




Artificial Intelligence for Country of Origin Information
Understanding Technical and Ethical Implications

Deliverable 1: Assessment of Needs and Requirements

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ACUTE

Artificial Intelligence for Country of Origin Information
Understanding Technical and Ethical Implications

The ACUTE project aims to stimulate a global discussion about the impact of new technologies on COI. Coordinated by ACCORD, the COI unit of the Austrian Red Cross, the project is financed by AMIF funds from Staatendokumentation, the COI unit of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum.

The project's main goals are to establish standards and guidelines for the use of AI in COI, as well as to develop applications that adhere to these standards.

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1. Introduction

This document is the first deliverable ("Deliverable 1") of the ACUTE Project – Artificial Intelligence for Country of Origin Information: Understanding Technical and Ethical Implications. The ACUTE project aims to foster a global discussion on the impact of new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), on the field of Country of Origin Information (COI). Coordinated by ACCORD, the COI unit of the Austrian Red Cross, and funded by Staatendokumentation, the COI unit of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, with funds from the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), ACUTE brings together a diverse group of experts and institutions from across Europe and beyond.

The central goal of ACUTE is to develop standards and guidelines for the responsible use of AI in COI research and practice, and to design applications that adhere to these standards. The rapid evolution of AI – especially large language models (LLMs) such as the ones used by OpenAI's ChatGPT – offers new opportunities but also presents significant challenges for the collection, processing, and quality assurance of COI. ACUTE therefore adopts an interdisciplinary approach, addressing technical, legal, ethical, and practical dimensions.

The project begins with a mapping exercise to identify existing AI activities in the field of COI, and an assessment of the needs of COI units. This will be followed by a constraints analysis to ensure the ethical and methodological integrity of AI applications. If deemed useful and feasible, a prototype AI application for COI databases or other AI prototypes will be selected or developed to gain practical insights. Lessons learned will be incorporated into a handbook on the use of AI in COI, providing users with theoretical and practical guidelines. Training materials will be developed, and training sessions will be conducted.

The ACUTE research consortium comprises a Steering Group consisting of COI unit management and the Chair of the IGC COI WG, as well as a Working Group consisting of individuals with practical experience of and knowledge about AI in the field of COI. The Advisory Group comprises representatives of institutions who help guide the project with their specialised knowledge.

Acknowledgements

The analysis in this document is based on close collaboration within the ACUTE working group, whose members contribute expertise from a variety of national and institutional backgrounds.

The ACUTE project is a collective effort made possible by the dedication of many individuals and institutions. Special thanks go to all members of the Working Group, whose contributions, comments, and critical questions have helped shape this document. We also wish to thank all members of the Steering Group and the Advisory Group who have provided valuable feedback and expertise.

The Working Group consists of representatives from

- ACCORD, the COI unit of the Austrian Red Cross
- CEDOCA, the COI unit of Belgium's CGRS
- Country Analysis, the COI unit of the Swiss Secretariat for Migration (SEM)
- CPIT, the Country Policy and Information Team of the UK Home Office
- CROS Protection, the COI unit of New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment
- DIDR, the Information, Documentation and Research Division of France's OFPRA
- Landinfo, the COI unit of Norway
- Staatendokumentation, the COI unit of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum
- the COI unit of the Polish Office for Foreigners
- the COI unit of the Swedish Migration Agency Migrationsverket
- Information Centre Asylum and Migration (ICAM), which houses the COI unit of the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)

2. Objective of the needs and requirements assessment

The primary objective of this ACUTE deliverable is to identify and analyse the relevant needs and requirements of institutions involved in the project and their target groups at the outset of the project. This is essential for clearly defining the potential impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the field of Country of Origin Information (COI). The following thorough assessment aims to identify the most valuable approaches and areas of use of AI in the COI context, as determined by the ACUTE project.

This assessment will subsequently inform the creation of customised guidelines for the development and use of AI-supported software, as well as the usage of AI tools.

A fundamental part of this assessment is identifying which needs an AI-supported COI system should address, and which target groups these features should serve. The primary tasks of the target groups differ, as do their needs and potential areas of application for AI. From the perspective of the ACUTE Working Group, which consists exclusively of members from COI research units, there are different potential starting points and areas of integration when it comes to incorporating AI into the field of COI.

AI terminology. “Artificial intelligence” (AI) currently serves as an umbrella term encompassing various systems and infrastructures, rather than representing a single, clearly definable technology (see, e.g., Möller, 6 June 2024). Following the recent hype surrounding AI that began with the launch of ChatGPT in late 2022, the general public tends to be referring to so-called foundation models (FMs), a form of generative AI, when talking about “AI”. For some analysts, the term “AI” itself is misleading, as the technique behind the text generation is merely statistical (see below and Bender et al., March 2021). In contrast, some use the term “Artificial General Intelligence” (AGI) for a potential future AI that is capable of thinking and reasoning like a human, or even surpass human intelligence (see Hao, 2025, pp. 89ff).

