



**Common EU Guidelines
for processing
Country of Origin Information
(COI)**

April, 2008

ARGO project JLS/2005/ARGO/GC/03

The Common EU Guidelines for the processing of COI have been developed by a project group, formed by representatives of COI desks from immigration services of the following countries:

- Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF) - Germany
- Bundesamt für Migration (BFM) - Switzerland
- Danish Immigration Service (DIS) - Denmark
- Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) - The Netherlands
- Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) - Belgium
- Office Français de protection des refugies et apatrides (OPFRA) - France
- Office for Repatriation and Aliens (ORA) - Poland
- Home Office - United Kingdom

This project was funded by the European Commission (ARGO project JLS/2005/ARGO/GC/03)

Project leader:
Office for Country Information and Language Analysis
Immigration and Naturalisation Service
Postbus 16502
2500 BM Den Haag
The Netherlands

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Formal Background: The Hague Programme and Commission Action Plan	1
1.2 Goal of the COI Guidelines.....	2
1.3 Scope of the COI Guidelines	2
1.4. Process of drafting the guidelines	3
1.5. Organisation of the document.....	3
 PART 1 - THE GUIDELINES	5
 2. Sources: research, selection and validation	6
2.1 Definition of “source”	6
2.2 General principles.....	7
2.2.1 Selecting sources.....	7
2.2.2 Searching for multiple sources.....	7
2.2.3 Searching for original/primary sources	7
2.2.4 Validation of sources.....	8
2.2.5 Hierarchy of sources	9
2.3. Specific issues	10
2.3.1 If information is found from only a single source	10
2.3.2 If information from a “dubious” source is found	10
 3. Information: selection and validation	12
3.1 General principles.....	12
3.1.1 Quality criteria for evaluating and validating information	12
3.1.2 Cross-checking information	12
3.1.3 Balancing the information	13
3.2 Specific issues	13
3.2.1 If contradictory information is found	13
3.2.2 If no information can be found	13
 4. Writing factual COI products.....	14
4.1 Presentation of the information.....	14
4.1.1 Transparency of information	14
4.1.2 Traceability of information	15
4.2 Presentation of sources	16
4.2.1 References.....	16
4.2.2 Annotation	16
4.3 Spelling	17
4.4 Disclaimers	17
4.4.1 Disclaimer on sources and information.....	17
4.4.2 Restrictions on the use of the report.....	18
4.5 Quality control.....	19
 PART 2 – EXPLANATORY NOTES ON THE GUIDELINES	20
 5. Note on public versus classified information - facilitating information exchange.	21
5.1. Introduction	21
5.1.1. General introduction.....	21
5.1.2. Approach.....	21
5.2. Distribution of information: assessing the risks involved	22
5.2.1. The information flow.....	22

5.2.2. The zones	22
5.2.3. Zone 1	24
5.2.4. Zone 2	24
5.2.5. Zone 3	24
5.2.6. Other zones possible?	24
5.2.7. Barrier 1	24
5.2.8. Barrier 2	25
5.2.9. "Waterproof"?	25
5.3. First step: Identifying the different client groups	25
5.4. Second step: Combining client groups and risk zones.....	26
5.5. Third step: Linking risk zones with the different levels of classification.....	27
6. Note on copyright and the "public domain" - facilitating information exchange.....	29
6.1. Introduction	29
6.2. Copyright as an obstacle to distribution and exchange	29
PART 3 – GLOSSARY	30
7. Glossary	31
Annex 1: A preferred format for a factual COI report.....	39

1. Introduction

1.1 Formal Background: The Hague Programme and Commission Action Plan

Recognising the need to strengthen the European Union as an area of freedom, security and justice, the European Council adopted the Hague Programme of 4-5 November 2004. The Council reiterated that in its second phase the aims of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) would be the establishment of a common asylum procedure and a uniform status for those who are granted asylum or subsidiary protection. In this context, the European Council also called for the establishment of appropriate structures involving the national asylum services of the Member States with a view to facilitating practical and collaborative cooperation towards three main objectives, including the joint compilation, assessment and application of Country of Origin Information (COI).

In response to the invitation from the European Council to present an Action Plan for the Hague Programme, the Commission issued a Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on strengthened practical cooperation entitled *New structures, new approaches - improving the quality of decision making in the common European asylum system* (February 17th 2006). Acknowledging the role of COI in guaranteeing the quality of the asylum processes and decision making of EU Member States, the Commission stressed:

"An objective, transparent and accurate COI system that delivers official, rapid and reliable information is therefore central to any assessment of whether a person should benefit from international protection. More convergence on the collection and analysis of COI by asylum authorities in Member States would contribute to levelling the asylum playing field."¹

The Commission set three main objectives for enhanced cooperation on COI, including the establishment of common guidelines for the production of COI. In annex C to this Communication (§ 10), the Commission refers to the guidelines to be established as "common basic principle on the production of COI" which should "address issues such as transparency, cross-checking and citation ...". As previously stressed in the corpus of the Communication itself, it then states that "the application of those guidelines to Member States' own COI would be the first step towards the longer term objective of a harmonised application of COI in line with the Hague Programme objectives".²

Further on, the Commission issued in September 2006 the document MIGRAPOL 132 (Report on Eurasil activities – Practical cooperation) in which it regards the Common EU-guidelines for the use and validation of factual COI as a "key issue in the development of common quality standards between EU Member States".

In June 2007, in continuation to the Hague Programme and Action Plan, the Commission launched a "Green Paper on the future Common European Asylum System" aimed at identifying "the possible options under the current EU legal framework for shaping the second stage of the construction of the CEAS" (COM/2007/0301 final).³ With the view to further approximating national practices and jurisprudences, it refers to "examples based on the joint assessment of situations in countries of origin" where Member States could adopt common approaches, i.e. "certain types of cases or certain aspects of asylum applications that require specific legal or factual expertise" (3. Implementation – Accompanying measures). In this context, the EU COI guidelines can be regarded as a prerequisite for adopting measures in response to the Green Paper.

¹ European Commission: *New structures, new approaches - improving the quality of decision making in the common European asylum system*. Brussels, 17-02-06 (COM (2006) 67 final). http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com2006_0067en01.pdf (consulted 24-04-08)

² European Commission: *Annexes to: New Structures, new approaches*. Brussels, 17-02-06.

³ European Commission: *Green Paper on the future Common European Asylum System*, Brussels, 06-06-07 (COM(2007) 301 final). <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0301:FIN:EN:PDF> (consulted 24-04-08)

1.2 Goal of the COI Guidelines

Pursuant to the Action Plan of the European Commission, the COI Guidelines aim at "improving the quality of decision making in the common European asylum system" while contributing to the harmonization of the asylum processes within the EU.

In line with the concerned provisions of the Action Plan, the goal of these guidelines is to provide basic common criteria on how to process transparent, objective, impartial, and balanced factual COI, with the aim of facilitating EU-wide exchange and use of such information. The guidelines are to be understood by new as well as experienced COI researchers.

The guidelines have been established taking into consideration that the use of COI is part of the requirements for an "appropriate examination" of asylum applications according to art. 8. 2 (b) of the Council Directive 2005/85/EC of 1 December 2005 on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status. Since an "appropriate examination" also implies, according to 8. 2 (a) of this Directive that asylum "applications are examined and decisions taken individually, objectively and impartially", criteria leading to the use of objective and impartial COI have been especially taken into account.

All EU Member States are encouraged to apply these guidelines, whether or not the production of COI is done in-house or is outsourced (i.e. COI commissioned from external organisations). Nevertheless, COI-producers may have to take into account limitations stemming from national legislation, specific rules on classification, citation and copyright.

The need to meet the criteria of objectivity and impartiality should also be understood as implying that, whenever possible, the processing and the production of COI should be kept independent from the decision making process and policy making.⁴

1.3 Scope of the COI Guidelines

Processing COI implies the selection of sources, collection of information, analysis, validation, and writing of COI products.

These guidelines focus on improving the quality of COI products that are processed on the basis of:

- public information (i.e. not classified information)
- factual information (i.e. not assessments, opinions by the COI-producer on the in-country situation, interpretations of the facts, or conclusions formulated for policy reasons)

Although the guidelines focus on improving the quality of COI-products that are processed on the basis of public and factual information, they can serve as a basis for the writing of other COI-products as well, such as country assessments, operational notes, fact-finding mission reports etc.

As set out in chapters 2, 3 and 4, the guidelines cover the entire COI production process consisting of:

- the selection, collection, analysis and validation of COI. A distinction is made between the validation of sources and the validation of information.

