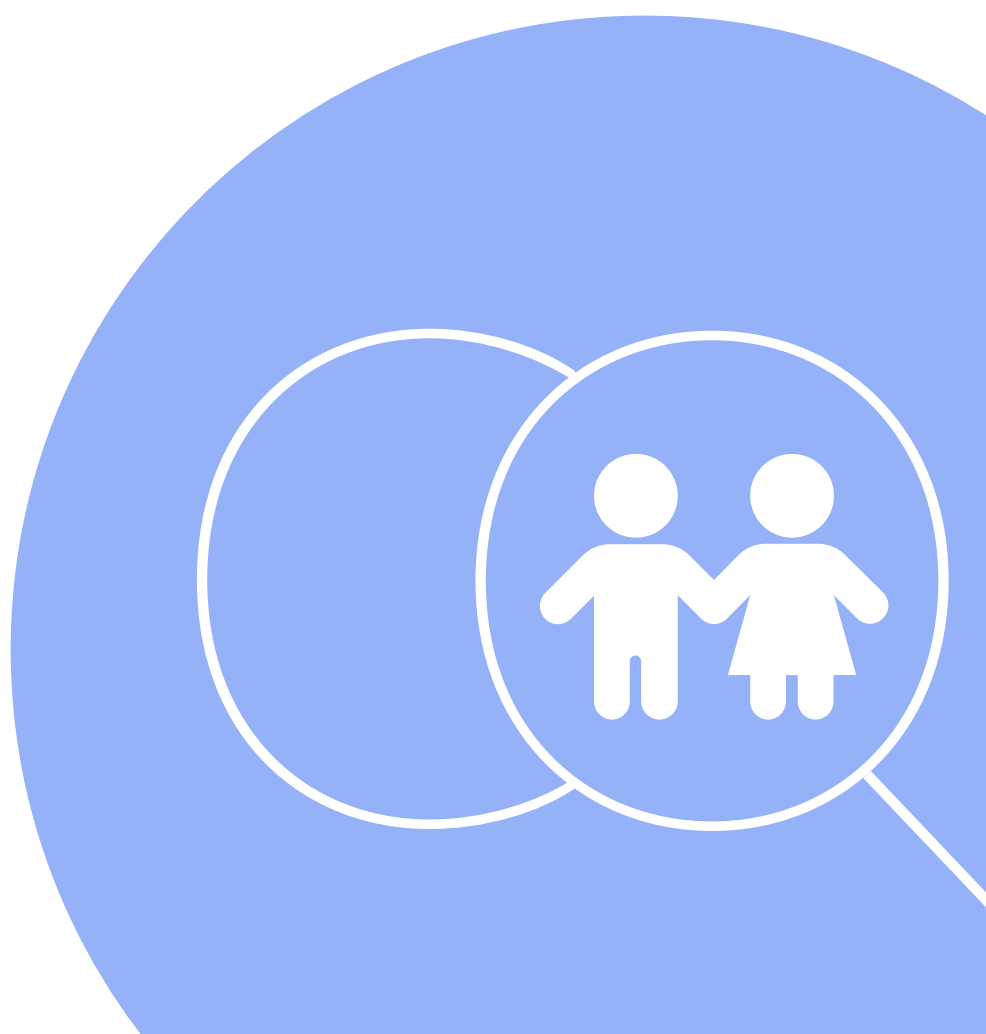




Asylos | Training Series
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2024

Conducting Country of Origin Information (COI) Research on Children and Young People



Acknowledgements and feedback

Acknowledgements

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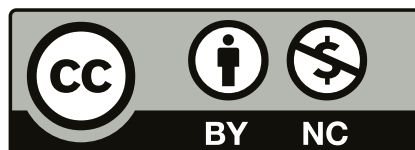
Feedback and comments

Should you have comments or questions about this handbook please direct them to: info@asylos.eu



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Who we are and what we do

Asylos

Asylos is a civil society network of more than 80 volunteers working all around the world (including in such countries of origin as Jordan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Afghanistan) and speaking more than 25 languages.

We have five regional teams which provide free of charge, ondemand and case-specific, Country of Origin Information (COI) research to support persons claiming their right for international protection on a fair and just basis. In the last five years, we have produced 700+ bespoke research reports. Our reports are regularly used in asylum procedures, have been used by UNHCR to inform UN eligibility guidelines, cited in The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), formally known as the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), COI reports and used as evidence in the UK's country guidance case on Afghanistan. Should you be interested in commissioning a research report or accessing available research, visit our research database at resources.asylos.eu and subscribe to our research updates for more information.

ARC Foundation

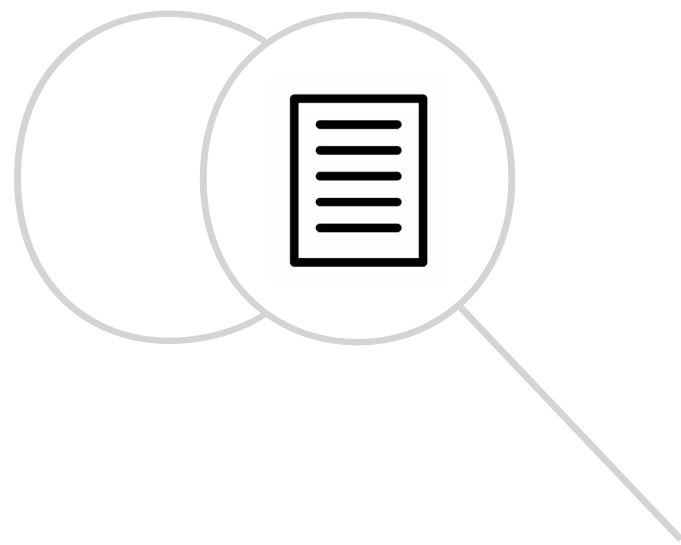
ARC Foundation was incorporated as a CIO (charitable incorporated organisation) in October 2016 and was a member of the [European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(ECRE\)](#), the [European Network on Statelessness](#) and the formerly known European Asylum Support Office's (EASO) [Consultative Forum](#) (now the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)), offering its expertise on COI-related issues.

ARC Foundation closed down in July 2022 with Asylos taking forward a number of key projects that have up to now been run by ARC Foundation or were jointly delivered by both organisations. For more information on the transfer on [Asylos' website](#).

Joint reports

Asylos and ARC Foundation have worked together to produce a series of strategic COI reports:

- Rather than individual situations, they address pertinent information gaps and misconceptions.
- In 2017, Asylos published 'Afghanistan: Young Male 'Westernised' Returnees to Kabul' (which was peer reviewed by ARC).
- In 2019 we jointly published 'Albania: Trafficked Boys and Young Men'
- In 2020 we jointly published "[Vietnam: Returned victims of trafficking](#)".
- In 2022 we jointed published '[Nigeria: Children and Young People with Disabilities](#)', October 2021.



Introduction

This handbook should be read alongside our publication [Country of Origin Information \(COI\): Evidencing asylum claims in the UK](#) which explains the fundamental principles of country-of-origin information research, its use in the UK refugee status determination, quality criteria, research tips and guidance on avoiding common pitfalls.

[Home Office statistics](#) show that there were 4,656 applications from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in the year ending September 2023, which made up 6% of total asylum applications. The exact total number for all children seeking asylum in 2023 is not clear from this dataset. The top country of origin for applications from unaccompanied children in 2023 was Afghanistan .

Home Office guidance states that an asylum application can be made by or on behalf of a child in their own right whether accompanied or unaccompanied, but even when being considered as a dependent:

‘Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 requires the Home Office to carry out its existing functions in a way that takes into account the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the UK. Where an asylum claim involves dependent children caseworkers must consider protection needs and the best interests of each child as an individual and in the context of the family unit.’ ¹

Therefore, it is clear that decision makers should be considering the individual protection needs of every child, whether or not they are making an application in their own right or as part of a family.