As Evangelos Kanoulas explained in his February 2025 UNHCR paper on the potential of AI in the field of COI, FMs are “advanced AI systems trained on massive amounts of data, allowing them to handle many different tasks using a single model”. As FMs are capable of adapting to various situations, they are deemed “incredibly useful in many areas” (Kanoulas, February 2025, p. 7). Large Language Models (LLMs), such as OpenAI’s GPT, are a specific type of FM designed to generate human-like text. These text-based generative models use a statistical model to generate their output, predicting the next word, phrase, or sentence based on probability and context.

The deliverable examines potential starting points and areas of integration, as well as the resulting requirements. It considers

- the target group(s) to be addressed;

- the scope and format of AI support (i.e. encompassing support in handling or processing information that has already been researched, as well as support in researching this information itself);
- the legal framework, which for EU Member States primarily means the EU AI Act¹, while in other countries the legal framework consists of relevant domestic laws, together with applicable administrative instruments; and
- and outlines potential uses of AI for COI.

The aim of this deliverable is to provide a preliminary outline of potential application of AI tools tailored to the identified needs and requirements. These potential tools are hereinafter referred to as “use cases”, meaning concrete, practical applications of AI designed to address specific aspects of the COI workflow. The primary objective of these use cases is to increase efficiency, enabling faster delivery of information and a more productive research process. At the same time, they may also contribute to improving the quality of COI products by enhancing accuracy, currency, reliability, level of detail, accessibility, and clarity – for example, through the automated translation of sources in languages other than the working languages of the COI researcher. The overall goal is to explore how AI can best be integrated into COI workflows while upholding established COI quality standards.

¹ Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act)

3. Target groups and areas of AI application

Target groups

Country of Origin Information (COI) provides insights into the situation in the countries of origin of asylum seekers, playing a central role in decisions on applications for international protection. It is a key consideration in the work of several different professions, which can be broadly divided into two groups: COI producers, also known as “COI service providers”; and COI users, also referred to as “Refugee Status Determination (RSD) practitioners”, who can be further differentiated based on how they use COI (i.e. to make decisions or to provide legal advice). Even in legal procedures beyond the field of international protection, such as immigration, return, or border policing, information on countries of origin of the individuals involved may become relevant. Therefore, the scope of use cases could also benefit target groups outside the realm of international protection procedures.

In its 2024 Manual *Researching Country of Origin Information*, ACCORD defines COI service providers as “individuals and institutions that provide COI products and services to support RSD practitioners” by “researching and analysing country information and drafting COI products” (ACCORD, January 2024, p. 20; p. 8).

RSD practitioners comprise the user groups of COI products, namely “decision-makers (administrative and judicial level), and legal advisors” (ACCORD, January 2024, p. 8). In most national contexts, RSD practitioners do not engage in COI research themselves. Referring to ACCORD’s COI Research Cycle (see Figure 1), it is evident that COI research is relevant to RSD practitioners at various stages of processing an individual asylum claim. Specifically, it is relevant to prepare for an interview with an asylum applicant. It also comes into play at the decision-making stage, when the facts relating to the applicant’s testimony are checked, potential risks to the applicant are identified, and it is assessed whether the person would be at risk of persecution or serious harm if they were to return to their country of origin (ACCORD, January 2024, p. 19).

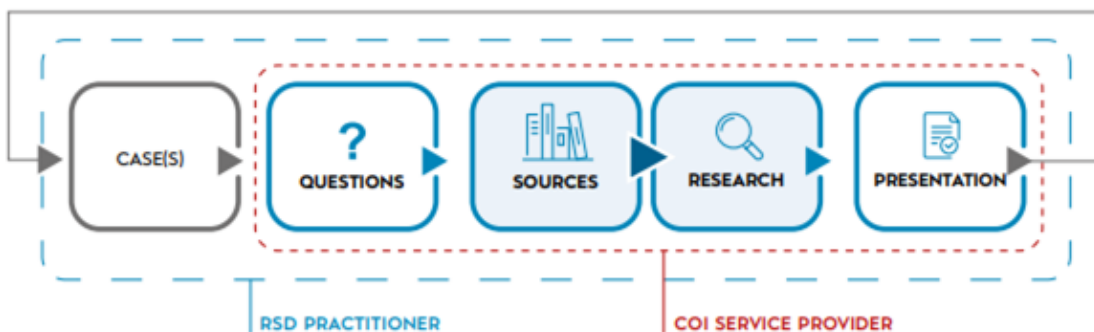


Figure 1: The COI research cycle (ACCORD, January 2024, p. 19)

Areas of AI application

Within the ACUTE project, the primary focus is on improving the research process, including researching, accessing and processing information, through the use of AI. This does not include or overlap with activities outside COI research, such as decision-making, producing country-specific guidance or policy, or preparing legal arguments (see Figure 2 for an illustration of this separation of process). There are specific legal rationales (or limitations) that support keeping these tasks separate. This is discussed further in section 5 of this document.

