

Asylos annual meeting 2012

Researching country of origin information to substantiate asylum claims

Asylos provides on-demand research assistance for lawyers across Europe who represent asylum seekers in court. Asylos is a network of 50 volunteers across the world researching information relating to the country of origin of the asylum seeker or any information pertinent to the individual claim. The network currently works with lawyers in Belgium and France. As part of its annual volunteer meeting in Brussels, Asylos would like to invite lawyers working on asylum cases to join the sessions below. The conference will take place at Bruxelles Laïque (Avenue de Stalingrad 18-20, 1000 Brussels). To register for the sessions please contact info@asylos.eu.

Saturday, 8 September

14.45-16.15 Better research for asylum decisions – a discussion with asylum lawyers

Over the past two years, Asylos has supported lawyers in France and Belgium with very different kinds of research assignments, ranging from fully referenced research notes to helping on short notice to verify particular facts related to an individual claim. In this session, researchers and lawyers will discuss how to improve the research and investigate what role Asylos can play in pooling existing knowledge and network amongst lawyers.

Speakers: **Aurelie Balcells**, Avocate à la Cour, France
Sylvie Sarolea, Avocate au Barreau de Nivelles et Professeure à l'U.C.L., Belgium
Moderator: **Ellen Riotte**, Coordinator of Asylos

16.45-18.15 Country of origin information in the asylum procedure

This session will look from different angles at the role of country of origin information in the asylum procedure. What kind of sources and information would judges like to see in court? How do asylum courts gather their information?

Speakers: **Michel Wilmotte**, Président de chambre, Conseil du contentieux des étrangers, Belgium (tbc)
Julien Théron, Judge assessor for the UNHCR at the French National Appeal Court for Asylum (CNDA), France
Moderator: **Thomas Klau**, President of Asylos

Sunday, 9 September 2012

13.00-14.30 Afghanistan: Researching country of origin information in conflict and post-conflict settings

Researching human rights violations or making inquiries on refugee stories poses particular challenges in conflict and post-conflict countries: public authorities who issue documents the asylum seekers needs for their asylum claims are absent or dysfunctional. The media is often state controlled and investigative journalism non-existent. The credibility of sources might be very difficult to judge, and often reports from other NGOs on the situation are incomplete. How do existing networks in the field, like international aid agencies and embassies, operate and how can they be asked for assistance? How can researchers evaluate the quality and reliability of their sources? In 2011, Afghanistan was the top country of origin for asylum seekers in the European Union. The discussion will inform Asylos' thinking on setting up an Afghanistan research unit, which is proposed to operate in cooperation with the Danish Refugee Council in Tajikistan, starting in fall 2012 (contingent on funding).

Speakers: **Sari Kouvo**, Co-director and co-founder of the Afghanistan Analysts Network
Joanna Buckley, Barrister at Matrix Chambers
Moderator: **Minna Jarvenpaa**, International Advocacy Director at the Open Society Foundations