[UNHCR guidelines](#), the [UK Immigration Rules](#)² and the [UKVI guidance on processing children’s asylum claims](#) make it clear that country of origin information (COI) is vital in the assessment of a child’s claim for international protection. However, there is a significant lack of child-specific COI in the public domain.

There are several reasons for this:

- Persons claiming asylum are often marginalised in their countries of origin and thus silenced from national statistics, reporting and services.
- There are numerous barriers to conducting primary human rights research (security, access, language, funding, etc.) in countries of origin which can lead to serious information gaps.
- Ethical research considerations mean children’s voices in research projects are less likely to be heard
- Certain human rights abuses take place in the private sphere and thus less likely to be reported on e.g. child abuse.
- COI is rarely published with the asylum protection context in mind.

Under these circumstances, evidencing a protection claim for a child can be challenging! For this reason the [UKVI guidance on processing children’s asylum claims](#) states that in assessing credibility “the benefit of the doubt will need to be applied more generously when dealing with a child.” It should also be noted this guidance is currently under review and does not yet reflect changes under the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 where those came into force on 28 June 2022. The Home Office introduced a two-stage standard of proof in Section 32 of this Act.

Acronyms

BID – Best Interest Determination
 COI – Country of Origin Information
 CP system – Child protection system
 CPIN – Country and Policy Information Note
 CRC – The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
 ECHR – European Convention on Human Rights
 ECtHR – European Court of Human Rights
 IAGCI – The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information
 UASC – Unaccompanied asylum seeking children
 UKVI – UK Visas and Immigration

¹ [Home Office, Asylum Policy Instruction: Dependents and Former Dependents](#), May 2014, pg 5

² Paragraph [339JA of the Immigration Rules](#)

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Whilst the decision to refuse asylum is usually appealable, [research](#) has found that historically there are significant barriers for children in exercising this right, due to a lack of quality advice or availability of representation. As a result of these practices, many separated children only receive temporary protection (limited leave to remain under paragraph 352ZE of the [Immigration Rules](#)) until they reach 17 and a half, after which they have to reapply for further leave.

We would also like to mention relevant UK caselaw: *G v G* case here, is a 2021 Supreme Court decision that concluded that a child who is named as a dependent on an asylum claim can and should usually be deemed to have made a claim for asylum in their own right.

It can get even more challenging when a child reaches the age of 18. At this point, arguing for a particular risk facing the young person becomes problematic when they are no longer a child and it may be several years after they have fled, so more often than not there will have been no recent threats or indicators of danger. Furthermore, despite the fact that UK case law recognises that “It is not easy to see that risks of the relevant kind to who as a child would continue until the eve of that birthday, and cease at once the next day”³ and that “persecution is not respectful of birthdays – apparent or assumed age is more important than chronological age”⁴ – COI in the public domain rarely reflects this principle. In this context we find that reports fail to acknowledge and account for the experiences of young people, who are likely to face similar risks to those facing children, but may be unable to access any child-specific protection that does exist, because of their age.

In this context many young people become ‘appeal rights exhausted’, many years after arriving in the UK as a minor, with their only legal recourse being to submit a fresh claim, either on the basis of asylum or human rights grounds. However, due to the increased evidential requirements for fresh claims, and the gaps in COI regarding young people, the chances of this fresh claim being successful are likely to be much lower.

Because of this it is crucial that children seeking asylum are supported to make their case at its strongest when they first arrive.

However, given all of the circumstances above, it is important to acknowledge that it may not always be possible to adequately evidence the situation in a child or young person’s country of origin through publicly available COI. Therefore, in many instances it may be necessary to instruct a country expert. However, it will remain critical that legal representatives are able to identify the relevant issues, and make use of the sources that are available. This training module will guide you through a set of key principles and tools to apply when conducting child-focused COI, so that you are able to better evidence applications from children and young people.

1. Legal framework

In the UK, the legal framework for processing asylum claims from children consists of the UK’s international obligations⁵, as well as the safeguarding and welfare provisions contained in domestic legislation. However, we will look at just three of the main legal instruments, to assist us in better understanding how to conduct child-focused COI:

The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol (‘the Refugee Convention’) provides the legal basis for international refugee protection.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the CRC), together with the Optional Protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on the involvement of children in armed conflict, is an international treaty which sets out the rights of children. The UK signed the convention on 19 April 1990 and it came into force on 15 January 1992.

³ [DS \(Afghanistan\) v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2011\] EWCA Civ 305 at \[\(54\)\]](#)

⁴ [KA \(Afghanistan\) & Ors v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2012\] EWCA Civ 1014 at \[\(18\)\]](#)

⁵ Including [The Refugee Convention](#), [The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), and [The European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#)

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The **2009 UNHCR guidelines** on ‘Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1(A)2 and 1(F) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees’ provide instruction on how the Refugee Convention interacts with the Convention on the Rights of the Child when considering a child’s claim for protection:

‘5. A child-sensitive application of the refugee definition would be consistent with the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter “the CRC”). The Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified the following four Articles of the CRC as general principles for its implementation:

Article 2: the obligation of States to respect and ensure the rights set forth in the Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind; **Article 3 (1):** the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children; **Article 6:** the child’s inherent right to life and States parties’ obligation to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child; and **Article 12:** the child’s right to express his/her views freely regarding “all matters affecting the child”, and that those views be given due weight. These principles inform both the substantive and the procedural aspects of the determination of a child’s application for refugee status.’⁶

This guidance makes clear that a child-sensitive application of the Refugee Convention requires it to be implemented in light of these legal principles. Whilst not all of these principles will be relevant for COI research, you will see later how Article 3 and Article 6 should guide your research.

2. Use of COI in Children’s Claims

The 2009 UNHCR Guidelines consider that “Due to their young age, dependency and relative immaturity, children should enjoy specific procedural and evidentiary safeguards to ensure that fair refugee status determination decisions are reached with respect to their claims”.⁷

UNHCR considers that “it may be necessary for an examiner to assume a greater burden of proof in children’s claims, especially if the child concerned is unaccompanied”.⁸

In relation to ‘Procedural and Evidentiary issues’, the Guidelines states with regards to COI that:

‘Just as country of origin information may be gender-biased to the extent that it is more likely to reflect male as opposed to female experiences, the experiences of children may also be ignored. In addition, children may have only limited knowledge of conditions in the country of origin or may be unable to explain the reasons for their persecution. For these reasons, asylum authorities need to make special efforts to gather relevant country of origin information and other supporting evidence.’⁹

Home Office Asylum Policy Instructions also recognises the importance of COI in children’s claims and the particular challenges children may face in producing ‘objective evidence’. Whilst recommending that the benefit of the doubt be provided more generously, Home Office policy does not explicitly state that this affects the burden of proof in children’s claims and also sets out that the standard of proof is in the same in asylum cases, irrespective of age (emphasis added):

Burden and standard of proof in children’s claims

Every claimant, regardless of age, has to show to the same standard (a reasonable degree of likelihood) that they have a well-founded fear of persecution for a convention reason – while taking into account the child-specific considerations and other factors that may impact upon the interpretation of these concepts. In children’s claims, the need to identify all the material facts and ascertain the potential risks on return may be more challenging. The expression of fear of return may not be as elaborate as in an adult’s case and a very young child may not even have a fear of persecution on return. Where the child is of a young age or where a significant period of time has passed since the child’s departure from their country of origin, decision-makers should:

⁶ UNHCR, [UNHCR GUIDELINES ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#), 22 December 2009 pg 4-5