⁴ According to the UNHCR, it is even a matter of credibility and authoritativeness (UNHCR, *Country of origin information: Towards Enhanced International Cooperation*. Geneva, February 2004, p. 17. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=403b2522a&page=search> (consulted 23-04-08))

- the presentation of written COI products such as reports and answers to questions/ query responses.

Where relevant and possible, the guidelines contain examples, in order to clarify or illustrate the contents.

1.4. Process of drafting the guidelines

The project group⁵ prepared the guidelines on the basis of various forms of input from all EU Member States, Canada, Norway, Switzerland, UNHCR, ACCORD, RDC Ireland and the European Commission, including:

- answers to a questionnaire developed by the project group;
- interviews with selected COI desks⁶;
- existing guidelines from ACCORD, the Canadian IRB and UNHCR; and
- comments from the reference group⁷.
- comments from EU member states in the testing period (May-November 2007)

The draft guidelines were presented at the EURASIL plenary meeting of March 27 2007, and were widely accepted. The final draft (d.d. April 04 2007) was sent out for testing to all EU member states, Norway, Switzerland, ACCORD, UNHCR, and RDC Ireland. In addition, a compendium of useful websites and other reference materials covering the majority of asylum generating countries was provided as a helpful tool for COI researchers. The period of testing lasted from May-November 2007.

By November 2007, the project group had received comments from ACCORD, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, Lithuania and The Netherlands.

Five partners of the original project group⁸ have finalized the guidelines.

1.5. Organisation of the document

The document consists of three parts, which are to be read in conjunction with each other. In Part 1, the guidelines are presented, organised in three chapters:

- Chapter 2 (Sources)
 Definition of sources
 How to select sources
 How to validate sources
 What to do if information is found only from a single source or a dubious one
- Chapter 3 (Information)
 Which quality criteria are used to evaluate and validate information
 How to cross-check, and provide balanced information
 What to do if no information can be found
 What to do if contradictory information is found

⁵ The Project Group is formed by representatives of COI desks from immigration services of the following countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

⁶ Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Spain, ACCORD, RDC (Refugee Documentation Centre Ireland).

⁷ Canada, Finland, Ireland, European Commission, UNHCR.

⁸ Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands and Switzerland

- Chapter 4 (Writing factual COI products)

Presentation of information and sources
Transparency and traceability
Need for disclaimers
The importance of quality control

In Part 2, two explanatory notes on the guidelines are provided; these are meant to help the user's understanding on the issues discussed in this document:

- Chapter 5 (Note on public versus classified COI)
- Chapter 6 (Note on copyright and the public domain)

In Part 3, a glossary of common COI terms is provided, which aims to make clear what is meant by the terms used in the previous chapters.

- Chapter 7 (Glossary)

An *annex*, including a preferred format for a COI-report, has been added. This format, when slightly adapted, can serve as a format for query responses as well.

PART 1 - THE GUIDELINES

2. Sources: research, selection and validation

As mentioned in the introduction, a distinction is made between *sources* and *information*. Chapter 2 describes the selection and validation of sources. Chapter 3 describes the selection and validation of information. These chapters do not go into the actual writing (i.e. presentation of sources and information) of the COI-products. This will be discussed in Chapter 4. For an explanation and definition of the various terms used in this document, please refer to the glossary (Chapter 7).

2.1 Definition of “source”

In the context of processing COI, the meaning of the term “source” can vary depending on the circumstances of its use: it may be used to describe the person or institution providing information; or it may be used to describe the information product produced, either by that person or institution, or by others.

For the purpose of these guidelines, the various definitions of “source” have been specifically refined as follows:

- A *source* is a person or institution producing information.
- A *primary source* is a person or institution close or directly related to (i.e. having first-hand information of) an event, fact or matter.
- An *original source* is the person or institution who documents the event, fact or matter for the first time. The original source can also be the primary source.
- A *secondary source* is the person or institution who reproduces the information documented by the original source.
- *Sources of information* are, for example: reports, written press, TV, radio, journals, books, position papers, etc.

Illustrations:

1. A human rights activist tells the researcher that an individual is detained for political reasons, while the prison director maintains that the individual is detained for criminal offences. In this case the human rights activist and the prison director are both *primary sources*. The researcher (or his institution) who documents the information in, for example, a report, is the *original source*.

The researcher's report of the interviews regarding the detained person is the *original source of information*.

2. A journalist who is an eyewitness to certain events and who documents them for the first time is both the *primary* and the *original source*.

Databases and the internet are useful ways of accessing sources of information, but should not be regarded as being the actual sources of information themselves.

Illustration:

A COI researcher finds a copy of the report on ecoi.net. Ecoi.net is a valuable repository of information – but it is not the source of information itself.

2.2 General principles

2.2.1 Selecting sources

Any source may provide information that can be relevant (to the asylum determination process). This means that no source should be excluded without further consideration.

Sources that may provide inaccurate or unreliable information on one subject may provide valuable information on another subject.

Illustration:

A political party that has been accused of violating human rights will most probably not be the most reliable and objective source for questions such as: "Did this party violate human rights?"

However, when it comes to questions such as: "Who is the political leader? What is the name of the newspaper of this political party?" the party itself is likely to be able to provide the most reliable and up to date information.

2.2.2 Searching for multiple sources

COI researchers should always try to find more than one source and different kinds of sources (e.g. governmental, media, international organizations, NGO's etc.) for each issue, preferably the original/primary sources in each case.

It is important to search for as wide a range of sources as possible, which reflect differing opinions about the issue or event, as this will help to ensure a balanced report. Finding more than one source will give added weight to the information provided, particularly if it is of a sensitive or controversial nature, by showing that the opinion it is not restricted to one – possibly biased - source.

2.2.3 Searching for original/primary sources

Researchers should always consult a variety of sources. As part of this process it is important to check, as far as this is possible, the adequacy of the source. Although it is not always possible to go back to the primary source, every effort should be made to find the original source that documented the fact, event or situation for the first time (see glossary). This will help to avoid *round tripping*, *false corroboration* and *misquoting* of information.

Round tripping occurs when secondary sources begin to cite each other, instead of referring to the original/primary source.

Illustration of round tripping:

An April 2004 UK Home Office report quotes a section of a report produced by the Danish Immigration Service, which was itself based on some information obtained from a report by the Canadian IRB, which in turn referred to information provided by an earlier (October 2003) UK Home Office Report.

False corroboration: certain information may be found in a number of sources, but after careful examination of each of the sources it may become apparent that all the sources obtained the information from the same, single source.

Illustration of false corroboration:

A COI researcher finds “confirmation” in the UK Home Office report of a fact mentioned in the US State Department report, not realising that the Home Office report is in fact directly quoting from the US State Department report.

An original/primary source is not necessarily a guarantee of quality. They may inadvertently or intentionally provide false information (for instance due to language/translation problems, or to political opinions). Therefore, even original/primary sources must be validated.

Illustration:

A reliable NGO (*primary source*) advises that aid is being distributed throughout a certain region. Subsequent reports by other sources note that some remote villages did not receive any aid at all, because the convoy carrying the aid and supplies was ambushed en route. Although the NGO had of course given the information in good faith, it was to some extent misleading information.

2.2.4 Validation of sources

Validation of a source is the process of evaluation of a source and/or information by (thoroughly and critically) assessing its cogency through quality criteria.

Validation of sources implies:

- assessing the context of the source in which it operates (to what extent is the source influenced by its context?)
- assessing the objectivity and reliability of the source.

Sources should be carefully examined, taking into account questions such as: who is the source, what did the source(s) say; why are they saying it; when did they say it and how is the information presented. As a matter of course, these questions are interrelated.

- **Who** is providing the information? Is this clear or is the source anonymous? What is his/her/its reputation? Does the source have specific knowledge that makes them an “expert” on the issue at hand?
- **What** information is provided? What is the real content /substance of the information produced/delivered independently of the motivation of the source?

- **Why** are they providing this information? What is the agenda of the source? Does the source have a specific interest?
- **How** is the information presented, how is it formulated? Is it clear what research methods are used? How is the information gathered by the source? Is the material presented in an objective, neutral and transparent way?
- **When** is/was the information gathered and when is/was it provided?

