



30 November 2022

Ref 2223-0903

M Kang

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Tēnā koe

Thank you for writing to the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) on 2 November 2022, to request information about MBIE's Country Research Unit (CRU), for decision-making about refugees, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA).

In your request, you asked for the following document:

- *An organisational chart of CRU*

You also asked the following questions:

- *How many officers and researchers are in the unit? What are their mandates?*
- *What are the procedures to request Country of Origin Information (COI)?*
- *What is the scope and usage allowed for COI? Is there any law or regulations about this matter?*
- *Who can request COIs? Can external persons, such as researchers, access the database? How long does it take to get the information?*
- *Do you have a COI Database system? If yes, how does it work? Do you use a platform or program?*
- *What is the methodology for producing and verification of COI?*
- *Do you have any training system for CRU? If yes, could you provide details about the training system?*
- *Does CRU have external cooperation?*

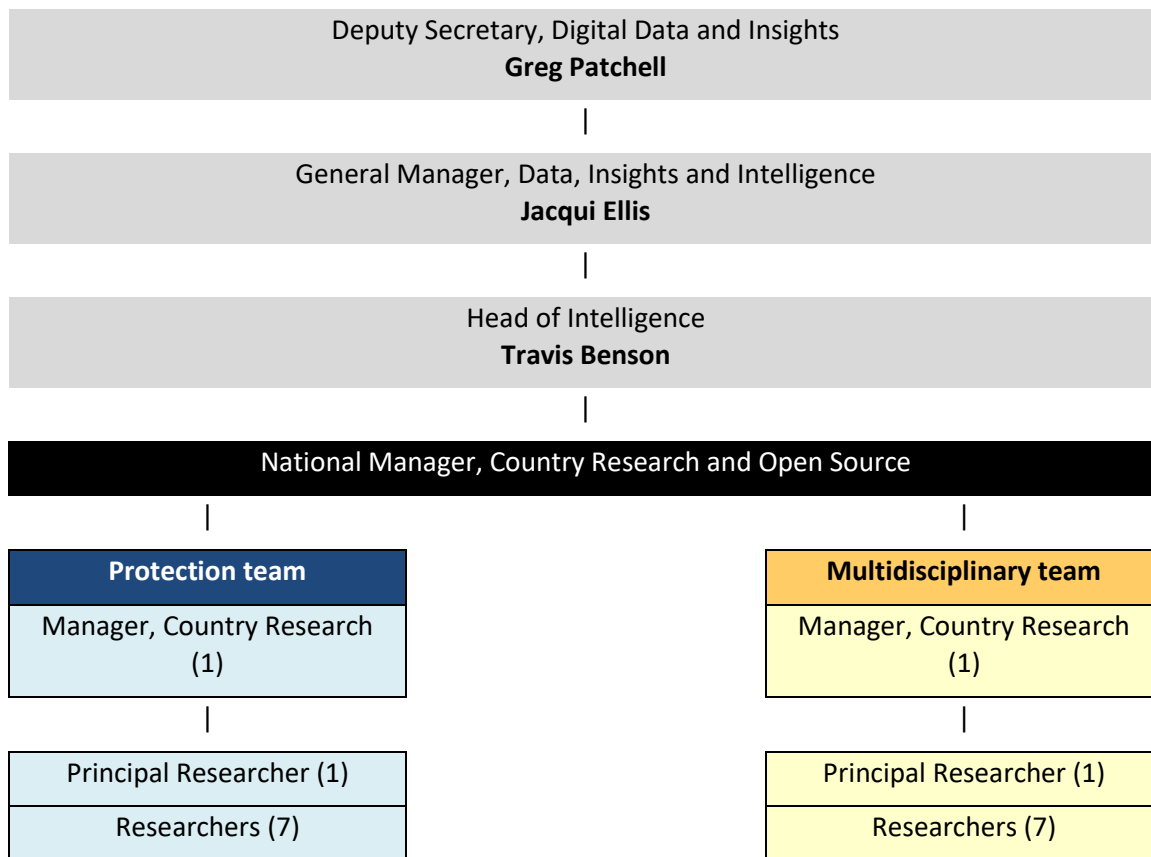
Structure and composition of the Country Research Unit

Country of Origin information for specific decision making processes, such as Refugee Status Determinations (RSDs), is supplied by the **Country Research and Open Source** (CROS) unit, which is part of the Intelligence unit, inside our Digital, Data and Insights Group. A chart showing this is provided overleaf.

Within CROS there is a Protection research team who are responsible for supplying Country of Origin (COI) information for RSDs. A second team, named the Multi-disciplinary Team, primarily work with other customers in INZ and wider MBIE.

As at 16 November 2022, the structure and composition of the two research teams in CROS is as follows:





The COI unit was not established by legislation, but rather as an administrative function due to an identified need to support Immigration decision-makers by providing an impartial and high-quality COI service.