⁷ Ibid pg 25

⁸ Ibid pg 25

⁹ Ibid pg 27

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- allow for resolution of the claim based on available country of origin information
- supplement the information provided by the child themselves where pertinent information has been provided by other reliable sources

A child may be less able to produce objective evidence to corroborate their claim, and may in fact have very limited life experience. Decision-makers must also be aware that a child may find it difficult to describe details beyond their direct experience, such as names of places, people, or organisations. **When considering the objective evidence in support of a child's case, it is important to refer to up-to date relevant country of origin information.**¹⁰

In October 2013 the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration published 'An inspection into the Handling of Asylum Applications Made by Unaccompanied Children February-June 2013'. The report found that child-specific COI was used in 52% of the cases that were sampled, that the most frequently cited COI was that produced by the Home Office, while identifying that COI would not have been relevant in every case, "usage could have been higher".¹¹

In January 2018, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration published its Inspection of the Home Office's production and use of Country of Origin Information in April- August 2017. It found that "During the current inspection, both Home Office users of COI and external stakeholders pointed to a current lack of coverage of children-related country information".¹² Furthermore (emphasis added):

'8.46 Inspectors examined 23 asylum refusals involving unaccompanied or dependent minors. Only 9 contained any reference to COI in the section 55 consideration. In 4 of these, the COI used was over 4 years old. There was no indication that decision-makers had checked with CPIT the information they had researched for themselves, which included older, outdated COI reports that CPIT had removed from the intranet and GOV.UK but that staff had accessed via third party websites such as Refworld.org. [...]

12.15 Inspectors examined 30 asylum claims made by unaccompanied children and a further 12 claims where the claimant(s) had dependent children. In 9 cases, the decision-maker referred to COI in relation to the safeguarding and welfare of the child.¹¹²

12.16 It was evident in each case that these decision-makers had done their own research. In some cases, this research included accessing out-of-date COI products that had been produced by CPIT or its predecessors. While CPIT had removed these products from the Home Office intranet and GOV.UK, they were still accessible via third party websites.

12.17 In the records examined, inspectors found that the quality and application of the research carried out by decision-makers varied to the extent that it undermined UKVI's aim of consistency in its decision-making – see Case Studies 3 and 4.

12.18 Inspectors also found decision-makers, who had been trained to deal with child claims, felt able to access "good tailored information" by using CPIT's request service as set out in the API. However, **these decision-makers felt that it would be useful to have more child-specific information readily to hand.** One commented that claims from unaccompanied minors were becoming increasingly complex, and they were not "comfortable doing my own research on this issue, as it is so serious".

12.19 External stakeholders confirmed that the findings from the sampled decisions reflected what they had seen themselves. **The widely held view was that the dearth of child-specific COI produced by CPIT as standard had a negative impact on decision quality, and it led some decision-makers to do their own research and to give weight to inappropriate sources.**

12.20 One stakeholder¹¹⁴ felt there was a "lack of intelligent use of other sources", and explained how its own report on Albanian orphanages, which had highlighted the poor conditions in these establishments, had been cited in support of the argument that as orphanages exist it was safe to return an orphaned child. The stakeholder contended that as a signatory to the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', the UK should use UNICEF reports to inform asylum decisions.^{115- 13}

112 Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/11/section/55>

¹⁰ UK Home Office, *Children's Asylum Claims*, 15 August 2019, pg 53

¹¹ Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, *An Inspection into the Handling of Asylum Applications Made by Unaccompanied Children February-June 2013, October 2013*, pg 45

¹² Ibid, pg 45

¹³ Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, *An inspection of the Home Office's production and use of Country of Origin Information April – August 2017*, January 2018, pg 56

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113 Immigration Rules part 11: asylum, Paragraph 339JA <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-part-11-asylum>

114 Amnesty International.

115 'The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child' is a human rights treaty, which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. The UK signed the convention in 1990 and it came into law in the UK in 1992. UNICEF publishes an annual report, 'The State of the World's Children', which includes the latest available statistics for countries on child survival, development and protection.

The Home Office currently publishes Country Policy and Information Notes (CPINs) on the main profiles of persons claiming asylum in the UK.¹⁴ These combine COI with Home Office 'guidance' or policy for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. As of July 2024 there were 166 CPINs in existence. It is clear that the vast majority of the CPINs are directed at adults claiming asylum- only two CPINs specifically address children: the [July 2024 Vietnam CPIN on unaccompanied children V2.0](#) and the [October 2021 Afghanistan CPIN on unaccompanied children V3.0](#).

These CPINs include information on the following issues: grounds for persecution against children as well as whether adequate reception conditions are available. Specific topics covered include:

- Demography
- Legal context
- Social and economic rights (Vietnam CPIN only)
- Juvenile justice (Vietnam CPIN only)
- Violence against children (**Afghanistan CPIN**: Child casualties, Child marriage, Child labour, Physical and sexual abuse, Bacha bazi, Street children, Street children, Child recruitment to armed groups, Retaliatory and targeted attacks, Trafficking; **Vietnam CPIN**: Child abuse, including corporal punishment and sexual violence, Early and forced marriage, Street children, Trafficking, Child labour)
- Child labour
- Childcare and protection (Vietnam CPIN only)
- Documentation (Vietnam CPIN only)

- Humanitarian situation (Afghanistan CPIN only)
- Internally displaced persons (Afghanistan CPIN only)
- Taliban takeover (Afghanistan CPIN only)
- Return and Integration.

On occasion, CPINs include particular subsections of COI relevant to children. For example, the El Salvador CPIN on Gangs published in December 2022 includes sections on 'Women and girls' and 'Children and youths', but no policy guidance to its decision makers specifically in relation to children. Background CPINs, which provide only COI and no guidance, tend to include a section on children, but it would appear there is no specific template as there is variance in how children's issues are addressed. From analysis undertaken by Asylos in July 2024, it appears that there are 13 different subsections or themes on children: Children in general (whole subsection), Children and education, Child labour, Birth registration, Early/forced marriage, Violence/abuse against children, sexual exploitation of children, child trafficking, FGM, Child protection/support, Infant mortality, Child rights, Age structure.

Five out of seven Background CPINs (on Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi and South Africa) deal with eight or more of these issues. All include a section on 'Children', 'Education' and 'Child labour', while only one includes a section on child rights. None had sections on child custody or alternative care for children without parental care. The issue of juvenile justice was not covered in any Background CPINs or CPINs covering Actors of Protection. There is also variance in how subsections are described and grouped. For example, four Background CPINs speak of 'violence' against children, while three use the term 'child abuse'. One Background CPIN groups information on physical and sexual abuse into one sub-section, another groups information on sexual exploitation of children and child marriage, while another includes a separate section on 'sexual exploitation of children'.

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¹⁴ [UK Home Office, Country Policy and Information Notes](#), regularly updated

Child sensitive COI considerations under Refugee Convention

The legal instruments mentioned above make it very clear that protection claims from children need to be treated differently to those from adults in refugee status determination procedures. The 2009 UNHCR Guidelines lay out the various different considerations, and legal interpretations, that decision-makers should apply when assessing children's asylum claims. As COI researchers we do not need to know about all of these technicalities, however there are some differences that should be understood by anyone conducting child-focused COI.

1. Persecution

It is a principle under refugee law that decision-makers must take into account the **individual profile and characteristics** of the applicant when assessing a 'well-founded fear of persecution'.

For child-focused COI research this means being aware of the most common forms of child-specific persecution such as:

- Child trafficking
- Violence against and exploitation of street children
- FGM
- Children in armed conflict including recruitment of child soldiers
- Abuse in children's homes and institutions
- Forced labour and other forms of exploitation
- Witchcraft accusations (of minority groups)
- Domestic abuse and neglect
- Sexual abuse
- Underage/forced marriage.