Depending on national contexts and institutional practices, RSD practitioners may also conduct or be required to conduct their own research. In this regard, it is important to recognise that researching COI and making decisions or constructing legal arguments require different approaches. The research process must be conducted independently from the subsequent use of COI in decision-making or legal reasoning. Research should not be used to support specific outcomes of pre-determined decisions, or already-prepared arguments by legal advisers (ACCORD, January 2024, p. 19).

Through its focus on the research process, the ACUTE project is applicable to a diverse audience, encompassing both COI service providers and other actors engaged in conducting COI research or collecting relevant COI for any purpose. However, the project's scope does not extend to creating AI-supported technical solutions for other tasks in the asylum procedure, such as preparing interviews, making decisions, or preparing legal arguments. Consequently, ACUTE aims to develop AI-supported solutions or applications that enhance COI research only.

The scope of the ACUTE project can be visualised in the following figure (see Figure 2). It shows the project's focus on the COI research process and its inclusion of the target group of RSD practitioners. Areas of application are depicted in blue, while excluded areas are depicted in grey:

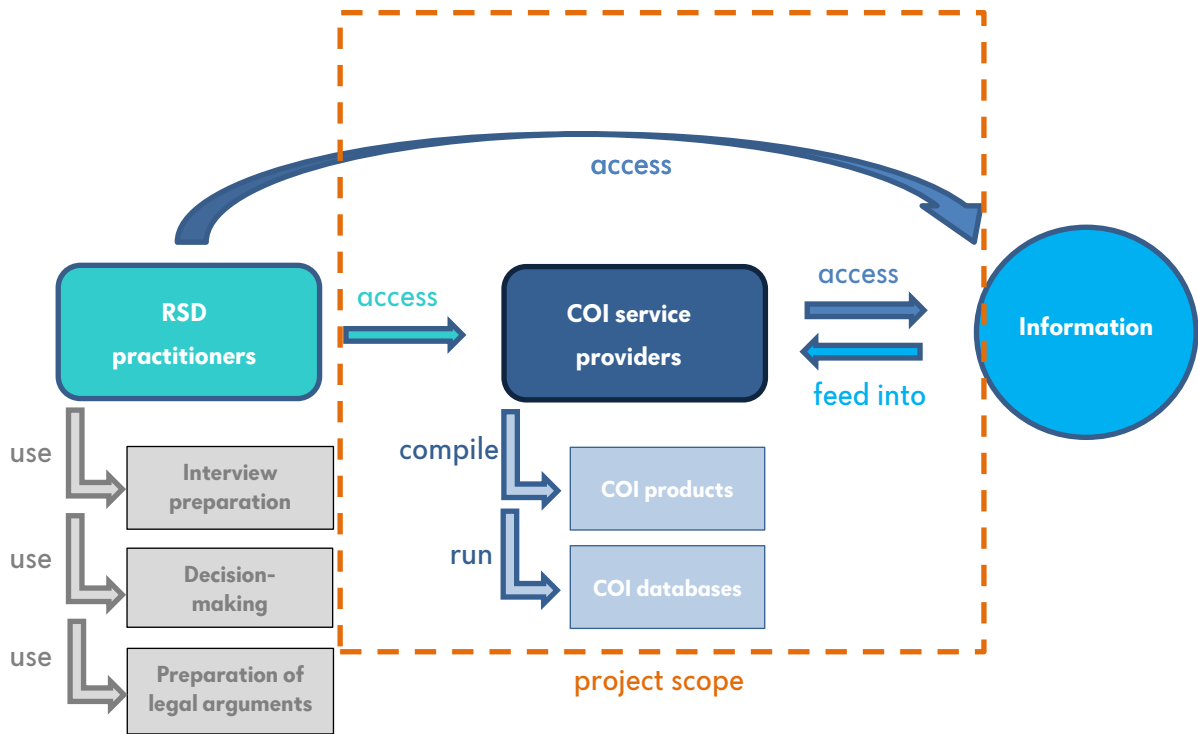


Figure 2: Scope and areas of application within the ACUTE project

4. Needs and requirements for information research and processing

The ACUTE project consortium defines the needs for an AI solution as follows:

- increased efficiency in gathering COI (by saving time)
- improved access to information (both by facilitating access to COI, and by enabling the discovery of previously inaccessible information)
- contributing to the improvement of the quality of COI products by enhancing the accuracy and currency of information, the assessment of the reliability of sources, the level of detail, and the clarity of presentation

In achieving the above, the AI solution must meet the following requirements:

- reliability and accuracy, including the provision of up-to-date, factually correct information (as factual errors can have serious consequences)
- transparency, meaning that all presented information can be traced back to its sources;
- compliance with methodological and ethical standards (see ACCORD's 2024 manual on researching COI, as well as ethical guidelines to be developed at a later stage of this project)
- human in the loop: a level of human verification of AI output adequate to the risk involved

Ideally, the AI solution additionally is

- cost-effective and exercises prudent resource management
- able to be used in multilingual contexts

These requirements should be understood as broad categories or guiding principles for the development and evaluation of AI solutions in the COI context. The concrete criteria and thresholds for each requirement – such as what constitutes sufficient reliability, transparency, or human oversight – will need to be defined individually for each AI tool or application. This specification process will depend on the particular function, intended use, and risk profile of the solution in question. In other words, the practical implementation of these requirements will be adapted to the unique characteristics of each AI system developed, with a minimum standard of specification.

Within the COI research process, two main elements of AI use can be identified:

- to access or retrieve information, and
- to process or handle information that has already been found.

Accessing and retrieving information

In this context, COI can come in two forms:

1. "processed", as existing COI products or COI databases;
2. "unprocessed", "raw" information, which might be relevant and useful in the COI context but has not been assessed and validated (Figure 2 illustrates this distinction).

Examples of AI support for accessing information include the use of Perplexity.ai to carry out online searches, "deep research" by (for instance) OpenAI's ChatGPT, Gemini summaries automatically displayed at the top of Google search results pages, and COI databases offering AI-assisted search functions and automated, AI-generated summaries of search results.

Examples of AI support for retrieving information encompass automated data entry into databases with information relevant in the context of COI, or AI-assisted automated retrieval of local-language sources in various media formats (e.g. text or audio).

Processing and handling information

AI tools can provide valuable support when processing and handling information that has already been researched. Many of these tools, such as ChatGPT, are powered by Large Language Models (LLMs) specifically designed to produce text that imitates human communication. These models have already demonstrated considerable proficiency in tasks such as formulating, paraphrasing, summarising, and translating text. Examples of AI assistance in information processing or handling include using LLMs to proofread or improve the structure of COI reports, paraphrase quotes, summarise long paragraphs or excerpts of text, or translate local-language information. Further possibilities include transcribing interviews or audio files and assistance with coding to support visualisation of numerical conflict incident data or creating other COI products.

AI hallucinations. The term "AI hallucinations" refers to instances where AI models generate (entirely) fabricated content. This content is often presented in a polished and convincing manner, which makes inaccuracies difficult to detect. The term "hallucinations" also illustrates the tendency to anthropomorphise AI; what it actually refers to is a "feature of the probabilistic pattern-matching mechanics of neural networks" (see Hao, 2025, p. 113). Contrary to the widespread assumption that this problem will eventually be solved, some researchers argue that hallucinated output is an inherent and unavoidable aspect of the underlying functionality of generative AI models (NYT, 6 May 2025).

While there are technical approaches that aim to reduce the likelihood of hallucinations – such as reducing a model's "creativity" (via its "temperature" setting²), integrating retrieval-

² LLMs choose their words (or more precisely "tokens") depending on the probability distribution as represented in their training data. The "temperature" setting controls the degree of randomness in this selection. At high temperature settings (e.g., 0.8), the probability curve is flattened, allowing the model to choose less common words. This makes the output more diverse or "creative", but also more prone to nonsense. At a low temperature setting (e.g., 0.1), the model almost always picks the single most statistically probable next word. At temperature 0 the model always picks the most probable next word. This is sometimes described as "more creative" vs. "more facts"

augmented generation (RAG, also see page 20) to try to ground responses in external sources, or training them to express uncertainty (e.g. by saying “I don’t know”) – these methods offer only partial mitigation rather than a definitive solution.

The fact that AI models cannot (yet) distinguish between truth and falsehood makes it all the more important to double-check AI-generated content and keep a human in the loop.

Comparison of application possibilities

Given the two elements of use cases described above, we assume that processing or handling information that has already been collected makes it easier to compare AI results with the original inputs than to verify information of unknown origin provided by an AI model. While the former appears easier to control in terms of reliability and accuracy, the latter may reveal information that would otherwise remain hidden.