Illustrations:

1. Different organizations (who) who may have specific purposes of their own (why), talk with different individuals (who and how), and the results of these talks can be presented by them in different ways (how), leading to different interpretations of the information (what).
2. A taxi driver (who) may be a reliable source on local geographical information (what), but may not be as reliable source on the political situation in his country (what) because he may not have expert knowledge or an objective agenda (why)
3. During a counter-insurgency operation in a village in Chechnya, Russian special forces burn down several houses and a dozen residents, including both women and men, are killed. The Moscow newspaper XXX subsequently describes the incident as an ambush targeting Russian troops in which "12 bandits were killed". In assessing whether or not to use the information provided by newspaper XXX, it would be relevant to consider the fact that the newspaper is pro-Kremlin in its report (who and why), is based entirely on comments by a Special Forces' spokesperson (who), and is slated in its coverage in referring to the insurgents as "bandits" (how).
4. An international oil company (who) active in the Niger delta in Nigeria (where) providing information on the current (when) security situation in the delta (what) via a newsletter on the company's website (how).

2.2.5 Hierarchy of sources

A general hierarchy of sources cannot be established. At least not in the sense that this means that the sources with the highest rank in such a hierarchy always provide the most reliable information.

Different subjects (in the context of certain country of origin information) require different approaches for the starting point of research and thereafter the selection, validation (and use) of sources.

The subject (the question that needs to be answered) is decisive for the sources that will be consulted first. A researcher looking for information on the general human rights situation in country X may be most successful in finding valuable information on this subject when he starts his research by consulting e.g. international organisations and NGO's. When he's looking for more specific information however, for example on particular events in country X, he may be more successful when starting his research by consulting other sources such as national or local news agencies or experts.

In short, some sources (e.g. international organisations and NGO's) may be more valuable for information on the general human rights situation, whereas other sources (e.g. national or local news agencies or experts) may be more valuable for information on particular events.

After having found the information, the source as well as the information needs to be validated. A source that is generally accepted as being a reliable source, may appear to be less reliable

where specific issues are concerned (illustration 1). And a source that is known to be biased may nevertheless provide reliable information on certain issues (illustration 2).

Illustrations:

1. The US Department of State is usually seen as a high-ranking source in terms of reliability. However, its annual report on Iraq 2005 does not mention the Abu Ghraib prison in which US soldiers abused prisoners. In this case, reports from objective human rights organisations or from countries which were not directly involved in the Iraq war may be ranked higher in terms of reliability and objectivity.
2. The website of a political party can be the best source to answer a question on the organisational structure, whereas it might not be an objective source on other matters, such as whether human rights are being or have been violated.

Notwithstanding the fact that it is not possible to provide a general hierarchy of sources, some sources are referred to in reports more often than others. Accompanying the draft guidelines of April 2007 was a list of frequently used sources, as a tool to help COI researchers. When using this list it should, as has already been said, always be borne in mind that these sources are not "recommended" as such. The source, as well as the information, needs to be validated according to these guidelines.

2.3. Specific issues

2.3.1 If information is found from only a single source

If information from only one source can be found, the context of that source should be assessed, such as:

- whether the country and/or the subject is widely reported on or not;
- whether the country has a lively press;
- whether censorship or self-censorship takes place etc.

The fact that only one source could be found should be mentioned explicitly and the context should be explained.

If possible, the sources consulted should be mentioned and briefly described, especially if the sole source that provided the information is not well-known.

Illustration:

Various sources (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, etc) have been consulted. The only information on the subject identified was reported in a local newspaper whose context is not known.

2.3.2 If information from a “dubious” source is found

It may occur that after consideration of who, what, why, when, how (see Validation of sources par. 2.2.4), a source has been assessed as being “dubious”. “Dubious” in this case means that the source could not be assessed as being reliable.

If this is the only source found and if the information seems important or particularly relevant, the information can be presented in the report. However, it should be stated explicitly that the source could not be assessed as being reliable and for which reasons.

Illustration:

Information such as personal websites, weblogs, internet forums and chat boxes are usually regarded as dubious because the source can not be clearly identified. An exception might be the official weblog of a well-known person who is traceable and verifiable as a source, e.g. a certain politician or journalist.

Remark:

The reliability of Wikipedia is widely discussed because the information can be altered by anyone who wishes to do so. Nevertheless, if important/relevant information is found only on Wikipedia, the information can be used in the report but the validation of the source and the reasoning behind the validation should be added.

3. Information: selection and validation

3.1 General principles

3.1.1 Quality criteria for evaluating and validating information

Please note that the quality criteria used to validate the source are different from the quality criteria used to validate the information.

Several **quality criteria** are important for the quality of research and the COI-report.

The first and foremost consideration must be the relevance of the information. If information is not relevant to the subject, it should be excluded.

Reliability, currency, objectivity, accuracy, traceability and transparency are all considered to be important criteria. However, it is not possible to order these criteria into a hierarchy. Their degree of importance depends on the subject of the questions being answered.

If some of these criteria are not met, this does not mean that the information cannot be used. For instance, the objectivity of the information is generally considered to be very important. However, in certain cases non-objective or non-neutral information can be used if other quality criteria are fulfilled, but it would be necessary to indicate this bias.

- **Relevance:** pertinent to the matter, fact, event, or situation in question.
- **Reliability:** trustworthy to the matter, fact, event, or situation in question.
- **Currency:** up-to-date or the most recent information available AND where the events in question have not changed since the release of the information.
- **Objectivity:** not influenced by emotions, personal prejudices, interests or biases.
- **Accuracy:** conformity of a statement, or opinion, or information to the factual reality or truth.
- **Traceability:** the degree to which the primary and/or original source of a piece of information can be identified.
- **Transparency:** the quality of the information is clear, non equivocal and intelligible.

3.1.2 Cross-checking information

All information should be cross-checked with information from other sources whenever possible unless it is an undisputed/ obvious fact (e.g. London is the capital of England, Saddam Hussein was president of Iraq). It should be explicitly mentioned when cross-checking has not been possible (e.g. "No corroborating information could be found from the sources consulted").

Wherever possible, the information provided by one source should be cross-checked with information from another source (double checked) and additional sources as appropriate (multi-checked). These cross-checks should be done with different kinds of sources (see paragraph 2.2.2). This is even more important when the information found does not fulfil some of the above mentioned quality criteria.

When cross-checking, care should be taken to avoid the danger of round tripping of information. A side effect of round tripping is that information may not be as current as it appears to be. See paragraph 2.2.3.

3.1.3 Balancing the information

As indicated earlier (paragraphs 2.2.2 and 3.1.2), every effort should be made to use a varied range of sources to provide balanced information.

If different sources present contradictory information then all those sources should/ could be carefully validated and presented in the report. In these cases it might be necessary to assess the quality and reliability of the information, whilst avoiding any personal bias with regard to the situation or event (see also paragraph 4.1.1).

3.2 Specific issues

3.2.1 If contradictory information is found

If relevant but contradictory information is found on a certain subject, a search into the background and context of the sources should be made and the contradictions should be made explicit. As indicated above, the sources of such information should/could be carefully validated and the quality and reliability of the information assessed.

Illustration:

Several sources state that there are 3 catholic churches in city X at moment Y, but one source states that there are 5 catholic churches. This seems to be contradictory information. A closer look at these sources might lead to the conclusion that outdated information was used, or perhaps a different definition of "catholic church".

3.2.2 If no information can be found

If no information has been found (e.g. as to the question of whether a certain event took place), this does not necessarily mean that the event did not occur. The lack of information should be dealt with and placed in context. For instance, if there is no report of the event and the country or subject in question is generally well-documented, this may indicate that it is less likely that the event took place. Conversely, if it is generally the case that there is little information available on the country and/or the subject, this should also be taken into account.

4. Writing factual COI products

4.1 Presentation of the information

The COI product should be factual and objective. This means that all the facts should be presented in a neutral way, without bias, on the basis of balanced and validated information and within the correct context.

The language used should not be judgemental or opinionated so that it does not influence the decision-making process.

The information product will be better understood by the end users if it is presented in a logical, well structured and intelligible way. COI-producers should always bear in mind that the end users have to be able to easily retrieve the information specifically needed without having to read or look through the entire report. It is advisable to use a style guide.⁹

The researched information can be presented in different ways: quoting, rephrasing or summarizing. It may depend on circumstances – sometimes it is easier, more adequate or effective to rephrase or summarize than to quote.

4.1.1 Transparency of information

It is advisable to be as transparent as possible in the use and presentation of information and sources. The following aspects should be taken into account:

- *Relevant information*
Only useful and relevant information should be provided (information that answers the question as precisely as possible). Where it is necessary to provide information not directly related to the question, an explanation on why this extra information is provided should be given.
- *Original/transcribed names of persons and organizations*
To avoid confusion, the names of persons and organizations should be mentioned in the original language and/or transcribed.
- *Time frame*
It should be mentioned that the research for the COI-product was done in a limited time frame. The date of publication should be given.
- *Opinions/assessments*
If the presented information reflects an “opinion” this should be clearly indicated.