Researchers should also be sensitive to the fact that when children suffer forms of persecution that are not child-specific (such as ill treatment because of perceived political opinion), they will still experience any harm as a child.

The 2009 UNHCR guidelines make clear that a **child-sensitive understanding of persecution** will mean assessing the harm from a child's perspective, and acknowledging that "ill-treatment which may not rise to the level of persecution in the case of an adult may do so in the case of a child."¹⁵

What does this mean for COI research? Well for starters, it means understanding that for children in particular, persecution may be established through an accumulation of a number of less severe violations. To illustrate, the Guidelines give an example of where children with disabilities, or stateless children who lack access to birth registration, are excluded from education, health care and other services.¹⁶

If this is the case then, it also means that researchers will need a good understanding and knowledge of child-specific rights and their violations. **The 2009 UNHCR Guidelines direct us to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**, stating that "children are entitled to a range of child-specific rights set forth in the CRC which recognize their young age and dependency and are fundamental to their protection, development and survival."¹⁷

¹⁵ UNHCR, [UNHCR GUIDELINES ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#), 22 December 2009, pg 6

¹⁶ Ibid, pg 14-15

¹⁷ Ibid, pg 6

(...) Child sensitive COI considerations under Refugee Convention

Examples of these rights include:

- The right not to be separated from parents (Article 9)
- Protection from all forms of physical and mental violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation (Article 19)
- Protection from traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children (Article 24)
- A standard of living adequate for the child's development (Article 27)
- The right not to be detained or imprisoned unless as a measure of last resort (Article 37) and
- Protection from under-age recruitment (Article 38).

In reference to these rights, the guidelines state that “children’s socio-economic needs are often more compelling than those of adults, particularly due to their dependency on adults and unique developmental needs.”¹⁸ **Therefore it will be important to pay more attention to the economic, social and cultural conditions for children, than you would perhaps for adults, in their country of origin.**

The Guidelines also emphasise that we should not “automatically attribute greater significance to certain violations than to others but to assess the overall impact of the harm on the individual child”, stating that the “violation of one right often may expose the child to other abuses; for example, a denial of the right to education or an adequate standard of living may lead to a heightened risk of other forms of harm, including violence and abuse”.¹⁹ This will mean taking an intersectional approach when formulating research questions, whilst considering the multiple and cumulative forms of discrimination that may amount to persecution for a child.

Example

In a UK country guidance case, [JA \(child – risk of persecution\) Nigeria \[2016\] UKUT 00560 \(IAC\)](#), the judges found that **a child can be at risk of persecutory harm contrary to the CRC in circumstances where a comparably placed adult would not be at such a risk.**

This case concerned an appeal brought by a Nigerian woman and her 7 year old son who suffered from albinism, against the Home Office’s decision to refuse them asylum. The judges in this case overturned this decision, and the preceding tribunal decision, and granted them refugee status on the basis that:

15. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is clearly a relevant consideration that this Tribunal and indeed all who deal with asylum issues should take into account, and it is clear that a child could be at risk of persecutory harm contrary to the Convention in circumstances where a comparably placed adult would not be at such risk.
[...]

19. That discrimination which has particular adverse effects can mean that there is persecution is undoubtedly so. An example given has been discrimination that prevents the access to employment or to education. But that that is not essential in order for persecution to be established is clear, Miss Knorr has referred in her skeleton argument to a decision of the Federal Court of Canada in *Kim v Canada* (MCI) 120111 2 FCR 448 at 467, 469 and 475, in which the CRC was referred to and the point was made that if the children's rights under the CRC were violated in a sustained or systematic manner demonstrative of a failure of state protection that child might qualify for refugee status.

¹⁸ UNHCR, [UNHCR GUIDELINES ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#), 22 December 2009 pg 8

¹⁹ Ibid, pg 14-15, pg 8

(...) Child sensitive COI considerations under Refugee Convention

20. Equally in that case the court made the point that to acknowledge that children have distinctive rights was not to graft additional rights on to the definition in the Refugee Convention of persecution but was instead to interpret the definition of persecution in accordance with the distinctive rights that children possessed as recognised in the CRC and it was a denial of the CRC rights that the court believed to be important in deciding whether there was an entitlement to refugee status.

21. It has been submitted essentially by Mr Melvin that we cannot go so far, and we should not go so far, as to recognise that discrimination in Nigeria could amount to persecution because there are a very large number, running into certainly at least, 1,000,000 of albinos in that country who would be entitled if that were right to protection.

22. But that we do not think is the whole answer. We have to consider the facts relating to the individual who appears before us. We have here as we have said, a child born in this country, and brought up in this country, who has not faced any of the discrimination and the basis of that discrimination which he could be at real risk of suffering were he to be returned to Nigeria.

23. Thus he would if returned have to recognise that he is treated as someone who has a real difficulty, inasmuch as to it is considered by many that he has been tainted by some form of witchcraft and that he simply is to be regarded as a second class citizen. That of course in itself might not be enough but it is the effect of that upon him that matters and we have no doubt that there is a real risk of certainly bullying, possibly worse, when he goes to school and that he will feel a pariah in society as a whole. As the previous judges have decided there is not likely to be any protection from the authorities that he can expect from such conduct against him and thus the effect on him is that much more serious than would have been the effect had he lived all 'his life and been brought up in the society in Nigeria.

24. That in our judgment puts him in a different position from the general position of albinos in Nigeria and in our judgment the likely effect on him even short of any real risk of being slaughtered or otherwise his body parts being taken, is sufficient to indicate that there is a real risk of persecution.

Within this judgment we see clear examples of the principles we described earlier:

Ill-treatment which may not rise to the level of persecution in the case of an adult may do so in the case of a child.

For children in particular, persecution may be established through an accumulation of a number of less severe violations.

This determination also makes explicit that when a child is at risk of having their rights under the CRC violated in such a sustained or systematic manner that may demonstrate a failure of state protection, then they would be eligible for refugee protection.

In this decision we also see an attempt by the judges to consider the ways in which the specifics of this child's identity and experiences may intersect in a way that would lead to multiple and cumulative forms of discrimination. Although this effort may also be a way of ensuring that being an albino in Nigeria (or even a child albino) is not of itself grounds for refugee status, it does still give us an opportunity to see how the principles and logic we have described may be approached by decision-makers.

2. Agents of persecution

Now that we know that "ill-treatment which may not rise to the level of persecution in the case of an adult may do so in the case of a child"²⁰, we should also be prepared to expand our notions of what constitutes an agent of persecution. For example, if multiple forms of discrimination may be more likely to amount to persecution, it may be less clear who the agent of persecution is.

The 2009 UNHCR guidelines state that in child asylum claims the agent of persecution is often a **non-state actor** including:

²⁰ UNHCR, [UNHCR GUIDELINES ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#), 22 December 2009 pg 6

(...) Child sensitive COI considerations under Refugee Convention

- Militarized groups
- Criminal gangs
- Parents and other caregivers
- The wider family
- Community and
- Religious leaders.

In these cases the adults we would normally expect to provide protection to a child, may condone, encourage or even inflict the harm against them. In such instances, research questions will have to address the issue of whether or not the state is either unable or unwilling to protect the victim. Some kinds of harm may be tolerated or condoned by the state, such as FGM. Similarly in cases where FGM is outlawed, community level held beliefs may influence a state official's response e.g. the police or prosecutors' personal lack of interest in pursuing FGM cases or protecting a child from a fear of FGM. On the other hand, other forms of harm may be proliferated because of a lack of effective legal mechanisms in place to prevent such harm, such as child abuse. Crucially, this will often mean looking at the implementation of legal measures that criminalise and provide sufficient sanctions against child-specific forms of persecution.