Regardless of the specific form of AI use, it is essential that all AI output is rigorously checked, particularly in controversial (disputed) or uncertain (where the information is limited or vague) areas on sensitive or controversial topics. Any AI solution developed by the ACUTE project should aim to provide the most reliable, context-aware and targeted support possible during information gathering, coupled with improvements in terms of the information base and the speed and quality of its processing.

– however, a “low temperature” does not equal “high truthfulness”. It leads to more consistency, not accuracy. At temperature 0, the model is simply selecting the word sequence it saw most frequently during training or finds most linguistically probable. If the model is trained on data containing a common misconception, or if it “hallucinates” a statement because it follows a statistically plausible pattern (like inventing a fake citation that looks very professional), it will do so consistently even at temperature zero.

In short, a low temperature makes it less likely that a model rambles randomly, but it does not stop it from being confidently wrong.

5. Legal considerations

The existing legal frameworks governing the use and integration of AI must be respected to ensure the success of the ACUTE project and its outcomes. In this regard, the EU AI Act plays a special role, since it represents the first transnational set of rules regulating the use of AI. In addition, particular emphasis is placed on EU regulations, especially the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as most of the ACUTE (working group) member institutions are based in or represent EEA countries.

Given the current global regulatory landscape, our initial focus is on the EU AI Act, as it remains the most comprehensive and binding framework for governing AI use. While other countries are exploring or implementing sector-specific or principle-based approaches, none have yet introduced legislation with comparable scope and enforceability. This makes the EU AI Act a practical and robust starting point for ensuring compliance and guiding responsible innovation, while we continue to monitor developments in other regions for future alignment.

The EU AI Act, which came into force in August 2024, aims to promote the use of trustworthy AI while maintaining a high level of protection for people whose lives and rights may be affected by AI technologies. According to Article 3 (1) of the Act, an AI system is defined as a

“machine-based system that is designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy and that may exhibit adaptiveness after deployment, and that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments” (EU AI Act, Art 3 (1))

The objective of the EU AI Act is to ensure legal certainty for all stakeholders, including providers, deployers, importers, and affected persons. In addition to harmonisation provisions for the placing on the market, commissioning and use of AI systems in the EU, the regulation also contains provisions for market observation, market surveillance, governance and innovation promotion.

A key component of the EU AI Act is the classification of AI systems into distinct risk groups. Based on this classification, systems are either prohibited or subject to varying regulatory requirements. The Act differentiates between prohibited practices (Art. 5 EU AI Act), high-risk AI systems (Art. 6 EU AI Act), AI with limited risk, as well as AI with minimal or no risk.

The wording of the EU AI Act currently leaves room for interpretation regarding the category of “high-risk AI,” which has significant implications for the use of AI in asylum procedures and thus for the ACUTE project.

Whether AI is considered high-risk is generally regulated in Article 6 of the EU AI Act. Article 6 (2) of the EU AI Act stipulates that AI systems listed in Annex III of the Regulation are

considered high-risk AI. According to Annex III, AI systems intended to be used by or on behalf of competent authorities or bodies, agencies, offices, and agencies of the Union to assist them in the examination of asylum and visa applications and residence permits, as well as related appeals, with the aim of determining the eligibility of applicants, including related assessments of the reliability of evidence, are considered high-risk AI.

According to Article 6 (3), AI systems referred to in Annex III are not considered high-risk if they do not pose a significant risk to health, safety, or fundamental rights. More specifically, AI is not considered high-risk if

- the system only performs a narrowly defined procedural task, or is intended to improve a previously completed human activity (potentially encompassing some of the applications discussed earlier), or
- merely recognises decision patterns or deviations – without replacing or significantly influencing human judgment, or
- only performs preparatory tasks for an assessment relevant to the uses listed in Annex III.

Therefore, any use of AI in an asylum procedure, whether for translation, summarising various data, or answering other asylum-specific questions, might fall under the category “high-risk AI”, unless such use falls under the exceptions of Article 6(3). The applicability of the exception in Article 6 of the EU AI Act in this context is questionable given that fundamental rights, such as the right to respect for private and family life (Art. 8 ECHR) may be impaired or restricted in asylum proceedings. Furthermore, it is unclear under what conditions AI is deemed not to have a material influence on a decision, or is considered to only perform “preparatory tasks”. According to Article 6 (5), the Commission shall, not later than 2 February 2026, provide guidelines specifying the practical implementation of Article 6 and including practical examples of what is considered high-risk and not high-risk. The Commission has missed this deadline, and the guidelines are now expected in March or April 2026 (Simmons & Simmons, 17 February 2026).