Illustrations (of opinion):

1. Human Rights Watch, in its 2005 annual report *concludes* that “...”
2. UNHCR, in its report on ... *assesses the situation in ...* as being worrying.

⁹ See for example the style guide of the UNHCR (Department of International Protection, Protection Information Section UNHCR: *Style Guide second edition*, Geneva. July 2005. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=42d67b3a4&page=search> (consulted 23-04-08)

- *Information from only one source*
The fact that only one source could be found should be mentioned explicitly and the context should be explained. If possible, the sources consulted should be mentioned and briefly described, especially if the sole source that provided the information is one that is not well-known.
- *Information from a “dubious” source*
If information from a “dubious” source is presented, it should be mentioned explicitly, and an assessment of the source should be made.
If this “dubious” source is the only source found and if the information seems important or particularly relevant, the information can be presented in the report. However, it should be stated explicitly that the source could not be assessed as being reliable and for which reasons.
- *Contradictory information*
If different sources present contradictory information, this should be mentioned explicitly and information from those sources (after careful validation) should/could be presented, as well as an assessment of the reliability of the information/source.

Illustrations:

1. According to the BBC News article “xxx”, ten persons were arrested, while Moskovskoe Novosti says in article “xxx” that two persons were detained ...
2. According to news agent X, a demonstration took place on the 1st of January 2007 during which several people were arrested. Amnesty International does not mention the event, whereas it normally does report on this subject, nor do any other sources that frequently report on issues like this. News agent X is generally known for its detailed information as it makes use of local reporters.

- *If no information was found*
If no information has been found this should be explicitly mentioned, adding that the fact that no information was found does not necessarily mean that the event did not occur. This explanation also needs to be placed in context (see also par. 3.2.2).
It should be mentioned that the research for the COI-product was done in a limited time frame. Moreover it should be mentioned which (main) sources were consulted.

4.1.2 Traceability of information

It is important to present the information exactly as it was given by the sources used. In the process of translating or paraphrasing the content and meaning of the information should not be distorted.

It should be indicated clearly which piece of information comes from which source (see paragraph 4.2.1).

Additionally, in the case where the item of information was found in a source which refers to another (original) source which is no longer accessible (for instance the website has ceased to exist or the article was censored etc.), it should be pointed out which source is the original and which is a secondary source.

Illustrations:

“L’Osservatore Romano” citing/referring to the article published on the website “Voice of Martyrs” gives an example of persecution of Christians in Libya. A researcher finds the information only in “L’Osservatore Romano” while the website “Voice of Martyrs” is not available anymore. In such a case a researcher indicates L’Osservatore Romano as a secondary source citing/referring to a original source which is “Voice of Martyrs”:

L’Osservatore Romano, *Christians in Libya*, 09.02.2007 – www.kjhfcckjhnefkjn (consulted: 20.02.2007) [based on: Voice of Martyrs]

4.2 Presentation of sources

4.2.1 References

As a minimum requirement, every piece of information must be referenced by one source, preferably the original/primary source. It is not necessary to mention all sources that have been consulted to cross-check a specific piece of information. It is sufficient to mention in the disclaimer that all information has been cross-checked with at least one other source unless it concerns an undisputed fact (see paragraph 4.4.1).

References to sources can be given either in the main text or in foot- or endnotes.

It is recommended that references appear on the same page as the text they refer to. In this way, whenever some pages of a report are photocopied, the sources of the information are always identifiable. Therefore footnotes on the same page are advisable.

All sources referred to in the report/query response should be fully referenced in the report. Internet sources should be fully referenced as well, including the link plus the date on which the site was accessed.

It is recommended to present references in a standardized way. If a full bibliography is made, references in the text or in foot- or endnotes can be short (e.g.: author, short title, date of publication and page number). This will make the report more readable (see paragraph 4.2.2 about annotation).

It is also good practice to list not only the sources referred to in the report/query response but all (or the main) sources of information consulted during the research. However, in case no information was found, the main sources consulted should be mentioned (see paragraph 4.1.1 “If no information was found”).

It is strongly recommended that copies of all source material are kept because, for example, news items on the internet may be removed after a while.

4.2.2 Annotation

Sources should be clearly identified in a standard way of annotating. It should be noted that there are a number of different standards.

Example of international standard (ISO):¹⁰

BURCHARD, JE. How humanists use a library. In *Intrex: report of a planning conference on information transfer experiments*, Sept. 3, 1965. Cambridge, Mass. : M.I.T. Press, 1965, p. 219.

Example of British academic standard:

Author's surname, initial(s) (Date of publication) *Title of publication*. Place of publication: Publisher.

The minimum requirement for annotating sources includes: author's surname and initials (or name of newspaper), title of publication, date of publication.

The most *primary or original* source should be used and thus annotated. There is no benefit in annotating several different sources (e.g. UK Home Office, US State Dept, IRB Canada) if they all refer to the same original source (see paragraph 2.2.3).

Illustration:

Constitución Política de Colombia, 1991 con reforma de 1997", in *Base de Datos Políticos de las Américas* [online], <http://www.georgetown.edu/pdba/Constitutions/Colombia/colombia.html> (consulted: 04-12-2001)

4.3 Spelling

Indicate the spelling and transcription standards used in the report. For example, with Arabic, Chinese, or Cyrillic writing, it is important to emphasise that different transcription modes in Roman script are possible.

4.4 Disclaimers

Each COI product should include clear disclaimers on sources and information and on the use of the COI-product. In order to facilitate EU-wide exchange of COI it is advised to include disclaimers in the national language and also in English.

4.4.1 Disclaimer on sources and information

Recommended disclaimer on sources and information:

This report was written according to the common EU-guidelines for processing factual COI (2008). It was therefore composed on the basis of carefully selected, publicly available sources of information. All sources used are referenced. All information presented, except for undisputed/obvious facts has been cross-checked, unless stated otherwise. The information provided has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care within a limited time frame. However, this document does not pretend to be exhaustive. Neither is this document

¹⁰ International Organization for Standardization (ISO), *ISO 690:1987 Information and documentation – Bibliographic references – content, form and structure*. Ottawa, 08-15-03 (Last update). <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/iso/tc46sc9/standard/690-1e.htm> (consulted 23-04-2008)

conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. If a certain event, person or organization is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organization does not exist. The information in the report does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the authority and makes no political statement whatsoever.

UK Home Office Disclaimer:

The information in this COI report is limited to that which can be identified from source documents. While every effort is made to cover all relevant aspects of a particular topic, it is not always possible to obtain all information concerned. For this reason, it is important to note that information included in the report should not be taken to imply anything beyond what is actually stated. For example, if it is stated that a particular law has been passed, this should not be taken to imply that it has been effectively implemented unless stated.

4.4.2 Restrictions on the use of the report

Classification

On each COI product it should be clearly indicated:

- by whom the document can be accessed;
- and how the document can be used.

It is advisable:

- to mention the level of classification on every page of the COI product in order to avoid any misunderstanding when, for instance, only a part of the original document is photocopied;
- to mention a person (or function) to be contacted in case of any questions concerning the possible restrictions on the access or use of each COI product.

Example in the case of a classified report:

"This report is for **[restricted / internal etc.] use. It cannot be quoted."

"The public sources of information used in this report can be quoted, but not the report itself."

"The information made available through this document cannot be used and/or quoted in an asylum decision, in a public document, on a web site."

Example in the case of a public report:

"This report is for public use and may be quoted."

Reproduction

A disclaimer about reproduction of the report should be clearly mentioned in the report.

For example:

"This report can not be reproduced or republished (partially or entirely) without the written consent of X"

4.5 Quality control

Quality control should be inherent in the process of production of COI, to ensure the overall quality of the product. Quality control implies ensuring that reports are produced in accordance with the quality criteria of these guidelines.

It is advisable to establish a quality control mechanism. At least some level of quality control should take place before the release of the COI product. Peer review and/or management review before release is a minimum standard of quality control.

After release, feedback from user groups or experts is helpful, for example in ensuring that the report addresses their needs.

Example of external quality control:

Review undertaken – either before or after release - by representatives of a national refugee council, Amnesty International, and/or academic experts on certain countries.

UK example:

In 2002 an independent Advisory Panel on Country Information was established to oversee the quality and accuracy of the Home Office's COI products.