As the 2009 UNHCR Guidelines set out:

- A child's access to state protection depends on the ability and willingness of the child's parents, other primary caregiver or guardian to exercise rights and obtain protection on behalf of the child.
- Not all children will have an adult who can represent them e.g. where the child is unaccompanied or orphaned, or where a parent, other primary caregiver or guardian is the agent of persecution.
- Children may not be able to approach law enforcement officials or articulate their fear or complaint in the same way as adults.

- Children may be more easily dismissed or not taken seriously by the officials concerned, and the officials themselves may lack the skills necessary to interview and listen to children.²¹

Example

In April 2024, Asylos published a research [report](#) on trafficking in Albania. We had identified critical COI gaps based on discrepancies between the assessment in the February 2023 [Albania CPIN: Human trafficking V14.0](#) that protection was available and effective and anecdotal evidence that suggested this position was not fully accurate.

4.1.1 In the country guidance case of TD and AD the UT held that 'there is in general a Horvath-standard sufficiency of protection [for a woman or a girl], but it will not be effective in every case' [emphasis added] – thus confirming it is effective in most.

4.6.1 In general, the state is willing and able to provide effective protection to male victims of trafficking. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.

The following excerpts from the Home Office's Country Policy and Information Note at the time, illustrate some of the various factors that the Home Office relied on to come to this position:

4.1.2 Both the US State Department and Freedom House acknowledge that Albania is making progress in addressing trafficking. The government continues to investigate, prosecute and convict traffickers. Whilst conviction numbers are low, this can be due to a range of factors, and not necessarily indicative of an inability or unwillingness on the part of the state [...]

4.1.3 The state has in place a comprehensive legislative and policy framework to address, and support victims of, trafficking but there has been a gap in effectively implementing some of these measures [...]

4.5.3 In general, the state has taken reasonable steps to prevent the persecution/serious harm of female victims of trafficking by operating an effective legal system for the detection, prosecution and punishment of acts constituting persecution/serious harm, which the person is able to access.

²¹ UNHCR, UNHCR GUIDELINES ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1(A)2 and 1(F) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, 22 December 2009, pg 15-16

(...) Child sensitive COI considerations under Refugee Convention

It is evident from these extracts that the Home Office based their position on the existence of legal mechanisms, but in order to assess the level of protection these mechanisms provide, a decision maker also needs information on how such mechanisms are working in practice, given a person's individual circumstances.

Based on this, our research explored factors affecting an individual's ability to access justice and protection. Through desk research and interviews, we found information on the following topics, relating to the efficacy of protection:

- Problems relating to victim identification
- Issues affecting the functioning of the criminal justice system including a lack of resources and expertise to effectively prosecute trafficking crimes
- Leniency in sentencing and a lack of accountability for perpetrators
- Failure to consistently follow best-practice procedures to protect victims in court, and a lack of child-friendly processes for the investigation of trafficking crimes
- Deficiencies in the child protection system and highly limited alternative care options for children without parental care
- Lack of access to legal aid
- Lack of access to justice for Roma who do not have citizenship.

A number of interlocutors interviewed for this research confirmed that there is a gap between the legislation and its implementation in practice:

"It seems that there is a marked difference between what is written and foreseen in the laws and the implementation in practice. More specifically, regarding the legislation that regulates the fight against trafficking and the protection of victims, it has been confirmed by various international reports that Albania has problems related to the implementation of the law in practice. Some of the influencing factors in this direction are:

- Lack of adequate human resources to deal with trafficking and to guarantee effective protection

for victims of trafficking (There are no permanent specialists in key positions and the high turnover of professional cause the lack of knowledge about the phenomenon of trafficking);

- High level of poverty and lack of economic growth in society;
- During the last years, the recent events in Albania related to the earthquake of 2019, COVID 19, as well as the political situation, have caused a decrease of vigilance toward trafficking in human being, as well as the fight against human trafficking not being considered a priority."

Source: Different and Equal, written communication with Asylos, 29 June 2023

"[...] So free legal support and the legal orientation should be provided by the state. But up to now, in my knowledge, most of the cases are supported by programs of international NGOs or local NGOs who are working with the victims of trafficking [...]"

Source: NISMA ARSIS, interview record, 19 June 2023

"[...] In terms of enforcing the law by the police, usually, what we've seen is that the police we've seen the implementation gap between the legislation mostly when it comes to protecting victims after they've been identified as victims of human trafficking, such as victims receiving compensations when they also testify against their traffickers and they win the trial. Also victims being protected and provided basic social support and assistance, which I think this is where we see an implementation gap. But maybe that's also a gap within the legislation itself, where the legislation is not very well developed. So I don't know if I can frame it as an implementation or legislation gap."

Source: Arise Albania Coordinator, interview record, 24 May 2023

3. Internal "flight" or "relocation" alternative

As we know, the principle of internal relocation is that to qualify for refugee protection an individual must demonstrate both a) risk in their home area and b) they are unable to escape the persecution (or the threat of it) by relocating elsewhere in his or her country of origin.

(...) Child sensitive COI considerations under Refugee Convention

The question of whether the person/child seeking asylum has a well-founded fear of persecution in their 'home area' should be assessed first. Only once this has been decided should the question of internal relocation be considered.

The 2009 UNHCR guidelines state that:

54. As in the case of adults, internal relocation is only **relevant** where the applicant can access practically, safely and legally the place of relocation.

55. In cases where an internal flight or relocation alternative is deemed relevant, a proposed site of internal relocation that may be **reasonable** in the case of an adult may not be reasonable in the case of a child. The "reasonableness test" is one that is applicant-specific and, thus, not related to a hypothetical "reasonable person". Age and **the best interests** of the child are among the factors to be considered in assessing the viability of a proposed place of internal relocation.²²

The Guidelines put emphasis on this notion of **the child's best interests**, stating that it should inform both the relevance and reasonableness assessments.

What is 'the child's best interests'?

In all decisions taken in procedures concerning children the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration. In a migration procedure a durable solution should be sought for the child involved. A durable solution will be long-term and sustainable and ensures that the child is able to develop into adulthood in an environment which will meet his or her needs as well as fulfil her/his rights as defined by the UN Convention and will not put the child at risk of persecution or harm. The durable solution will be informed by the Best Interest Determination (BID).²³

On the question of reasonableness, the 2009 UNHCR Guidelines goes on to state that where unaccompanied children have no known relatives in the country of origin, who are willing to support them, then we will need to look at whether or not state care and assistance would be adequate:

57. If the only available relocation option is to place the child in institutional care, a proper assessment needs to be conducted of the care, health and educational facilities that would be provided and with regard to the long-term life prospects of adults who were institutionalized as children. The treatment as well as social and cultural perceptions of orphans and other children in institutionalized care needs to be evaluated carefully as such children may be the subject of societal disapproval, prejudice or abuse, thus rendering the proposed site for relocation unreasonable in particular circumstances.²⁴

COI should provide critical evidence that decision-makers will need to take into consideration when making this assessment. This will mean researching key issues such as the existence of child protection systems in a country of origin, or lack of it.

UNICEF describes a **child protection (CP) system** as "certain formal and informal structures, functions and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. The importance of a CP system is to create a protective environment where laws and policies, services, behaviors and practices minimize children's vulnerability and strengthen children's own resilience".²⁵ Key to this will be whether or not it provides protection against forms of child-specific persecution, whilst providing a protective environment that encourages the development of a child according to the principles laid out in the CRC.

