Adapted from EMN glossary
COI Researcher	A person who undertakes diligent and	Country expert; country advisor,	Agreed by ECS Working Group

	systematic inquiry or investigation into COI related matters in order to discover facts and knowledge.	Country analyst	
Decision Making Authorities	Any quasi judicial or administrative body in a Member State responsible for examining applications for Asylum and competent to take first instance decisions on such cases.	Decision making function; decision maker; decision taker	Adapted from EMN glossary
Deontology	The ethical study of duties, obligations, and rights, with an approach focusing on the rightness or wrongness of actions themselves and not on the goodness or badness of the consequences of those actions	Code of Conduct, Chart of good behaviour	en.wiktionary.org/wiki/deontology.
Fact Finding Mission (FFM)	A special project or extraordinary process in which a impartial team or panel travels to the Country of Origin or third country to investigate or obtain information from local Sources	Information gathering	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Fact Finding Delegation – FFM Delegation	The group or body of delegates chosen to undertake a fact finding mission	Fact Finding research team; Interview team; team member (singular – delegate)	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Foreign Service Mission	The government department in charge of foreign affairs.	Ministry of foreign affairs, foreign ministry/office	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Head of Delegation	A person appointed as leader or authority within the Fact Finding delegation.	Fact finding lead; Head of Mission	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Independence	Freedom from Policy or decision making pressure	Objective, unbiased	
Interpretation	explanation or way of explaining		Oxford Dictionary
Interview	A meeting at which information is obtained from a Sources	Meeting	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Interviewer	A person who undertakes an interview and leads discussions with a Sources	Lead interviewer	Agreed by ECS Working Group

Interview Guide	A guide or written prompt to provide direction or focus for an interview.	Preparatory notes	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Note Taker	A person who undertakes to document and record impartially and accurately information given during an Interview.	Minute taker	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Note Taking	The practice of using written records to document information given during an interview.	Minute taker; secretary	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Policy	A course or principle of action proposed or adopted by a government (or other body).		Oxford English Reference Dictionary, second edition
Primary Sources	The quality of a Sources to be close or directly related to facts, events or Situations without any intermediary	First hand information, Original source, eyewitness	definition extracted from the *Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information* (COI)
Principle of Approved Notes	The practice of agreeing or approving written notes with a source following an Interview.		Agreed by ECS Working Group
Protection Expert	A person who specialises in personal protection and security matters	Body guard	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Report	A written account or description of the findings on facts, event or situation; which gives usually a statement on the result of the investigation.		Definition extracted from the *Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information* (COI)
Semi-Structured Interview	A methodological approach used to conduct an interview. A semi-structured interview has a framework of themes or questions to explore but also has some degree of flexibility, allowing new questions to be brought up during the interview in response to what the interviewee says.		Agreed by ECS Working Group
Snowballing	A method to identify		Agreed by ECS Working

	new, future sources through existing sources or contacts. Such recommendations will be 'extended associations', for example friends or acquittances of the original source.		Group
Sources	A person or institution producing first-hand or second-hand information	Respondent, interviewee, Informant	*Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information* (COI)
Sponsor	Broadly, this refers to a person or entity which undertakes a (legal, financial or personal) engagement, promise or pledge, on behalf of another. For the purposes of these guidelines, the sponsor will normally be the commissioning immigration authority.		Adapted from EMN glossary
Tape Recording	The practice of using audio recording to document information given during an Interview	Audio recording; 'on the record'	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Terms of Reference (ToR)	The formal instructions given to someone when they are asked to consider or investigate a particular subject, telling them what they must deal with.	Aims or objectives	Agreed by ECS Working Group
Unstructured Interview	A methodological approach used to conduct an interview. An unstructured interview will adopt an informal, conversational approach to explore themes or questions. The focus of the interview will be entirely dependent on the Sources' direction and responses, rather than being directed by the Interviewer.		Agreed by ECS Working Group
Verbatim Note Taking	To record information word for word, exactly or literally.	Word for word notes	Agreed by ECS Working Group

11. Bibliograhy and further recommended reading

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