PART 2 – EXPLANATORY NOTES ON THE GUIDELINES

5. Note on public versus classified information - facilitating information exchange.

Target of this note

This note aims at contributing to the current international debate on the exchange of COI and the cooperation in the field of COI.

This note is directed at those responsible for the management of national COI units and the development, implementation and evaluation of classification systems and bi- or multilateral agreements on information exchange.

5.1. Introduction

5.1.1. General introduction

The remit for the ARGO project on the establishment of Common COI Guidelines is to deal only with what is called “public information”. It goes without saying that deciding to deal only with public information as such, inevitably raises the **question as to the threshold beyond which information is no longer considered to be public**. When discussing this issue with European colleagues one is immediately confronted with:

1. an evident variation in national (corporate) cultures concerning classification;
2. a considerable confusion of tongues;
3. an important lack of transparency as to each other's rules of classification and on the mutual correspondence between different levels of classification.

Taking all this into account makes international information exchange a particular challenge.

The glossary that has been developed within the framework of the afore mentioned ARGO project already suggests some definitions on “public”, “public domain”, “classification”, etc.

5.1.2. Approach

The reader will be invited to analyze and describe the national classification rules from the point of view of the entitled client group of each and every bit of information. The question we deal with will be “Which are your different client groups and why and how are they separated from each other?” It is important to avoid focusing on the different levels of classification that may exist within the reader's organization.

As this note would like to emphasize, it might just be more efficient to approach classification from the angle of the client group. In the end classification is all about establishing thresholds between different client groups. Those thresholds should be based upon a realistic risk assessment and should mark the limits of different zones or areas characterized by more, or less, control on the distribution.

For instance, if country A is about to exchange certain COI with country B they might be much more concerned with the question as to where the information will be dispersed within country B's organization (“Who will be able to effectively access the information?”) than by being informed about the degree of classification country B will impose upon the exchanged information.

“Classified” and “public” do not necessarily have the same meaning in different countries. It is not helpful to know each other's denomination of classification levels when in one country the

denomination means that such information is under strict control and in the other it will be available to members of an NGO, an applicant or its lawyer just to name a few.

After having identified those client groups, the thresholds between them can be described as well. Those thresholds will mark the end or the beginning of more, or less, controlled zones. Logically, each zone should correspond with a level of classification.

It might be worth the effort for each EU-MS to fill in Figure 1 and to link the zones with their denomination of the classification levels. Bringing all these results together in a compilation would make it much easier to interpret each other's rules on classification. It only takes three steps to fill in Figure 1.

5.2. Distribution of information: assessing the risks involved

Although it might sound a bit dogmatic, imposing classification upon information is always done with a clear intention to contain and control the risk of that information being available to unintended clients.

Illustration:

If a checklist used by case officers to determine an applicant's country of origin is made available in its entirety to the applicant, the checklist might be passed on to others, who might use the information to prepare for his/her own asylum interview (the "cookbook effect"). In such circumstances it would no longer be possible to rely on the checklist as a tool for determining nationality.

As stated in the introduction to this note it is important to ignore the issue of the classification levels and to focus instead on the risks of distribution, on client groups and on the flow of information.

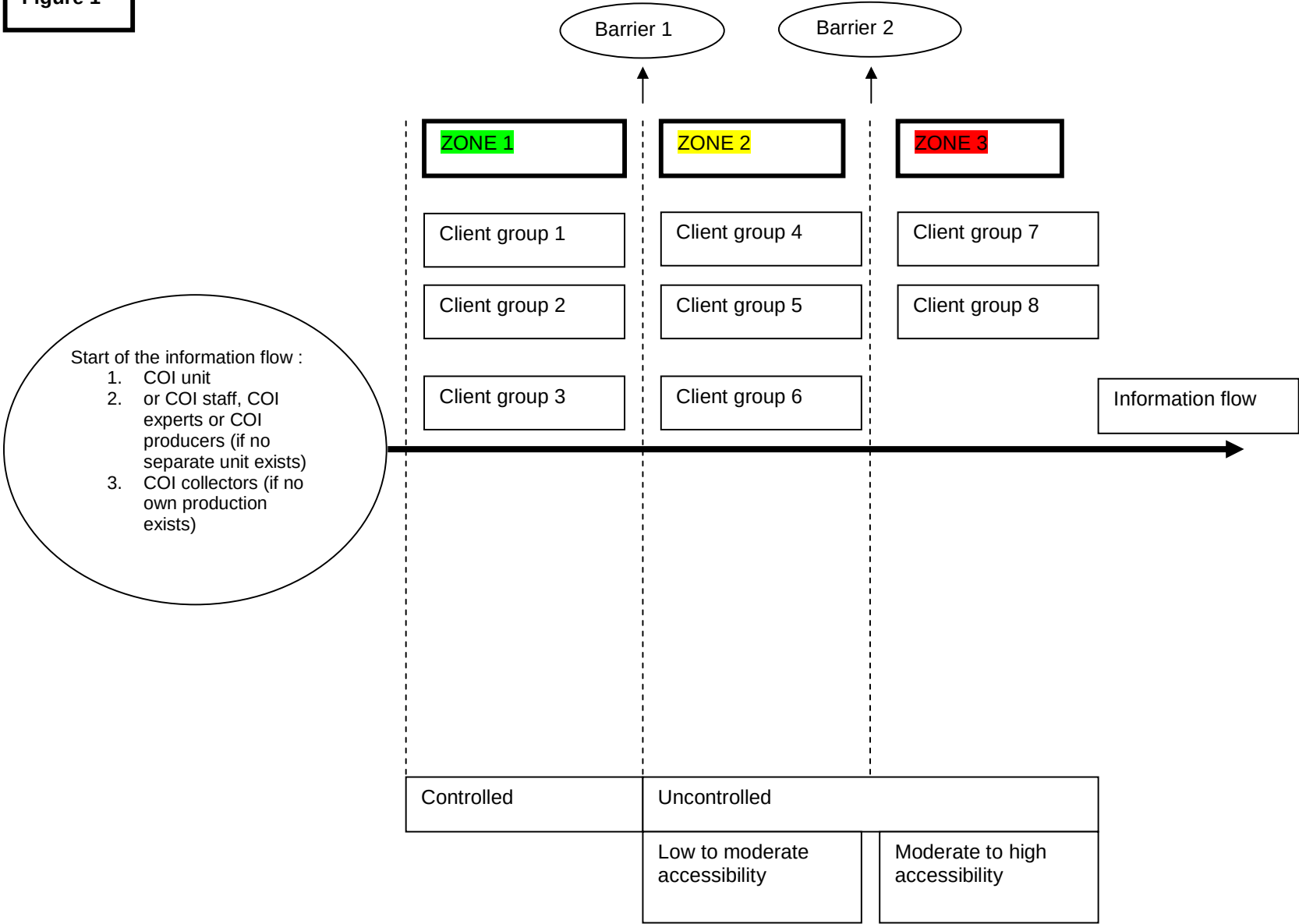
5.2.1. The information flow

If you take a look at Figure 1 you will see an abstract scheme of the information flow such as could be generated by an average COI unit, or by COI-producers or COI-collectors where no separate unit exists. The start of this flow is the COI unit. After having left the unit the information flows through the organization in order to reach its different clients.

5.2.2. The zones

The different zones incorporated in Figure 1 are zones of risk. Each of the zones corresponds with a certain level of risk involved in distributing information to client groups belonging to that zone. It goes without saying that non-sensitive information of course can circulate in more zones than very sensitive information. We will get back to this later.

Figure 1



5.2.3. Zone 1

Zone 1 is the zone which can be described as controlled distribution. This means that when information is handed over to client groups belonging to that zone the author of the information can be certain of the fact that the information will remain in that zone and will not be handed over to client groups in zone 2 or 3. "Controlled" means that at the least:

1. there exists a set of rules imposing ways of handling the information;
2. this set of rules is known and implemented by the addressees of the information;
3. information will be marked in such a way that those handling the information can easily determine the possible restrictions on the distribution of that information.

5.2.4. Zone 2

Zone 2 is a zone marked by uncontrolled distribution. This means that once information is handed over to client groups belonging to that zone, the author of the information will lose control of the further distribution to any originally unintended client group. The persons belonging to those client groups are not subjected to strict rules on the protection and distribution of information, at least not to those rules of the framework within which the original information was produced.