If the use of AI in asylum procedures is considered high-risk, there are more obligations that need to be met. These obligations vary depending on the specific role of the actor (provider, manufacturer, etc.) involved, with the provider bearing the most extensive obligations, as outlined in Article 16 of the EU AI Act. Among other things, providers must set up a risk management system, ensure data management, record, document, and make available extensive information, and ensure that the AI system is subject to human oversight and protected against access by third parties. In addition, a quality management system must be established to ensure compliance with the provisions of the AI Act. An EU conformity assessment procedure must be carried out and the system must be registered in the EU database.

Automatically generated logs must be kept for at least six months. Among other requirements, providers are obliged to take corrective measures in the event of violations of the regulation. Upon reasoned request from the competent authorities, providers must demonstrate that they meet the requirements imposed on them. The obligations for high-risk AI will come into force in August 2026.

At the moment, due to the often broad and vague definitions in the EU AI Act, only additional legal information and future practice will show the extent to which the regulation will be restrictive in nature.

For the ACUTE project, this puts us in a wait-and-see position. While it is not yet clear how restrictive the law will be interpreted upon implementation, the specific AI solutions and software developments for the ACUTE project still need to be determined.

In any case, it is important to be aware that the EU AI Act will have implications for ACUTE results, although it is not yet clear how significant these will be. Should certain outcomes of the project be classified as "high-risk AI", the project team will need to ensure that the associated requirements are met.

Nevertheless, it is already evident that a key advantage of the planned ACUTE project outcomes is that they focus on improving the research process. Tasks such as decision-making and preparing legal arguments are intentionally kept separate from the project's scope. This ensures that the ACUTE AI solutions are not intended to provide support for decision-making by AI, which would imply a much stronger association with AI systems classified as high-risk.

6. National administrative differences

The ACUTE Project is a multinational initiative involving participants from EU and non-EU countries; therefore, it is essential to consider the varying national and administrative contexts when establishing the project's desired outcomes. While the previous section addressed AI regulations within the EU as a legal basis, this section will discuss how specific legal and/or administrative constraints in different countries could shape the needs and requirements for potential ACUTE AI solutions, and how these could be addressed within the project.

Different providers, different models

Currently, the use of different generative AI models in various COI units presents a diverse picture. Areas of application, intensity of use, but also the providers and the use of models differ. While some units have their own ChatGPT account which they exclusively use, others only permit the use of Microsoft's Copilot or even prohibit the use of AI tools altogether. For the software developments planned as part of the ACUTE project, these differences must be considered, particularly with regard to AI solutions based on programmatic connections to existing commercial models.

Different official positions on the use of AI

While some governments are proactively addressing the topic of AI and its implications for public administration by establishing AI strategies and planning nationwide infrastructure, others are adopting a more cautious approach. A central requirement of the ACUTE project will be to engage equally with these different positions and strike a balance between precautionary measures and security, and creativity and innovation. By aligning with the EU AI Act, the project intends to establish a reliable framework that will ensure that its initiatives can realise their full innovative potential within secure and legally defined boundaries.

Different forms of cooperation between COI researchers and decision-makers

The way in which COI researchers and decision-makers collaborate on research questions can vary depending on the national context. In some countries, decision-makers actively seek support from COI researchers when preparing for and conducting interviews, as well as when following up afterwards. In other national contexts, decision-makers are expected to conduct their own research and only consult COI researchers when specifically required to do so. In some countries, administrative decision-makers primarily use materials prepared by the national COI unit to inform their decisions or are explicitly required to consider only these sources. In other countries, decision-makers are expected to contact the national COI unit directly with any research questions. In some countries, the COI unit not only provides the relevant information, but also country-specific policy guidelines to decision-makers.

The role of COI service providers therefore varies considerably. It ranges from playing an

intensive mediating role between decision-makers and COI documents to providing administrative decision-makers with support only when necessary. Accordingly, administrative decision-makers in different national systems either must rely on their own research (skills) or can draw on more substantial support.

Within the ACUTE project, various institutional factors therefore determine the extent to which AI-based solutions are considered necessary to support COI researchers and RSD practitioners in their research. As time constraints and information overload are frequently identified as challenges in the work of RSD practitioners, the ACUTE project also seeks to examine AI-supported solutions that aim to improve efficiency and save time for all professional groups engaged in COI research. The proposed AI solutions should primarily deliver improvements to COI research which, by increasing the availability of high-quality information should, indirectly, support more consistent and better-informed decision-making, ideally extending across national boundaries.

Handling different types of information

To successfully integrate AI into multinational COI practices, the ACUTE project must adapt to institutional and national practices regarding the use of different types of sources. In the context of the AI solutions envisaged by the project, this may concern topics ranging from AI-assisted translation to the use of social media sources.