²² UNHCR, [UNHCR GUIDELINES ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, 22 December 2009](#), pg 21

²³ UNICEF, [Methodology Guidance on Child Notice](#), 2015, pg 26

²⁴ UNHCR, [UNHCR GUIDELINES ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, 22 December 2009](#), pg 21-22

²⁵ UNICEF, [Methodology Guidance on Child Notice](#), 2015, pg 28

Child sensitive COI considerations under other forms of protection

1. Serious harm under the Qualification Directive

European legislation [Council Directive 2004/83/EC \(the Qualification Directive\)](#)²⁶, which was transposed into UK law²⁷, sets out the provisions and criteria for granting subsidiary protection or Humanitarian Protection as it is known as in the UK. Article 2(e) provides that those who do not qualify as a refugee but face a real risk of serious harm on return to their country of origin (and is unable, or, owing to such risk, unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country) may be eligible for subsidiary protection. Article 15 sets out the definition of serious harm:

- a) Death penalty or execution; or
- b) Torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of an applicant in the country of origin; or
- c) Serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict.²⁸

As under the Refugee Convention, there are child-specific considerations that affect the interpretation of these legal principles, which will be relevant when conducting COI research. This is particularly the case when the threshold of 'serious harm' is such a high one, making any exceptional circumstances paramount. Principally, any assessment of whether or not the conditions in the country of origin meet the relevant thresholds in both Article 15b and 15c, must pay attention to the individual's personal circumstances (such as age and levels of vulnerability) that would put them at an increased risk of serious harm.

For example, case law from the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)²⁹ introduced a 'sliding scale' and 'enhanced risk categories' that meant that certain groups (such as children) may be at sufficient risk of harm in situations where the levels of indiscriminate violence do not meet the general threshold, to engage Article 15c of the of the Qualification Directive.

Likewise in cases that concern prison conditions, the threshold for children is much lower when showing that their detention would amount to inhuman or degrading treatment.

What does this mean for COI research? This means that it is imperative that any COI that is produced in these cases must be as relevant as possible to the particular circumstances of the child in question. For example, it will not be enough to produce generalised evidence on a humanitarian situation. Rather the evidence will need to show the impact of factors such as absence of water, basic shelter, or food have had on children in particular.

Likewise, with regards to the security situation, although the starting point for research would still be the types of targets, the levels of violence, and the impact on the local population, it will still be imperative to show how children in particular are impacted.

This could include looking at numbers of child casualties, attacks on schools, numbers and situation of child IDPs (internally displaced persons).

When researching this issues it is important to recall that as per the 2009 UNHCR Guidelines, "The violation of one right often may expose the child to other abuses;

²⁶ N.B. the UK opted out of the recast 2011 Directive

²⁷ [Through the Refugee or Person in Need of International Protection \(Qualification\) Regulations 2006](#) and [paragraphs 339C, 339D, 339q\(ii\) of the Immigration rules](#)

²⁸ [EU Council Directive 2004/83/EC \(the Qualification Directive\) on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted](#)

²⁹ [QD \(Iraq\) v SSHD \[2009\] EWCA Civ 620](#)

(...) Child sensitive COI considerations under other forms of protection

for example, a denial of the right to education or an adequate standard of living may lead to a heightened risk of other forms of harm, including violence and abuse”.³⁰

So for example, children who are forced into a situation of displacement may be forced to engage in risky survival measures and become vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Of course, if we follow the approach taken by the 2009 UNHCR guidelines, it may be arguable that the cumulative violations experienced by the child may meet the threshold of the Refugee Convention. This will be an issue that the legal representatives should be sensitive to, whilst continuing to gather evidence that would support a grant of subsidiary protection in the alternative.

2. Trafficking cases

Child trafficking is defined in the [United Nations Palermo Protocol](#) as the “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt”³¹ of a child for the purpose of exploitation. Unlike the definition for adults, children do not have to demonstrate the ‘means’ (“the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person”³²) to be treated as a victim of trafficking. This does not mean to say that child victims are not coerced into exploitative situations, but rather recognises that a child cannot be said to give their informed consent.

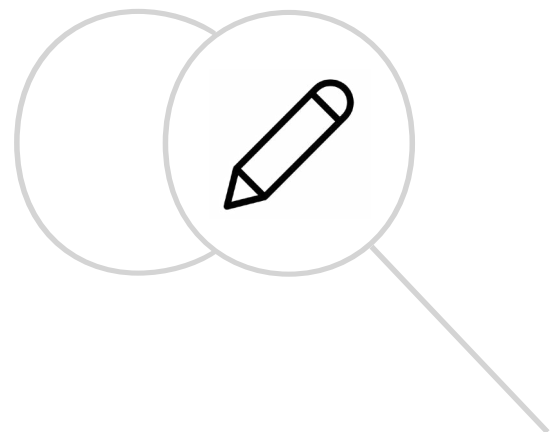
In terms of COI research, this may mean including additional information on the circumstances that may make children knowingly enter into exploitative situations, such as poverty and domestic violence. This information will be relevant when considering the risk of re-trafficking on return.

The main forms of child exploitation are:

- Labour exploitation
- Criminal
- Sexual
- Domestic servitude
- Forced begging
- Organ harvesting
- Illegal adoption, financial fraud or forced marriage.

It’s extremely important to recognise however that children may be exploited in multiple and overlapping ways. For example, being trafficked for criminal exploitation may lead to forms of sexual exploitation, and vice versa. These possibilities should be reflected in any COI research on this area.

It’s also important to note that a child is defined by [the Palermo Protocol](#) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as any person under the age of 18. This will be relevant when researching support that is available for child victims of trafficking, as some countries have a lower age of majority (such as Vietnam, which is 16), meaning that children aged 16-18 may not be eligible for services.



³⁰ UNHCR, [UNHCR GUIDELINES ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, 22 December 2009](#), p 8

³¹ [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#)

³² Ibid.

Research strategy

When conducting child-focused COI, make sure you remember the following principles and guidance when approaching your research:

1. **Put children's rights at the centre and make sure your research questions are child-specific.**
2. **Take an intersectional approach.**
3. **Use child-focused COI sources.**
4. **Use child-specific terminology in your search.**

1. Put children's rights at the centre and make sure your research questions are child-specific

As emphasised earlier, when assessing a child's asylum claim and return decision, decision-makers are obliged to apply a child sensitive definition of persecution and as such any COI research relating to children should be wide enough in scope to include information on how effectively children's rights (as enshrined in the CRC) are protected in a country of origin.

In their report³³ analysing the Home Office's coverage of issues related to children in their COI reports, the Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) stressed that child-focused COI should make use of the evidence produced as part of the reporting process on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and that when structuring a report, adopting a framework that mirrors the reporting structure to the UN Committee Reports could be useful. Whilst this level of detail will usually not be possible in a case specific report, it may still be helpful to take a look at [the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's template for State Party reports](#), in order to identify the key issues which will inform your research.

These key issues include information on the definition of who constitutes a child; legal provisions and principles on non-discrimination, on best interests of the child, and on the right to life, survival and development; civil rights and freedoms; family environment and alternative care; disability, basic health and welfare; education; special protection measures in the case of armed conflict, military conscription, child labour, child trafficking, street children, administration of juvenile justice, and children belonging to a minority or an indigenous group.

When drafting or revising research questions we would also advise that you always consult UNICEF's '[Methodology Guidance on Child Notice](#)'. UNICEF has published a number of 'Child Notices', which are COI reports specifically addressing the situation of children, with each report done on the basis of an extensive list of research questions.