Apart from being uncontrolled, zone 2 is characterized by the fact that the information made available to those client groups is only slightly to moderately accessible. This means that:

1. any further distribution depends on the willingness of a zone 2 client to further distribute the information;
2. anyone not belonging to zone 1 or zone 2 but wishing to access information circulating in zone 2 will encounter difficulties in obtaining that information.

5.2.5. Zone 3

Zone 3 is also marked by uncontrolled distribution, but differs substantially from zone 2 due to the fact that the information is moderately to highly accessible. Information can circulate freely and anybody wanting to access the information will not find it very difficult to do so.

5.2.6. Other zones possible?

In most organizations zone 1 will be preceded by other zones in which even more sensitive information is circulating. As will be explained later those zones are of very limited interest to this debate. Since essentially we are focusing on public information, and therefore also dealing with non-public information it is mainly barrier 1 which concerns us rather than other possible barriers delimiting zone 1 from preceding zones.

5.2.7. Barrier 1

Barrier 1 delimits zone 1 from zone 2 and, as such, marks the end of the zone within which information can circulate in a controlled way. As we will see later Barrier 1 will be the filter beyond which no sensitive information will pass. As such it delimits the client groups having access to sensitive information from those not having access to that information.

5.2.8. Barrier 2

Barrier 2 delimits zone 2 from zone 3. Although in both zones only non-sensitive information will circulate, Barrier 2 will separate the client groups from zone 2 from those of zone 3. This threshold will in fact separate a zone in which the risk of further distribution of information to originally non-entitled client groups is low to moderate. The information made available will only trickle down to such non-entitled client groups or those non-entitled client groups who will have to make some effort to have access to the documents concerned.

5.2.9. "Waterproof"?

The threshold of greatest concern to us is Barrier 1 which separates the controlled from the uncontrolled zones. This threshold comprises a set of rules which determine the circulation and use of information within the controlled zone. In order to increase efficiency these rules should be accompanied by an audit and control system.

The existence of such a set of rules does not rule out the possibility of information unintentionally passing Barrier 1 into the uncontrolled zones. Human error cannot be ruled out. Nor does it exclude the possibility of intentional neglect or intentionally handing over information to unintended client groups.

5.3. First step: Identifying the different client groups

If you look at your own organization you will be able to identify a number of different client groups which receive or have direct access to different types of information. All of those interact in one way or another in the information flow.

Most probably some or all of the following imaginable client groups exist within your organization or are part of the information network of your organization:

Civil servants working for the COI unit	Civil servants working for the asylum agency or migration department as a case officer	Civil servants working for the asylum agency or migration department as a decision maker	Civil servants working for the asylum agency or migration department as a policy officer	Civil servants working for the asylum agency or migration department in a management function
Courts and judges in general	Staff of courts and judges in general	Appeal courts and judges	Staff of appeal courts and judges	Members of internal review boards for COI
Members of external review boards for COI	Courts and judges in general committed to guaranteeing confidentiality	Staff of courts and judges in general committed to guaranteeing confidentiality	Appeal courts and judges committed to guaranteeing confidentiality	Staff of Appeal courts and judges committed to guaranteeing confidentiality
Members of internal review boards for COI committed to guaranteeing confidentiality	Members of external review boards for COI committed to guaranteeing confidentiality	Ministers or others belonging to the executive power	Politicians in general or Members of Parliament	Intergovernmental or supranational bodies
European partners	NGO's	Interpreters	The applicant	The applicant's lawyer
The services for social support	Staff members of the reception centers	Witnesses during the interview	Guardians (of minor applicants)	The asylum agency's or migration department's legal service or the lawyers working for them

Anybody not belonging to one of the client groups above but wishing to obtain COI distributed by the COI unit	The wider public	...		
---	------------------	-----	--	--

Most probably this list is far from exhaustive. When doing the exercise for your own organization feel free to add more types of client groups.

5.4. Second step: Combining client groups and risk zones

Now that all possible client groups have been identified, our next step will be to group them. The grouping exercise will be done **twice**.

First we will identify those client groups which could be considered to belong to the asylum agency or migration department as such, or which are subject to know and apply the rules of classification as implemented within your organization. What characterizes these client groups is the fact that from the point of view of the information they can be considered to be **controlled**. Information circulating within and between these client groups is subject to controlled distribution. Each and every member of such a group knows how to use the information circulating within the group and knows exactly how and which information can be distributed to other client groups.

Looking back at Figure 1, these client groups should be situated to the left hand side of Barrier 1 and therefore belong to Zone 1, the zone of controlled distribution.

This grouping will differ from country to country but in the end might resemble something like this:

Civil servants working for the COI-unit	Civil servants working for the asylum agency or migration department as a case officer	Civil servants working for the asylum agency or migration department as a decision maker	Civil servants working for the asylum agency or migration department as a policy officer	Civil servants working for the asylum agency or migration department in a management function
Courts and judges in general committed to guaranteeing confidentiality	staff of courts and judges in general committed to guaranteeing confidentiality	Appeal courts and judges committed to guaranteeing confidentiality	Staff of appeal courts and judges committed to guaranteeing confidentiality	Ministers or others belonging to the executive power
Members of internal review boards for COI	Members of internal review boards for COI committed to guaranteeing confidentiality	Members of external review boards for COI committed to guaranteeing confidentiality	The asylum agency's or migration department's legal service or the lawyers working for them	...

The client groups that are left have to be divided across the two remaining zones. Therefore we will have to define the difference between both zones and thus the meaning of Barrier 2. Both zones are marked by what we called **uncontrolled** distribution. By making the information available to members of the client groups in both zones, the author as such of the information loses control on the further distribution of the information to possible non-entitled client groups. What marks the **difference between both zones** is the way in which the information is made accessible to those non-entitled client groups.

In most countries the two zones are treated as one. Nevertheless, within the framework of exchange of COI it might be well worth considering where there are some differences. Some countries never make their non-sensitive COI reports available to a wider public for instance by publishing them on a website or by sending reports to those who request it. Only those items of information used to decide a case or to motivate the case are made available to the applicant and his/her lawyer. Neither the entire COI collection, the complete report used in the individual decision, nor any other COI product are made available to a wider public. Since those countries do not make their COI reports publicly available, other countries should respect this and not circulate COI products received from those countries.

In a bilateral relationship this could be seen as an interpretation of the **third country rule**: COI reports from country A, obtained by country B are never to be distributed further by country B. For non-sensitive information a lot of exceptions exist. The variation on the third country rule applied by some countries is that they allow other countries to redistribute their information only within the framework of individual asylum or migration cases.

Let us return to the difference between zone 2 and zone 3. The information distributed to the client groups in zone 2 is not or only moderately accessible to non-entitled client groups (those from zone 3). This means it would take a lot of effort from members of those non-entitled client groups to gain access to the information or that it would depend on individual actions by members of the client groups in zone 2 to further distribute the information to members of non-entitled client groups. As a consequence the information made available to the client groups in zone 2 is **exposed to a lower risk** of unintended redistribution than the information in zone 3 where the risk is moderate to high. From the point of view of information security this might be of some importance to some of the COI partners.

Of the client groups identified under par. 3 the following might belong to zone 2:

Courts and judges in general	Staff of courts and judges in general	Appeal courts and judges	Staff of Appeal courts and judges	Members of external review boards for COI
Interpreters	The applicant himself and his lawyer	Witnesses during the interview	Guardians (of minor applicants)	...

Zone 3 as such certainly consists of the group "wider public".

Several of the client groups identified under par. 3 have not been attributed to a zone as yet. It is quite impossible to do this as an example because it will depend on the information security policy applied by each country. It is not important to come to a kind of common agreement on which client group should be situated in which zone. Our only interest is to know what is each other's national policy. That would be the basics for a mutual understanding of each others rules and views. Based on such transparency common agreements on COI exchange are much easier to reach.

5.5. Third step: Linking risk zones with the different levels of classification

Up until now we have systematically avoided discussing classification systems and levels (degrees) of classification. However, looking back at Figure 1 we can easily link the zones with levels of classification.

Barrier 1 marks the limit between the controlled and the non-controlled zone, and thus between the classified zone (zone 1) and the non-classified zone (zones 2 and 3).

The name of the classified zone may vary from one country to another. Some will call it “confidential”, others “internal”. The **denomination doesn’t really matter** because in the end it is the client groups that we are interested in.

The non-classified zones will generally be called “public”, but as explained earlier zone 3 tends to be more public than zone 2. For some countries that distinction may be of considerable importance.

6. Note on copyright and the “public domain” - facilitating information exchange.

Target of this note

This note aims at contributing to the current international debate on the exchange of COI and the cooperation in the field of COI. Without any intention of being exhaustive this note lays down reflections made during the process of the development of Common COI Guidelines within a European framework.