Social media sources (or “user-generated content”), for instance, present challenges to traditional research methods due to their diversity and distribution across different platforms, and the immediacy with which information spreads – often in real-time as events unfold. An AI system able to handle and assess these diverse sources, which vary in quality but may provide valuable insights in terms of quantity, could give COI units access to a significant amount of information that is currently un- or under-used. However, the way social media sources are handled varies from COI unit to COI unit. While some regularly incorporate this type of source into their COI products, others do not. For the ACUTE project, this means that potential AI solution prototypes capable of incorporating social media sources into research must clearly indicate the advantages and disadvantages of integrating this source type and provide the option to allow selective integration to respect institutional preferences.

A similar approach could be useful for incorporating local foreign-language sources. In this case, automatic AI translation could be carried out upfront, though this would entail certain risks, including potential translation errors or distortion of meaning, which could compromise the reliability of COI products. Again, clear labelling of these types of sources and their automatic translation in the search results, along with the option to exclude them, if necessary, should be provided. This would increase transparency and give users control over the types of sources included in the search. The same applies to AI-assisted transcription, which could make information that is only made available in audio or video formats accessible to text-based search.

7. Outline of potential AI tool uses

This section will present potential AI use cases within this defined framework. To illustrate this, we will revisit Figure 2, which showed the scope and areas of application within the ACUTE project and expand on it in terms of specific use case possibilities:

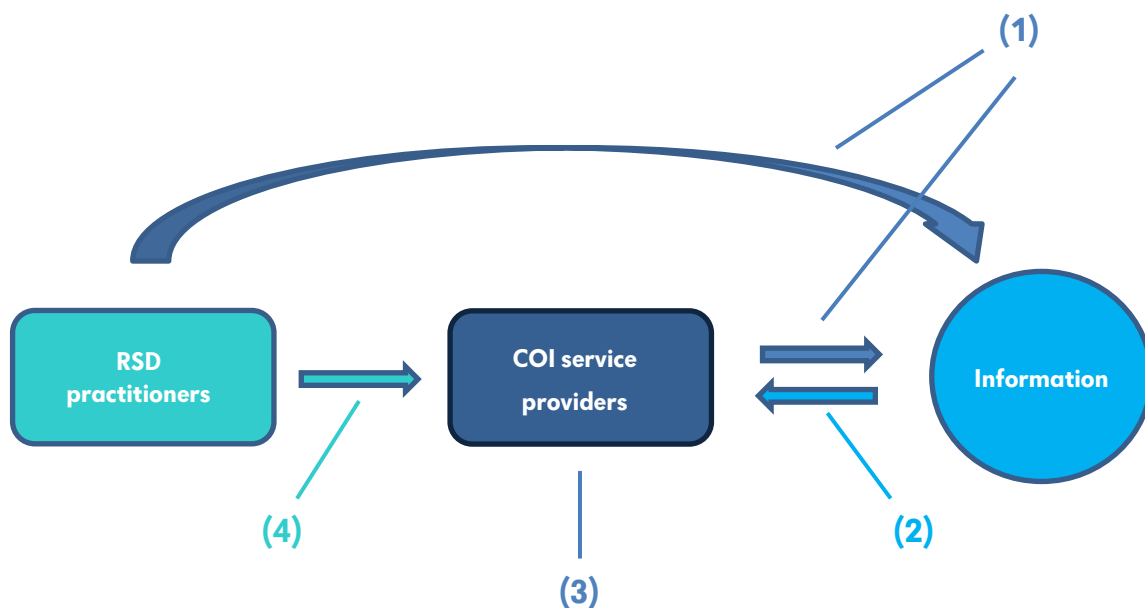


Figure 3: Scope and areas of application including groups of potential AI use cases within the ACUTE project

(1) Search tools: these are AI tools that assist with accessing “raw” information. Existing commercial tools, such as Perplexity.ai, ChatGPT, Copilot and Gemini, are already being used by RSD practitioners and COI researchers for this purpose. However, using third-party commercial AI tools can cause issues in certain contexts, and different national units may have different administrative rules regarding the use of various providers and models (see section 6 of this document). Therefore, the ACUTE project is tasked with creating a joint, comprehensive and up-to-date overview of existing methods and tools, detailing their respective advantages and disadvantages for COI research practices. This will facilitate the sharing of experiences and provide a useful starting point for colleagues who are new to AI.

(2) Tools expanding the existing information base: Solutions that offer AI support with regard to information retrieval (see section 4 of this document) could expand the information base of existing COI products and especially of COI databases. For example, foreign-language news sources could be integrated into COI database search results using automatic AI translation. This could be extended to audiovisual content by preceding the AI translation with automatic AI transcription. As mentioned in the previous chapter, however, it must always be clearly stated

which steps were carried out exclusively by AI and what inaccuracies this may entail.