These reports combine desk based research with interviews with local sources, including local UNICEF offices. UNICEF states that these questions have been inspired by all of the relevant legislation and so "by answering the research questions in a detailed and comprehensive manner, one should be able to generate a holistic picture of the situation of children in the country concerned".³⁴

This '[Methodology Guidance on Child Notice](#)' provides a detailed list of questions divided amongst the following research headings:

1. Demographic information /statistical data on children
2. Basic legal information
3. General principles
 - e. Non-discrimination (including children of minorities and indigenous people)
 - f. Best interests of the child
 - g. Right to life and development

³³ IAGCI, [An analysis of the coverage of issues related to children in Country of Origin Reports produced by the Home Office, 2012](#)

³⁴ UNICEF, [Methodology Guidance on Child Notice](#), 2015, pg 4

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4. Civil rights and freedoms
5. Basic rights (health / water / food / education)
6. Family environment and alternative care
7. Special protection measures
 - a. Children in conflict with the law
 - b. Victims of child trafficking
 - c. Children in armed conflict
 - d. FGM/C
 - e. Forced and underage / child marriage
 - f. Domestic violence
 - g. Child labour and other forms of exploitation
 - h. Children living and / or working on the streets
 - i. Refugee children and internally displaced people
8. Returning separated or unaccompanied children and families
9. Country specific issues that affect children.

Researchers should consult each of these sections when developing their research questions, in order to identify the relevant issues. Some of the issues will of course overlap, and it will not always be possible (or even necessary) to draw on them all. However, this list will provide a useful starting point that should be utilised as much as possible.

It may also be useful to check other sources when identifying the different factors that may be relevant for a child who is with family. For example, although section 8 of the 'Methodology Guidance on Child Notice' does include issues relevant for families, you may also want to consult a report from the [Country of Return Information \(CRI\) Project](#)³⁵ to support you when creating your research questions.

It should be noted that UNICEF are currently updating their methodology to include a section on children with disabilities. This means that researchers will have to consult other sources³⁶ for guidance on relevant factors.

2. Take an intersectional approach

What is intersectionality?

In Chapter 9, of the Oxford Handbook of Children's Rights Law, Jessica Dixon Weaver³⁷ discusses the concept of intersectionality in the context of international children's rights, a term first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a scholar in critical race theory and a feminist:

"[...]Crenshaw 'has defined intersectionality as a way of conceptualizing a problem in a way that captures the dynamics of the interplay between two or more axes of subordination.'³ She and other scholars have expanded on the understanding and analysis of intersectionality, and it has been used within the law and other disciplines to further understand the complexities of living with multiple cultural characteristics and the cumulative harm experienced by certain individuals and groups.⁴ Within the context of international children's rights, intersectionality has been used to examine the experiences of children, their subordination by law, and the ways in which these different identities come together to exacerbate discrimination and limitations placed on children because of their minority status.'⁵" (pg. 181).³ Rangita de Silva de Alwis, "Mining the Intersections: Advancing the Right of Women and Children with Disabilities within an Interrelated Web of Human Rights," Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal Association 18, no. 1 (2009): 293–322, 301 (citing UN Expert Group Meeting on Gender and Racial Discrimination, Gender-Related Aspects of Race Discrimination, UN Doc. EGM.GRD/2000/WP.1 (2000)).

⁴ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color," Stanford Law Review 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–1299; Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," Social Problems 33, no. 6 (1986): S14; Devon W. Carbodo and Mitu Gulati, "The Fifth Black Woman," Journal of Contemporary Legal Issues 11 (2001): 701–729; Darren Lenard Hutchison, "Identity Crisis: 'Intersectionality,' "

³⁵ Please note that these reports are outdated and so should only be used as a topic guide.

³⁶ Such as [State party reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

³⁷ Weaver, Jessica Dixon, 'Intersectionality and Children's Rights', in Jonathan Todres, and Shani M. King (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Children's Rights Law, Oxford Handbooks (2020; online edn, Oxford Academic, 7 May 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190097608.013.10>, accessed 8 May 2024.

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Multidimensionality,' and the Development of an Adequate Theory of Subordination," *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* 6, no. 2(2001): 285–317; Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications and Praxis," *Signs* 38, no. 4 (2013): 785–810.

5. Sherrie L. Russell-Brown, "Bridging the 'Divide' between Feminism and Child Protection Using the Discourse of International Human Rights," *Southern California Review of Law and Women's Studies* 13, no.1 (2003): 163–168; de Silva de Alwis, "Mining the Intersections," 293; Thomas A. Mayes, "Understanding Intersectionality between the Law, Gender, Sexuality and Children," *Children's Legal Rights Journal* 36, no. 2 (2016): 90–106; Aurelie Roche-Mair, "Challenges to the Protection of Children's Human Rights and the Perpetuated Marginalization of Children in Transitional Justice," *Georgetown Journal of International Law* 49, no. 1 (2017): 135–161.

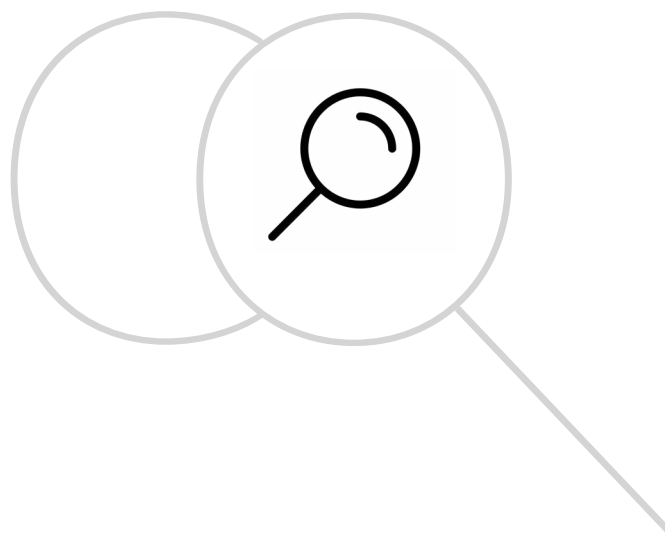
The author continues to give the following example:

"Within the realm of child marriage, several overlapping or interlocking identities of children present different types of bias. For example, the identity of a child as a refugee, female, person of color, Muslim, and child bride creates five layers of oppression that are not simply addressed by one or two provisions of international law." (pg. 182)

An intersectional approach to child-focused COI research is not common or, when undertaken, is relatively superficial. This carries the risk of homogenizing very diverse experiences. If done well, it is certainly likely to be time consuming. Nonetheless, international protection decision-making demands an intersectionality informed approach to COI. This will enable a more nuanced understanding of how intersecting factors and processes of power across geopolitical contexts shape the risks, needs and experiences of individuals seeking international protection.

Therefore, when researching child-specific human rights violations, we must always remember to look at how the identity-based, economic and social characteristics of the child (such as gender, family background, class, caste, health, education and income level) may a) increase the risk of harm, b) influence the type of persecutory conduct inflicted on the child, and c) exacerbate the effect of the harm on the child.³⁸

Taking an intersectional approach to COI research may sound complicated, but it will be critical when developing your research strategy, and can be easily broken down into a set of clear research questions.