Target group

This note is directed at those responsible for the management of national COI units and the development, implementation and evaluation of classification systems and bi- or multilateral agreements on information exchange.

6.1. Introduction

This is a short note on the impact of copyright rules on the distribution and exchange of CO. These rules are imposed by external bodies, external to the national administrative bodies. The influence or impact of, for instance, a COI unit will be rather limited.

Nevertheless the subject should be dealt with. First of all, when one touches on the issue of classification, the term “public domain” should be explained. Secondly, copyright rules as such can be a cause for not distributing or exchanging information, and as a consequence those rules can be a cause for classifying documents.

6.2. Copyright as an obstacle to distribution and exchange

Part of the information used by COI researchers is subject to copyright rules. Those rules regulate the possibilities of further redistribution of the information.

Although a bit confusing, some countries might classify information for copyright reasons, that way limiting the further redistribution of the information. This might make the discussion on classification more complicated. We will have to keep this in mind.

Very often there tends to be some **confusion on the terms “public” and “public domain”**.

“Public domain” is opposed to “private domain” and refers to texts, images, etc. that are not subject to copyright rules. There is no legal owner of the information or document, or, if there is one, the original owner renounced to the ownership. The information is (or has become) public property.

Being “public” or not concerns classification and not copyright. Of course, information belonging to the public domain will always be public but both are very different qualities and have nothing to do with each other.

Of course, the confusion arises where copyright rules themselves are the cause of classification and that way an obstacle to further distribution of the information.

PART 3 – GLOSSARY

7. Glossary

This glossary has been developed for the purpose of enabling the reader to fully understand the guidelines. The glossary is an inseparable part of the guidelines.

TERM	DEFINITION	SYNONYM/ ANTONYM	NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH
Abstract	A brief and concise summary of the main points of an argument, a text or a report. <i>Remark: Reading the abstract can help you decide if you want to locate and read the whole article or book.</i>	Compendium Aperçu Digest Recapitulation Outline Résumé Synopsis Brief account	Introduction Prologue
Accuracy	The degree of conformity of a statement, or opinion, or information to the factual reality or truth. <i>Example: "The lawyer questioned the truth of my factual account".</i>	Veracity Sureness Verity Certainty Correctness <i>Antonym:</i> Inaccuracy Falsehood Untruth	
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 <i>Antonym:</i> Synthesis	Description Report on facts Evaluation Assessment Investigation Summary Synthesis
Appropriate	Quality criteria meaning that the information/source fits the fact, event or situation concerned or examined.	Suitable Adapted Pertinent Fitting Adequate Proper <i>Antonym:</i> Improper Inappropriate Unfitting Insuitable Inadequate Unadapted	
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). (See also definition of HCR, Glossary , 2006)	Appraisal Judgement Valuation	Description Evaluation Survey Analysis

Balance	To take all relevant parameters into consideration in a proportional way. <i>Example: "He balanced the pros and the cons before making a choice".</i>	Counter-balance Equity Proportion <i>Antonym:</i> Imbalance	
Classification	The act of classifying content, source and/or information product according to specific (legal) criteria.	<i>Antonym:</i> Declassification	
Classified	The state in which the distribution of content, its source and/or an information product is being designated as restricted to a certain purpose and/or to a limited (and, if possible, well-defined) group of addressees.	Restricted Confidential Secret Private Internal Limited <i>Antonym:</i> Unclassified Declassified Public	
Compilation	A work, such as a book, file, document, or list, solely composed of pre-existing materials gathered from other sources. Apart from the assembly of these pre-existing materials as such, there is no added value (such as an evaluation, analysis, etc.)		Analysis Synthesis Assessment Statement Abstract
Confidential	A degree or level of classification of the content, source and/or information product.	Restricted	
Corroboration	The act of supporting or strengthening the accuracy, certainty, validity or veracity of information describing facts, events or situations, with other information (or other evidence). <i>Remark: False corroboration: certain information may be found in a number of sources, but after careful examination of each of the sources it may become apparent that all the sources obtained the information from the same, single source.</i>	confirmation substantiation authentication validation, verification	Cross-checking
Cross-checking	The process through which the quality of the information obtained is submitted to scrutiny by testing whether (one) different and unrelated source(s) confirms that information.	Verification Double-check Triple-check <i>Antonym:</i> Compilation	Cross-reference (see definition In: HCR, Glossary , 2006)
Currency	The state of being up-to-date or belonging to the present time and therefore still being valuable with respect to the moment the original statement was issued.	Present-day Up-to-date Current <i>Antonym:</i> (Out)dated Old Past	
Disclaimer	A written statement append to a document in order to 1. limit under certain conditions the	Remark	Introduction Synthesis

	responsibility for the possible lack of exhaustiveness or for certain (side) effects of the use of the information contained in a document and/or to 2. limit the right of use of that document to a copyright or to a certain circle of clients.		
Disclosable	The quality of content, source and/or information product of not being subject to classification and therefore being open to unrestricted distribution.	Publishable Divulgatable <i>Antonym:</i> Undisclosable Secret Restricted	
Diversity	The quality of being varied in kind. <i>Example:</i> "A diversity of possibilities".	Variety Heterogeneity <i>Antonym:</i> Uniformity Homogeneity Sameness Conformity	Similar Multiplicity
Evaluation	A systematic and objective analysis of given fact, event or situation, in order to assert knowingly a judgement or assessment (against given standards).	Finding Judgement Intellectual opinion	Description
Expert	A person with proven and reputed special or superior skill in or competent knowledge in a particular area or subject, knowledge as the result of experience or training. An expert acts as a specialist independently from his official function. He produces expertise. Whether an expert is paid or not for providing information does not matter as such. <i>Remark: Somebody can be an expert, but not an informant or an informer.</i> Example: The lawyer providing information on the legal system is an expert. The human rights lawyer or journalist providing information on the violation of human rights in prisons is an expert.	Specialist Adviser Intellectual authority (e.g. academic) Consultant Think tanks Universities trusted sources <i>Antonym:</i> Amateur Neophyte Apprentice Novice	Informant Informer Official agent Official expert
Face-to-face conversation	The exchange of information between at least two parties meeting at a physical place, in general without leaving a written trace.	Joint meeting Face-to-face discussion <i>Antonym:</i> Mutual interaction via digital or electronic communications medium (e.g. chat)	
Hierarchy of sources	A (fixed) list of sources in which each source has been attributed a certain ranking based on criteria like quality, reliability, etc.	Ranking of sources <i>Antonym:</i> Catalogue Inventory	Inventory of sources

Independency	The quality of being free from control or influence.	Autonomous Free Unrestrained <i>Antonym:</i> Dependency Bound	Neutrality Objectivity
Informant	Person – official or private – furnishing useful information (to a researcher) on different domains in which he not necessarily has proven and reputed skills. Whether an informant is paid or not for providing information does not matter as such. <i>Remark: Somebody can be an informant, but not an expert.</i> Example: Somebody checking whether a school is located at a certain junction is an informant A human rights journalist providing information on the weather is an informant		Expert Canary (délateur) Informer
Information	The basic content or data gathered through specific research.		Source Informant Informer Expert
Informer	An informer is a person providing information but who has a vested interest in doing so. He can be considered being a stakeholder and therefore willing to influence or to harm. He might even approach the COI Unit himself. Whether an informer is paid or not for providing information does not matter as such.	Canary (délateur)	Expert Informant
Multiplicity	The quality of being varied in number.	Multeity Plenty Plurality <i>Antonym:</i> Singular	Diversity
Neutrality	The state of being unrelated or without any possible stakeholder ship to the subject matter.	Uninvolved Unimplicated Uninfluenced Impartiality <i>Antonym:</i> Partisan Involved	Independence Objectivity
Objectivity	The state of not being influenced by emotions, personal prejudices, or biases.	Detachment Unbiased Without prejudice Equitable Open-minded Fair <i>Antonym:</i>	Independence Neutrality

