

News story: The Chief Inspector's report on Country of Origin Information has been published

Mr Bolt said:

"The Home Office produces Country of Origin Information (COI) primarily to assist asylum decision makers in determining whether a person qualifies for protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention. COI enables them to evaluate statements made by asylum applicants and to assess their credibility. It follows that COI must be reliable and kept up-to-date.

"This inspection, which was sent to the Home Secretary on 23 October 2017, examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Home Office functions that produce and use COI, specifically how COI products are commissioned, developed and disseminated, and how they are used within the asylum process. It did not look at the content and quality of individual products as this is the role of the [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information \(IAGCI\)](#), a panel of experts and practitioners created in 2009 to assist the Independent Chief Inspector with a rolling programme of COI reviews.

"The inspection found that the team responsible for producing COI had made efforts to engage the main users of COI, and COI products had been made shorter and topic-specific as a result. However, more needed to be done to create effective feedback loops, to understand and satisfy demand for specific COI, and to train asylum decision makers how to use COI.

"But, the inspection identified a more fundamental and urgent problem with COI. Guidance published by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and recognised in the UK's Immigration Rules requires COI to be presented in a way that permits decision makers to reach their own objective judgements and decisions on individual applications. The Home Office's COI products do not do this.

"Country Policy and Information Notes (CPINs) combine country information and "Policy". This is wrong in principle. It has the effect of directing decision makers towards a predetermined outcome, particularly where a significant body of asylum decision makers are inexperienced (as a parallel inspection of [Asylum Intake and Casework](#) found), unfamiliar with COI, have insufficient time to master every detail, and are likely to interpret "Policy" as something they are required to follow.

"My report made 7 recommendations. While the Home Office has accepted the majority, it has rejected the key recommendation regarding use of the term "policy", suggesting in its formal response that it sees this as interchangeable with "analysis", "guidance" or "country position". I do not agree. The Home Office does however recognise that the term may be misinterpreted and commits to making it clear that that part of the CPIN

“provides an analysis of the COI”. I look forward to seeing this clarification.

“In the meantime, I will continue to work with IAGCI to ensure that the information contained in particular COI products is as reliable, up-to-date and complete as possible, and will also ensure that any future inspections of asylum casework examine how decision makers are using COI.”

[An inspection of the Home Office’s production and use of Country of Origin Information](#)

[Home Office’s response to the Chief Inspector’s reports.](#)