³⁸ UNHCR, [UNHCR GUIDELINES ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#), 22 December 2009, pg 6-7

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3. Use child-focused COI sources

UNICEF, the IAGCI and ARC Foundation have provided useful lists of sources for child-focused COI which we have amalgamated below:

Background sources

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child [website](#) and documents, including;

1. [State Reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#)
2. [Committee on the Rights of the Child – Concluding Observations](#)
3. [Committee on the Rights of the Child – General Comments](#)
4. [Committee on the Rights of the Child – Decisions](#)

UNICEF

1. [State of the World's Children](#)
2. [Annual country reports and contact details UNICEF Country offices](#)
3. [Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys \(MICS\)](#)
4. UNICEF research publications of the [UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti](#)
5. UNICEF Child Notices:
 - [Methodology Guidance](#)
 - [Child Notice Somalia 2018](#)
 - [Child Notice Ethiopia \(2018\)](#)
 - [Child Notice Afghanistan \(2018\)](#)
 - [Child Notice Guinée](#)
 - [Child Notice Morocco](#)
 - [Child Notice Albania](#)
 - [Child Notice Sudan](#)

Non-governmental Organisations working on a range of issues related to children

1. [The African Child Policy Forum](#)
2. [African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#)
3. [African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect](#)
4. [Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#)
5. [Child Rights International Network \(CRIN\)](#)
6. [Defence for Children](#)
7. [European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(ECRE\)](#)
8. [Human Rights Watch – Children's Rights](#)
9. [Plan International – Children's rights](#)
10. [Save the Children](#)
11. [Terre des hommes](#)

[UNHCR Refworld](#) has a 'special feature' site with documents related to children, including legal, policy and background information.

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Thematic sources

Some of the following resources are not exclusively about children, but contain relevant information. In order to find the child-specific information use the search terms and phrases described in Principle 4³⁹. Please note that most of the reports about children focus mainly on unaccompanied children. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding, you should also include the information about the returning children, who are coming with their families and those who are accompanied by a family member.

Theme	Source
Demographic information / statistic data on children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Labour Organisation (ILO) • Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) • Pew Research Centre • UNICEF Data by topic and country • World Bank [Development Indicators]
Basic legal information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age of Consent [age of consent by country] • Citizenships Rights in Africa Initiative • Constitution Finder • NATLEX • Religion and Law Research Consortium • Right to Education [Minimum Age legislation] • UNHCR Refworld [Select country > Legal information > National Legislative Bodies] • World Law Guide [Check Legislation > select country]
Non-discrimination	<p><i>Not child-specific:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Centre for Minority Issues • Minorities at Risk Project • Minority Rights Group International • UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination • Unrepresented Nations and Population Organization
Civil rights and freedoms	<p><i>Not child-specific:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 19 [Freedom of expression and information] • Freedom House • International Federation for Human Rights
Basic rights – health	<p><i>Not child-specific:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avert [HIV/AIDS] • Eldis • International Committee of the Red Cross • Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières) • Reliefweb [country pages] • World Health Organisation (WHO)
Basic rights – food, water housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNOCHA • UNHABITAT • Reliefweb [country pages]

³⁹ Asylos, [Principles For Conducting Country of Origin Information Research on Children and Young People](#), p.15, 2024

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Theme (continued)	Source (continued)
Basic rights – education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education International • Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack • Right to Education • Their World • UNESCO [Education Statistics] • UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education
Disability and mental health	<p><i>Not child-specific:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asia-Pacific Development Centre on Disability • Centre for Global Mental Health • Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum • Disabled Peoples International • Disability Rights International • Disability Rights Promotion International • Global Action on Disability • Global Initiative on Psychiatry • Humanity & Inclusion • International Disability Alliance • Inclusion International • International Disability and Development Consortium • NGOs and UN Agencies Assisting Persons with Disabilities worldwide • UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities • World Psychiatric Association
Family environment and alternative care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better Care Network • Children in alternative care – UNICEF DATA • Orphanages Worldwide
Children in conflict with the law	<p><i>Not child-specific:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association for the Prevention of Torture • Atlas of Torture • Death Penalty Worldwide (Cornell Law School) • International Commission of Jurists • International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) • International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims • Penal Reform International • World Prison Brief
Victims of child trafficking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Protection Hub for South East Europe [Global Child Trafficking Resources] • ECPAT • Human Trafficking Search • UN Action for Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons (UN-ACT) • UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography • UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children • U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Reports

(...) Research strategy

Theme (continued)	Source (continued)
Victims of child trafficking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Protection Hub for South East Europe [Global Child Trafficking Resources] • ECPAT • Human Trafficking Search • UN Action for Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons (UN-ACT) • UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography • UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children • U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Reports
Children in armed conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict • War Child • Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict <p><i>Child soldiers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Soldiers World Index • The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative
FGM/C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 too many [Focus on practices in Africa] • Inter-African Committees on Traditional Practices [Network of African anti FGM NGOs] • Inter-Parliamentary Union [Worldwide legislation regarding FGM] • Orchid Project [Country profiles covering legislation and practice]
Forced and underage / child marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls Not Brides • OECD's Social Institutions & Gender Index [Database and country profiles]

(...) Research strategy

Theme (continued)	Source (continued)
Domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) • World Childhood Foundation
Child labour and other forms of exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S Department of State – Annual findings on the worst forms of child labour • Walk Free Foundation
Children living and / or working on the streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consortium for street children
Refugee children and internally displaced people	<p><i>Not child-specific:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) • International Refugee Rights Initiative • IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix • UNOCHA Humanitarian Response • UNHCR • UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons • Women's Refugee Commission
Returning separated or unaccompanied children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Organization for Migration (IOM) • Refugee Legal Aid Information [Post-deportation monitoring programme]

4. Use child-specific terminology in your search

Although we encourage you to use terms like 'child seeking asylum' or 'refugee child' to underpin that they are children first and foremost. For practical reasons, COI researchers should consider using a broad range of search terms when undertaking children and young people inclusive research. Examples of English keywords, individually or in strings⁴⁰ could include:

English word/term	French	Arabic	Comments
adolescent	adolescent	يافع	can be used for plural form
age	âge	عمر	can be used for "age of consent", etc.
baby	bébé	طفل	can be used for plural form
babies	bébés	أطفال	no strings
boy	garçon	ولد	can be used for plural form
child	enfant	طفل	can be used for plural form
descendent	descendant	حفيد	can be used for "descendent of migrants", etc
girl	filles	بنت	can be used for plural form
infant	enfant	رضيع	can be used for plural form
juvenile	juvénile	حدث	no strings
kid	enfant	طفل	can be used for plural form
lad	enfant	ولد	can be used for plural form
lass	jeune fille	بنت	can be used for plural form
newborn	nouveau-né	حديث الولادة	no strings
minor	mineur	قاصر	can be used for "unaccompanied minor", etc
offspring	enfant	أولاد	can be used for plural form
orphan	orphelin	يتيم	can be used for "orphaned...", etc
preteen	préadolescent	ما قبل سن المراهقة	no strings
schoolboy	écolier	تلميذ/طالب	can be used for plural form
schoolchild	écolier	تلميذ/طالب	can be used for plural form
schoolgirl	écolière	تلميذة/طالبة	can be used for plural form
separated child	enfant séparé ⁴¹	طفل مفصول عن ذويه	can be used for plural form ⁴²
teen	adolescent	مراهقة	can be used for plural form
toddler	enfant en bas âge	طفل	no strings
unaccompanied minors	mineurs non accompagnés	الأطفال غير المصحوبين بذويهم	can be used for plural form
young person	jeune	شباب	can be used for plural form
younger people	jeunes gens	شباب/شابات	can be used for plural form
young	jeune	فتي	can be used for plural form
youth	jeunes	شباب/شابات	can be used for plural form

⁴⁰ Wildcard searches * can be applied to strings of words to find documents that contain variations of those words. Example: * will find documents that contain variations of the word "teen", you could use a wildcard search like "teen*". This would match any document containing words such as "teen", "teens", "teenage", and "teenager".

⁴¹ Please note, in the French language 'separated child' is not a very common phrase, but it would be "enfant séparé." Normally, in a sentence, it would take the form of "enfants séparés de leurs familles/parents," which literally means "children separated from their families/parents."

⁴² Similarly, in the Arabic language, the phrase "child separated from family" needs to be part of a complete sentence. Writing "separated child" alone would be incomplete in Arabic.

