



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	Ivory Coast
Main subject	Black skinned people with red/blonde hair
Question(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information on human rights violations (in particular abductions and killings) against black skinned people with red and/or blonde hair (not albinos) (2014-2018)2. Information on societal attitudes towards people with such characteristics3. Information on people with red/blonde hair being used as part of witchcraft rituals (2014-2018)
Date of completion	8 October 2018
Query Code	Q120
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	

Disclaimer

This response to a COI query has been elaborated according to the [Common EU Guidelines for Processing COI](#) and [EASO COI Report Methodology](#).

The information provided in this response has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care within a limited time frame. All sources used are referenced. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive neither conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

The information in the response does not necessarily reflect the opinion of EASO and makes no political statement whatsoever.

The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on the 8 October 2018. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.

COI QUERY RESPONSE

1. Background Information

Red or blonde hair

Human beings with red hair in Africa is usually a phenomenon of a kind of albinism¹. Thinking of people with albinism, we tend to think of white hair, pale skin and red eyes. Although this is the case for Caucasians, 'albinism works differently in people of African descent'². There are two main categories of albinism: ocular albinism (which affects the eyes only); and oculocutaneous albinism (which affects the eyes, skin and hair). Within the latter category different types can be distinguished. One of them is rufous oculocutaneous albinism or just rufous albinism, which usually affects dark-skinned people. Individuals have reddish-brown skin, ginger or red hair, and hazel or brown irises³. 'Rufous oculocutaneous albinism has been reported to affect 18,500 individuals in Africa'⁴. Although, 'rufous oculocutaneous albinism has been described primarily in people from southern Africa'⁵, in 1953 Barnicot already published an article about people with red hair in south-western Nigeria⁶.

Albinism and witchcraft

In February 2015 the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee published a report on the situation of human rights of persons living with albinism. In the report was mentioned that 'the belief that the body parts of persons with albinism possess magical powers that can be used to gain wealth and prosperity and/or to gain power via winning elections are some of the reasons for the killing of, and attacks against, persons with albinism'⁷. Especially, in Sub-Sahara Africa persons with albinism are often victim of human rights violations. 'Since 2012, hundreds of persons with albinism, particularly women and children, have been killed or mutilated, and graves have been desecrated in order to obtain and sell fingers, limbs, hair, nails and other body parts to be used in so-called witchcraft rituals'⁸.

¹ Persons with albinism are sometimes referred to as 'albinos'. This term is viewed by some as offensive, as it places the emphasis on the disability rather than the person. See for example, NOAH, *Information Bulletin – What Do You Call Me?*, n.d., ([url](#))

² Stanford at The Tech/Understanding Genetics, *Hair Color - How is it that red hair shows up in people of African descent?*, 10 November 2004, ([url](#))

³ GHR, *Health Conditions - Oculocutaneous albinism*, n.d., ([url](#))

⁴ Grønskov, et al., 'Oculocutaneous albinism' in: *Orphanet Journal of Rare Diseases*, 2:43, 2 November 2007, ([url](#)), p. 3

⁵ GHR, *Health Conditions - Oculocutaneous albinism*, n.d., ([url](#))

⁶ Barnicot, N.A., *Red Hair in African Negroes: A Preliminary Study*, 1953, ([url](#))

⁷ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee on the study on the situation of human rights of persons living with albinism*, A/HRC/28/75, 10 February 2015, ([url](#))

⁸ International Bar Association, *'Waiting to disappear' International and Regional Standards for the Protection and Promotion of the Human Rights of Persons with Albinism*, June 2017, ([url](#)), p. 18

Witchcraft in Ivory Coast

According to a Gallup survey in 2010, belief in witchcraft is widespread throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, ranging from 15 percent in Uganda to 95 percent in the Ivory Coast⁹. In the latter country witchcraft is also known as 'sorcellerie' – the French word for witchcraft – and according to Leo Igwe, it is more or less a 'national religion'¹⁰. For example, many Ivoirians believe that the wife of former president Laurant Gbagbo, Simone Ehivet Gbagbo, 'possesses powers of witchcraft'¹¹. Furthermore, in Ivory Coast there is traditional believe that disabled children are suspected of witchcraft¹².

Witchcraft is prohibited in Ivory Coast by section 205 of the Criminal Code of 1981¹³. Unlike former British-colonies, such as Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, etc., there is no specific legislation in French-speaking countries, like Ivory Coast, which punish those who make false accusations of witchcraft against someone, or persons who claim to be a witch¹⁴. Nevertheless, 'violence related to witchcraft accusations can be prosecuted under other offences in the Criminal Code, such as murder, assault and incitement' in Ivory Coast¹⁵.

2. Information on human rights violations (in particular abductions and killings) against black skinned people with red and/or blonde hair (not albinos) (2014-2018)

Mid July 2015, a 46-year-old man was beheaded by several men in Buyo, a region in south-western Ivory Coast. The killers, who were arrested by the police, confessed that they wanted the organs of the red-haired planter for ritual purposes¹⁶.

