The Information, Documentation and Research Division (DIDR) is an Ofpra department in charge of providing all staff with reliable, objective, transparent and updated information on the countries of origin of applicants for international protection, liable to support the decision-making process.
Information

The DIDR manages Ofpra’s new Professional Database, enriched since the end of 2013 with all the information necessary for assessing applications for international protection and protecting applicants who qualify. This includes all relevant information selected by the DIDR on the situation prevailing in applicants’ countries of origin, including documents produced within the division. It also includes practical tools to support the determination process, analyses by Ofpra’s Department of Legal, European and International Affairs and documentation related to international and European affairs. Country of Origin Information (COI) is also available to the French National Court of Asylum and the European counterparts of the DIDR.

A team led by a professional librarian is responsible for indexing all relevant reports, articles and other documents in this database. It also provides the layout of the reports of missions conducted in the countries of origin. The library section also conducts geopolitical monitoring and informs Ofpra’s staff of any conferences that are likely to be of interest to them in the course of their work. In addition, the section is responsible for providing staff with all relevant information on countries of origin legislation bearing on civil status.

Its information mission also leads the DIDR to regularly organise conferences at Ofpra, via its research sections, to which researchers, university academics, members of NGOs, journalists working in the field, etc., are invited.

Documentation

The DIDR also manages the Ofpra reading room, which is available to all staff working at Ofpra. Books, maps and periodicals can be consulted on site or borrowed.

These documents are ordered following meetings held by the publications selection committee, in which all Ofpra departments are represented.
Research

The team

The DIDR includes eleven research officers divided into three geographical sections: Europe-Middle East, Africa and Asia-Americas, each supervised by a section manager. They answer questions tabled by their colleagues from the eligibility divisions, the Department of Legal, European and International Affairs and the protection division on the situation prevailing in applicants’ countries of origin.

Methodology

The research work carried out by the DIDR is a time saver for case owners tasked with assessing applications, since they can focus on the determination process instead of having to personally carry out the necessary research for each case submitted to them. Geopolitical information available to them is a decision-making support tool which improves the quality of the determination process, in compliance with the EU Qualification and Procedure Directives.

These Directives require Member States to take account of the situation in the country of origin when they are deciding on an application for international protection (Directive 2011/95/EU of 13 December 2011), based on accurate and updated information from different sources and ensuring that case owners have access to such information (Directive 2013/32/EU of 26 June 2013).

The DIDR is at the centre of this process.

In view of the growing requirements of European and national Courts which ensure the correct use of Country of Origin Information (COI), the DIDR has drawn up a style guide and a specific working methodology based on common EU guidelines on COI processing.

Thus, DIDR documents, which are intended to be used at all stages and by all stakeholders in the process, are produced using information drawn from multiple and original sources available to the public, in line with good practices including the assessment of the reliability of sources, corroboration of information, relevance, transparency and traceability of information.

Section managers are responsible for quality control of documents drafted by research officers.
Research officers

As lawyers, historians, geographers, sociologists, political scientists, ethnographers or linguists, most of whom having extensive experience in the determination process and in working abroad, these protection officers have sound knowledge of the countries under their competence and a solid network of contacts (academics, journalists, local NGOs and international organisations, European counterparts, French consulates abroad and their experts networks). They draft documentary products (studies, notes), are involved in the development of tools to support the determination process in liaison with Ofpra’s other departments, organise conferences and work meetings with external professionals, contribute to the training of protection officers and participate with representatives of the National Court of Asylum and sometimes with some of their European counterparts in fact-finding missions in applicants’ countries of origin, for which they contribute to the drafting of reports. Participating in networks of European experts set up by the European Asylum Support Office and trained in research techniques, they collect, process and analyse information in accordance with European guidelines.

Increasing transparency and accessibility

Most reports drafted at the end of fact-finding missions in the countries of origin are available on the Ofpra website. Documentary products of the DIDR used for decision-making are included in the case files of asylum seekers, which their counsel may consult during the appeal process. In addition, general notes and studies by the DIDR are now intended to be publicly posted on Ofpra’s website.

Information, Documentation and Research Division (DIDR)

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