		Biased Partial Subjectivity	
Original information	The quality of information to be available in its unmodified form and content as distributed initially by its primary source or as distributed without any modification by an intermediate. <u>Example:</u> His report refers to only original information given by persons close to the examined event.	first-hand authentic genuine initial primary underived <i>Antonym:</i> second-hand derived secondary	Primary source
Original source	The quality of a source to be the person or institution documenting the event, fact or matter for the first time.		Primary source
Primary research	The process of search for first hand information and/or source close or related to facts, events or situations. Primary research of information describes the process of gathering information through interaction with people close to the examined event, fact or situation, and by different means, such as fact-finding mission or direct communication between researcher and source (e.g. by telephone, e-mail, fax, ...). <i>Remark: the avoidance of the use of intermediates is essential.</i>		Primary source
Primary source	The quality of a source to be close or directly related to facts, events or situations without any intermediary. <u>Example:</u> An eyewitness (e.g. live reporter) or direct victims or actors of an event are primary sources.	Firsthand Eyewitness Testimony <i>Antonym:</i> Second-hand Secondary source Indirect Intermediate	Persons and/or organizations reporting as first on certain events. Organizations like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, regardless their vested authority in the field, are not necessarily primary sources. Original source
Printed material	The state of publications or products to be published by means of pressed type or electronic way in order to offer them in a printed form to a certain circle of persons.	Printed document Publication	
Public	In general: The state of content, source and/or information product not to be subject, in theory, to limited distribution. In practice however it might be possible, or it will even be very likely that the public as such has no access to such content,	Open source Unrestricted Disclosable <i>Antonym:</i> Classified Restricted Confidential	Public domain

	source and/or information product due to it ignoring the mere existence of such content, source and/or information product, or due to practical thresholds (cfr. grey literature). <u>Remark:</u> In some EU MS “public” is to be considered a degree of classification i.e. the lowest degree applicable. In this context “public” means “not restricted to only internal distribution”. In fact some EU MS hardly ever or even never disclose information products any further than the applicant and his lawyer. In fact the applicant and his lawyer are the outer limits of the distribution chain. Therefore, in these MS, “public” does not necessarily correspond with “open to uncontrolled public disclosure”.		
Public domain	The status of publications, products, or sources that are not protected by copyright, or not subject to legal ownership by a third party, and therefore limiting their possible (re-)use and/or (re-)distribution. It would be a mere contradiction for something to belong to the public domain and in the same time being subject to classification. <u>Remark:</u> “Public domain” has no legal status in the UK.	<u>Antonym:</u> Private domain	Public
Readability	The quality of written language that makes it easy to read and understand.	Legibility Understandable Clear Comprehensible <u>Antonym:</u> Illegibility Unreadable Obscure	Coherence
Relevance	The state of being pertinent to the matter, fact, event, or situation at hand.	Pertinence <u>Antonym:</u> Irrelevance	
Reliability	The state of being trustworthy to the matter, fact, event, or situation at hand.	Credibility Trustworthiness Unquestionable Undoubtable Faithful Truthful Genuine Reputable Undisputable Veracious <u>Antonym:</u> Unreliable Doubtful Fake	Independence Pertinence Appropriate Traceability

		Questionable Faithless Untrustworthy False	
Report	A written and detailed account or description of the findings on facts, event or situation; which gives usually a statement on the result of the investigation.	Survey Description Account Study	Statement Judgement Opinion Analysis Forecast Summary Commentary
Round-tripping information	The fact of information being quoted differently in several sources, but which has to be referred in fact to a single original source or information. <u>Example:</u> Several secondary sources referred to each other as primary sources without referring adequately to their original source of information.	Duplicated information	Original information Cross-checking Corroboration
Scenario	A plausible description of an hypothesized chain of events. <u>Example:</u> "Planners developed several scenarios in case of war".	Forecast	Report Statement Assessment
Secondary source	The quality of a source that describes or relates to facts, events or situations already passed over by referring to intermediary or primary source.	Second-hand Subsidiary <i>Antonym:</i> Firsthand source Primary source	
Source	A person or institution producing first-hand or second-hand information.		Information
Statement	An oral or written declaration setting forth an appraisal of facts.	Declaration Explanation Presentation Account Appreciation Address Communiqué Opinion Judgement	Summary Analysis
Summary	A short and concise restatement of all major, significant points of a subject or report.	Compendium Abstract Aperçu Digest Recapitulation Outline Résumé Synopsis Brief account	Introduction Prologue
Traceability	The degree in which a piece of information or a statement is presented in such a way that the end-user is 1. capable of reconstructing the same information or statement based on the	Deducible Derivable Inferable <i>Antonym:</i> Indeductive	

	constituent parts and/or 2. is capable of identifying the individual sources and their kind (primary, secondary, ...) of each and every constituent part and/or 3. is capable of evaluating the statement made.	Undecomposable Untraceable	
Transparency	The quality of information to be clear and unequivocal and intelligible.	Clearness Intelligibility understandability <i>Antonym:</i> Distortion Obscurity Opacity Unclearness Equivocal Ambiguous	accuracy appropriate objectivity readability relevance
Up-to-date	The state of being in accord with the latest information available on a subject.	Latest Newest Current Recent Present <i>Antonym:</i> Out-of-date (Out)dated Past	
Validation of source and/or information	The process of evaluation of a source and/or information by (thoroughly and critically) assessing its cogency through quality criteria. <u>Remark:</u> The methods for validating source and information are however different.	Analysis of Assessment of Evaluation of	Description of

Annex 1: A preferred format for a factual COI report

NB: the format can also serve (slightly adapted) as an answer format as well.

Your logo

Name of organisation
Name of COI unit etc.



Country Name

Title report

[subtitle]

If wished, map of country

For internal/... use only. / For public use

Date/month and year

Prepared in accordance with the EU COI guidelines

Table of contents

Disclaimer	1
English summary.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Content of the report.....	4
List of sources used.....	5

Disclaimers

Disclaimer on sources and information

This report was written according to the common EU-guidelines for processing factual COI (2008). It was therefore composed on the basis of carefully selected, publicly available sources of information. All sources used are referenced. All information presented, except for undisputed/obvious facts has been cross-checked, unless stated otherwise.

The information provided has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care within a limited time frame. However, this document does not pretend to be exhaustive. Neither is this document conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

If a certain event, person or organization is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organization does not exist. The information in the report does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the authority and makes no political statement whatsoever.

Disclaimer on the use of report

This report is for **[restricted/internal etc.] use. It cannot be quoted.
The sources of information used in this report can be quoted, but not the report itself.

OR

This report is for public use and may be quoted.

AND

This report can not be reproduced or republished (partially or entirely) without the written consent of

Spelling (optional)

In this report the * transcription is used. Or ...

In this report the spelling of [name the sources] is used.

In case of doubts about names or spelling please contact ***.

English summary

[if the report was written in another language]

To facilitate international exchange of information, it is recommended to include a summary in English.

Introduction

Context/background (if needed)

Scope of the report

Content of the report

SIGNATURE (if wished):

Name organisation
Name COI unit

List of sources consulted

Annotation/ List of sources of information

Sources should be clearly identified in a standard way of annotating.

Every item of information used in the report must be referenced (in the text or in foot- or endnotes)

The minimum requirement for annotating should include:

Author's surname and initials (or name of newspaper), title of publication, date of publication.

Internet sources should be fully referenced in the list of sources (the full link plus the date on which the site was accessed). In the footnotes, the references to internet links may be shorter.

Sources of information should be listed in a standardized way.

Examples of annotation:

ACCORD/UNHCR, *Country Report – Nigeria*, 8th European Country of Origin Information Seminar Vienna, Final Report, H. 2.4.2, 28/29 June 2002

Amnesty International, *Vigilante Violence in the South and South-East*, November 2002, p. 12

Burchard, J.E. How humanists use a library. In *Intrex: report of a planning conference on information transfer experiments*, Sept. 3, 1965. Cambridge, Mass. : M.I.T. Press, 1965, p. 219.

Constitución Política de Colombia, 1991 con reforma de 1997", in *Base de Datos Políticos de las Américas* [online], <http://www.georgetown.edu/pdba/Constitutions/Colombia/colombia.html> (consulted: 04-12-2001)

Leonard, L. Adopting female "circumcision" in southern Chad: the experience of Myabé. In: B. Shell-Duncan & Y. Hernlund (eds): *Female 'circumcision' in Africa; culture, controversy and change*, Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner Publ: (2000), p. 167-191

Onitsha National, *Bakassi Boys ask Mbadinuju to remove leader*, www.onitshanational.com/links/adv.asp?blurb=96, consulted 22-03-2005

Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Familienplanung (ÖGF), *Weibliche Genitalverstümmelung; ein "harmloser" Brauch oder ein tiefgehender Schaden für Frauen?* Wien: Veranstaltung Weibliche Genitalverstümmelung (FGM), 8.5.2001

Reuters News, *Four Dead As Traders, Vigilantes Clash in Nigeria*, 21-12-2001