Among all sources consulted and within the timeframe allocated to respond to this Query, no other specific reports, aside from the case mentioned above, could be traced in which there were human rights violations against black skinned people with red and/or blonde hair.

Nonetheless, the below information could be of relevance.

In September 2011, the Israeli newspaper Hareetz reported about a 4-year-old girl with albinism and the impossibility for her to go back with her parents to Ivory Coast. The father of the girl was quoted

⁹ Gallup, *Witchcraft Believers in Sub-Saharan Africa Rate Lives Worse*, August 2010, ([url](#))

¹⁰ Igwe, L., *Child Witchcraft Accusations in Ivory Coast*, Ethical Technology, 12 July 2015, ([url](#))

¹¹ Reuters, *Ouattara urges peace after Ivory Coast rival held*, 11 April 2011, ([url](#))

¹² BICE, *Disabled Children in Ivory Coast*, n.d., ([url](#))

¹³ Côte d'Ivoire, *Code pénal*, 1981-640; 1995-522, 31 July 1981, ([url](#))

¹⁴ UNICEF, *Children Accused of Witchcraft: An anthropological study of contemporary practices in Africa*, April 2010, ([url](#)), p. 39

¹⁵ HelpAge International, *Using the law to tackle accusations of witchcraft: HelpAge International's position*, 2011, ([url](#)), p. 15

¹⁶ L'Infodrome, *Buyo: Des individus décapitent un père de famille rouquin et lui arrachent des organes*, 10 October 2015, ([url](#))

in the article: 'Rich people in Africa come with a lot of money, looking for these children, like my daughter. Witch doctors use their parts and blood'¹⁷.

Several media reported about a 6-year-old boy who used to live in Taita Taveta county at Kenya's border with Tanzania. In September 2014, masked men, who allegedly wanted to take him to Tanzania for sacrifice, raided his home and attempted to kidnap him. The boy has rufous albinism. After the incident the boy was taken in by Kenyan politician Isaac Mwaura for security reasons. Mwaura himself is living with albinism and is also the national coordinator for the Albinism Society of Kenya¹⁸.

In January 2015, several media reported that at least 21 children were kidnapped in Ivory Coast since December 2014¹⁹. 'Most have been found dead with their bodies mutilated'²⁰. A special unit was set up to investigate the killings²¹. 'Many said the kidnappings were likely linked to ritual killings by corrupt businessmen and politicians, who used body part in ceremonies supposed to confer supernatural powers'²². According to a BBC correspondent in Abidjan, 'there was a similar spate of suspected ritual killings in Ivory Coast in the run-up to elections in 2006 and 2010'²³. A journalist for local news site L'Infodrome, who was reporting on the kidnappings, was quoted by Vice News: 'recommend human sacrifices for good luck. Adults are also sacrificed, but unfortunately, children are an easy prey'²⁴.

The organisation Under The Same Sun²⁵ keeps a database on reported killings and attacks of people with albinism. The database does not make a distinction among the different types of albinism, so it cannot be verified whether any case concerning rufous albinism is part of it as well. According to the last report, dated 11 September 2018, a total of 206 people were killed and 304 attacked in 29 countries in Africa. By far the most cases have been reported in Tanzania, in total 182 (76 killings, 80 survivors, 1 missing, 22 grave violations, 3 asylums)²⁶.

For Ivory Coast 30 cases (9 killings, 13 survivors, 4 missing, 2 asylums and 2 abandoned) have been reported²⁷. The most recent killing was reported on 30 June 2017, when a 3-year-old-boy with albinism was discovered in a well about a meter deep behind the town hall of Kani, at town in the north-western part of the country. Initially, it was believed that the child's death was caused by drowning due to the heavy rains the day before²⁸. However, Under The Same Sun reported 'that this case was not an

¹⁷ Hareetz, *Hunted in Ivory Coast, Albino Child and Parents Granted Asylum in Israel*, 16 September 2011, ([url](#))

¹⁸ Global Press Journal, *Market for Their Body Parts Forces Africans With Albinism to Live Amid Constant Danger of Attack*, 8 November 2015, ([url](#)); Standard Digital, *MP calls for law to protect albinos in East Africa*, 21 September 2014 ([url](#))

¹⁹ BBC, *Ivorian police unit to investigate suspected ritual killings*, 29 January 2015, ([url](#)); Reuters, *Child ritual killings spread alarm, anger in Ivory Coast*, 27 January 2015, ([url](#))

²⁰ Reuters, *Child ritual killings spread alarm, anger in Ivory Coast*, 27 January 2015, ([url](#))

²¹ BBC, *Ivorian police unit to investigate suspected ritual killings*, 29 January 2015 ([url](#))

²² Reuters, *Child ritual killings spread alarm, anger in Ivory Coast*, 27 January 2015, ([url](#))

²³ BBC, *Ivorian police unit to investigate suspected ritual killings*, 29 January 2015, ([url](#))