Similarly, as mentioned in the previous section, the inclusion of user-generated content (i.e. social media sources) could also be considered. A tool that can include individual contributions in search results and cumulatively assess the content of numerous postings on one topic in a transparent manner could offer added value.

Expanding existing databases, such as ecoinet which already offers a comprehensive range of COI content, would greatly increase the amount of content available for research. For instance, users could benefit from local-language reporting.

(3) Text processing tools: using AI to support processing and handling of information that has already been researched (see section 4 of this document). Possible use cases for an existing database include AI-supported qualitative data analysis (i.e. qualitative coding) of selected text excerpts, the creation of daily/weekly security situation overviews from text snippets taken directly from various sources using a fixed template, and the transformation of selected relevant text passages into reports in continuous text format. Additionally, the COI database can be enhanced with functions such as AI-supported translation, paraphrasing, and synthesis of passages from multiple sources.

(4) Access support tools: assistance in accessing COI, similar to those described in (1). However, unlike what we termed *search tools*, the focus is on COI that has already been processed (see section 4 of this document). The goal is not to use general commercial AI models to search all accessible sources, but to support working with already created COI products or pre-selected information within a specific COI database. The main target group for these tools are RSD practitioners conducting research. Possible use cases for such support include identifying relevant research topics or search terms. AI could, for example, help identify relevant research questions related to international protection grounds based on interview transcripts, highlight relevant aspects, and suggest search terms or particularly relevant sources. AI could also help in creating accessible forms of presentation of COI. In addition, an AI-supported chatbot solution could provide support by enabling chatting with one or more documents or summarising the most relevant sections of documents for a specific search query.

General considerations and limitations

In general, it is important to note that the more AI is used for research rather than retrieving information from curated databases or existing COI products, the more challenging it is to identify AI hallucinations (see section 4 of this document). From a technical perspective, the retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) approach is likely to be adopted for most of the proposed applications of AI in COI. With the RAG approach, the model's retrieval of information is strongly guided by a defined information base, for example ecoinet's COI database. While this reduces the risk of hallucinations, attention must be paid to how hallucinations can be handled and how safe output can be ensured in all these potential use cases.

8. Conclusion and outlook

This document has set out the issues to be considered in order to understand how AI can be used to enhance COI research within the ACUTE project framework. It provides an overview of the needs and requirements for integrating AI into the COI domain by identifying distinct target groups, mapping application areas and outlining technical possibilities, while considering legal and administrative constraints. There are ten core takeaways to inform the next development phases of the project:

1. **Focus on research, not decision making tools:** AI tools should enhance information gathering and handling, not replace or outsource decision-making.
2. **Support diverse user needs:** Both RSD practitioners and COI researchers must find tools that align with their distinct COI workflows and constraints.
3. **Consistent with COI standards:** AI use must align with existing COI quality standards and avoid shortcuts that could compromise the reliability of sources and accuracy of information.
4. **Human in the loop:** AI output must remain subject to human verification to mitigate the risk of hallucinations, biases or misinformation.
5. **Transparency matters:** Users must always be able to identify AI-generated content and understand its origin.
6. **Adaptability across contexts:** Solutions must be flexible enough to function under diverse administrative, legal and technical frameworks across countries and organisational contexts.
7. **Adjustable integration:** Tools should allow selective integration of different modules (e.g. toggling off social media sources) to respect institutional preferences.
8. **Legally compliant:** The working group must remain responsive to evolving interpretations of the EU AI Act and other relevant regulations, building tools in compliance with the law.
9. **Efficient and effective:** Time savings are welcome, but reliability and contextual sensitivity remain paramount.
10. **Promote cross-national consistency:** Well-designed AI tools should help harmonise COI standards and practices across jurisdictions.

These guiding principles will inform the design and evaluation of the AI-supported tools developed within the ACUTE project. In subsequent phases, these considerations will be tested and refined through prototyping, feedback loops, and interdisciplinary collaboration – with the goal of creating meaningful, responsible, and effective support systems for COI research.

9. Glossary

ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation, the COI unit of the Austrian Red Cross

ACUTE – Artificial Intelligence for Country of Origin Information: Understanding Technical and Ethical Implications

AI – Artificial Intelligence

AI Act – Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act)

AGI – Artificial General Intelligence

COI – Country of Origin Information

ECHR – European Convention on Human Rights

FM – Foundation Model

LLM – Large Language Model

RAG – Retrieval-Augmented Generation

RSD – Refugee Status Determination

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