Procedures for requesting Country of Origin information, and Database

Requests to the COI unit for refugee decision-making come from either:

- a) Refugee and Protection Officers within Immigration New Zealand’s Refugee Status Unit, or
- b) Members of the Immigration and Protection Tribunal who are hearing Refugee stream appeals.

The Immigration Act outlines the information that Refugee and Protection Officers and Immigration and Protection Tribunal members, administered by the Ministry of Justice, may seek to inform an RSD. CROS researchers provide operational support for this decision-making function, as outlined below:

Refugee and Protection Officers:

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2009/0051/latest/DLM1440814.html>

The Immigration and Protection Tribunal:

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2009/0051/latest/DLM2390002.html>

Additionally, COI in of itself is not a type of regulated information, although its distribution is strictly controlled. The Immigration Act 2009 gives powers to decision makers to seek any type of information they need to help determine their decision, more information can be found using the links above.

Information requests from RSD decision-makers to COI unit researchers are managed through the CROS research request database. Due to the controls around COI information, we aren’t able to provide you with information about the platform that CROS uses, and I am withholding information about our

database under section 6(c) of the OIA, to avoid prejudice to the maintenance of the law, including the detection and prevention of offences.

The research database itself is only accessible to CROS staff. However, we provide a generalised table of sources and information on COI which you can find at the following address:

<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/documents/statistics/guidetocoisourcesonline.pdf>.

Requests are submitted via an online template, located on MBIE's internal intranet pages. The database automatically loads all the information provided by the decision-maker into a pre-populated template, to which the researcher then inputs the research response. When the response is complete, the template is emailed to the decision-maker as an attachment, using appropriate security classifications, as part of their decision-making process. You can read more about these classifications at the following address:

<https://protectivesecurity.govt.nz/classification-system/overview/classifications/>.

CROS treats information consistently with the confidentiality obligations attached to refugee and protection claims under section 151 of the Immigration Act 2009.

Since 2021, the standard timeframe to respond to a request is eight working days. Given the variety of situations where decision makers may request urgent information, we can accommodate same-day requests and deadlines may be flexible, dependent on the situations of individual applicants.

Methodology

MBIE's methodology for production and verification of COI is influenced by the Austrian Red Cross and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD).

ACCORD produces a guide for COI practitioners and forms a best practice standard and an international benchmark for Nations who produce COI. It is our understanding that ACCORD is currently revising the training manual, and that this will be made publicly available, as with the current edition.

The ACCORD guide is endorsed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The most recent guide was published in 2013 and can be found at:

<https://www.coi-training.net/site/assets/files/1021/researching-country-of-origin-information-2013-edition-accord-coi-training-manual.pdf>

Training for COI unit researchers

MBIE's expectation is that new staff will have considerable knowledge and experience of research prior to their appointment. Researchers appointed to roles in CROS typically have postgraduate qualifications and a minimum of three years' experience in research work.

For your reference, the most recent position description for a CROS Researcher role can be found here:

<https://www.mbie.govt.nz/position-descriptions/data-insights-and-intelligence/researcher>

Researchers new to the unit are taken through an in-house induction programme, which includes various training modules and sessions, on a variety of topics relevant to the role, which can include:

- introductions to some of MBIE's key sources, including COI portals and in house subscriptions
- tools such as the catalogue of CROS resources
- training on using the in-house research database and workflow system
- introductions to key customer groups, including the Refugee Status Unit (RSU) and Immigration and Protection Tribunal (IPT). An officer from the RSU provides an overview of refugee law during the induction period.

Researchers also complete external online training: on UNHCR's & ACCORD's online course on the role and quality standards of COI, which you can read at <https://www.coi-training.net/training/e-learning/>. Please note, this site requires registration, but is free to access.

Beyond the initial few weeks of induction, new Researchers are closely supported by their managers, and more experienced staff (Principal Researchers, for example).

After the induction, CROS has a system of peer review and quality assurance processes across all Researchers. There is a strong emphasis on collaboration and knowledge-sharing within the team.

International cooperation


In general, CROS does not directly contact international organisations or academic institutions when undertaking COI research for refugee decision-making. Information supplied in research responses is published by third parties. This means it is not obtained by CROS conducting interviews with experts or by directly contacting academic institutions.

The main external contact for COI in refugee decision-making is the Inter-Governmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC). New Zealand is a participating state in the IGC, and the CROS National Manager and selected research staff attend events organised by the IGC, including COI Working Group meetings (sometimes in person, sometimes via remote online attendance), as well as country seminars and other sessions.

You can read more about the IGC's work online at <https://www.iom.int/>.

Thank you again for your request. Under section 28(3) of the OIA, you have the right to refer my response to an Ombudsman for review. You can find more information about this by emailing info@ombudsman.govt.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jacqui Ellis

General Manager, Data, Insights and Intelligence
Digital, Data and Insights