²⁴ Vice News, *Ivory Coast Deploys 1,500 Extra Security Officers to Tackle Wave of Child Killings*, 4 February 2015, ([url](#))

²⁵ Under The Same Sun is a Christian charitable organisation that promotes the wellbeing of persons with albinism via education and advocacy. For more info, see: ([url](#))

²⁶ Under The Same Sun, *Reported Attacks of Persons with Albinism*, 11 September 2018, ([url](#))

²⁷ Under The Same Sun, *Reported Attacks of Persons with Albinism*, 11 September 2018, ([url](#))

²⁸ AIP, *Côte d'Ivoire/ Le corps d'un petit albinos retrouvé dans un puits à Kani*, 4 July 2017, ([url](#))

accident and it appeared that the boy was tragically murdered for ritual purposes and his body thrown in the abandoned well²⁹.

3. Information on societal attitudes towards people with such characteristics

On 20 May 2013 the French Newspaper Le Monde published a story about a 29-year-old Ivorian lady who obtained a refugee status from UNHCR in Tunisia. She left her two children, a girl and a boy, in Abidjan. According to her, both children, (the girl is a 'rouquin'³⁰ and the boy almost black), are also discriminated³¹.

In a study on albinism among the black population in South Africa and Lesotho, the authors stated that in relation to rufous/red albinism: '...the community members see such individuals as different and reports have reached us of rejection at birth in cases where the mother was unhappy at the sight of her unusually pigmented infant as different'³².

Etieyebo and Omiegbe stated in their paper on discrimination against persons with disabilities that 'people with oculocutaneous albinism are broadly discriminated in Nigeria'³³.

The US Department of State reported in their annual report on Human Right Practices in Ivory Coast in 2016 that there was 'societal discrimination' against people with disabilities³⁴.

4. Information on people with red/blonde hair being used as part of witchcraft rituals (2014-2018)

In 2008 The Guardian reported that some fishermen in Tanzania 'believe that, if they weave the red hair from an albino into their nets, fish will be attracted by the golden glimmer'³⁵.

A paper published by the organisation Under the Same Sun³⁶ contains a quote from a well-known Zulu witchdoctor or *Sangoma*, Credo Mutwa, in South-Africa. During an interview he had with Bob Rickard in 2010, the latter asked him about the practice of *muti*³⁷, and Mutwa replied:

²⁹ Under The Same Sun, Reported Attacks of Persons with Albinism, 11 September 2018, ([url](#))

³⁰ According to the online Cambridge Dictionary (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>) 'rouquin' is translated as 'redhead'.

³¹ Le Monde, *Blogs - Julienne, 29 ans, réfugiée «dermatologique»*, 20 May 2013, ([url](#))

³² Kromberg, J.G.R., et al., 'Types of Albinism in the black southern Africa Population', in: *East African Medical Journal*, Vol. 89, No. 1, January 2012, ([url](#))

³³ Etieyebo, E. and Omiegbe O., *Religion, culture, and discrimination against persons with disabilities in Nigeria*, 31 October 2016, ([url](#))

³⁴ US Department of State, *Côte d'Ivoire 2016 Human Rights Report*, 10 February 2017, ([url](#))

³⁵ Guardian (The), *Albino Africans live in fear after witch-doctor butchery*, 16 November 2008, ([url](#))

³⁶ Under The Same Sun is a Christian charitable organization that promotes the wellbeing of persons with albinism via education and advocacy. For more info, see: ([url](#))

³⁷ *Muti* is a term for a traditional medicine in Southern Africa. The so-called 'muti killings' is the practice of killing people for their body parts. For more info, see: Under The Same Sun, *Persons with albinism: Killed for "Muti"*, n.d., ([url](#))



‘Not all Africans have got black hair. There are Africans who are regarded as very holy, as very sacred. These are Africans who are born with natural red hair. These Africans are believed to be very spiritually powerful. Now, in Africa, such people, albeamers or redheaded Africans, were the most victims of sacrifice, especially when they were just entering maturity – whether they were males or females’³⁸.

On 12 June 2015, the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (RSTMH) reported that people with albinism ‘are being murdered at an alarming rate for their body parts (primarily bones and hair) used for witchcraft purposes’³⁹.

On 19 September 2017, The Conversation reported that ‘the hair and bones, genitals and thumbs of people with albinism are said to possess distinct powers. Alleged to bring wealth or success, they are often dried and ground, put into a package to be carried, to be secreted in boats, businesses, homes or clothing, or scattered in the sea’⁴⁰.

³⁸ Under The Same Sun, *History of Attacks against Persons with Albinism (PWA)*, 15 July 2013, ([url](#)), pp. 5-6

³⁹ RSMTH, *Albinism in Africa: a medical and social emergency*, 12 June 2015, ([url](#))

⁴⁰ Conversation (The), *The trade in body parts of people with albinism is driven by myth and international in action*, 19 September 2017, ([url](#))

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