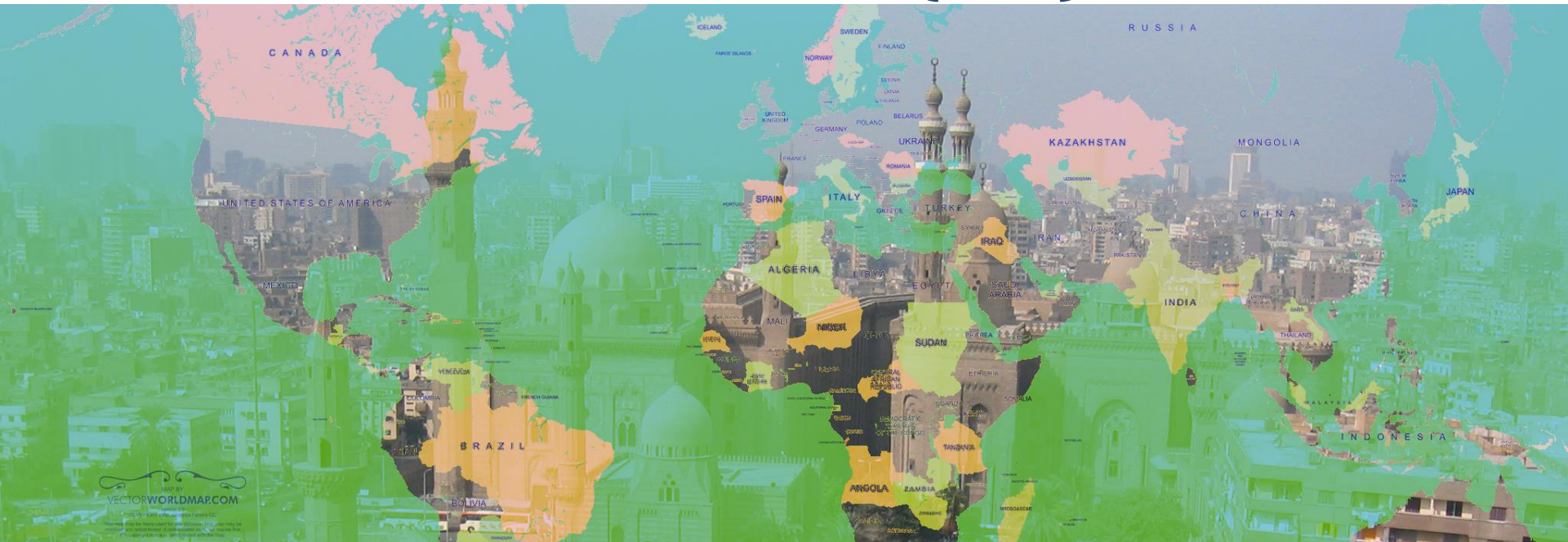


Researching Country of Origin Information (COI)



Research Unit (RU)

Refugee, Asylum and International Operations

April 2021



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Who are we?

- The Research Unit was established as an independent entity for COI in 1991
- Why?
 - To ensure that political considerations do not influence determinations regarding whether an applicant has a well-founded fear of persecution



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Services

Who are we?

- The Research Unit is a center of expertise in country of origin information (COI), including human rights conditions, in support of USCIS and DHS
- The Research Unit provides:
 - Reliable country of origin information and training to support timely and accurate adjudications
 - Other related assistance to fulfill the mission of USCIS and DHS



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Who are we?

- The unit consists of:
 - A director
 - 7 regional researchers
 - At times:
 - TDY researchers (refugee & asylum officers)
 - Administrative assistants
 - A student intern



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Who are we?

- The researchers cover the following regions:
 - Horn of Africa
 - Sub-Saharan Africa
 - Middle East & North Africa
 - Asia (South & East)
 - Europe & Central Asia
 - Latin America & the Caribbean
 - 2 researchers



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How can we help?

- General background information about a country conditions issue
- Information on specific cases to help adjudicators:
 - Prepare to interview an applicant
 - During an interview (in real time)
 - Make a decision on a case
- Sources of information that could be cited in a decision on a case



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COI Products & Services

- Internal website (ECN)
- ECN country pages
- Query responses (formal & informal)
- Monthly News Summary Bulletin
- Temporary Protected Status (TPS) reports
- Presentations & trainings



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COI Products & Services

- Speaker series events
- Hot Topics (news of interest)
- Encyclopedia of online resources
- Terrorism related grounds of ineligibility (TRIG) research
- Regional Teams pages
- Virtual office hours
- COI bank (in development)



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Priority Countries

- Sub-Saharan Africa
 - Cameroon
 - Democratic Republic of the Congo
 - Nigeria
- Horn of Africa
 - Ethiopia
 - Eritrea
 - Somalia
 - Sudan
- Latin America & the Caribbean
 - Venezuela
 - Honduras
 - Guatemala
 - El Salvador
 - Haiti
 - Mexico
 - Cuba
 - Nicaragua
 - Colombia
 - Brazil



Priority Countries

- Asia (South & East)
 - China
 - India
 - Burma
 - Pakistan
 - Sri Lanka
- Middle East & North Africa
 - Syria
 - Iraq
 - Yemen
 - Egypt
 - Turkey
- Europe & Central Asia
 - Russia
 - Ukraine
 - Iran
 - Afghanistan
 - Central Asian countries



Challenges

- Limited or lack of information
 - Lack of information on specific locations
 - Restrictions on access to certain countries
 - No independent human rights monitoring
 - War zones
 - Biased or state-run media



Challenges

- Linguistic & cultural barriers
 - Limited or lack of language abilities
 - Limited or lack of understanding of local realities
- Pre-existing assumptions of some officers
- Lack of resources, time, & staff



Unique Processes

- Adjudicators must cite publicly available information
 - It must be available to the applicant
 - In general, we do not use oral sources
- Incorporation of new technologies (Teams, Skype)



Unique Processes

- Peer review of all work products
- Comprehensive standard operating procedures (SOP)



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