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# Usage and impacts of ecoi.net

Executive Summary

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# Executive Summary

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The European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net) collects information on countries of origin and makes it available on a globally accessible online platform to those persons who make decisions in asylum procedures, prepare them or represent asylum seekers - regardless of which country of origin is relevant for a decision. Ecoi.net is one of the largest databases worldwide and is operated by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), a department of the Austrian Red Cross, in cooperation with the "Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration" (Information Network Asylum & Migration).

ACCORD is carrying out an evaluation of ecoi.net in order to demonstrate the impacts of ecoi.net and to check the impact goals, but also to obtain concrete feedback on the platform's usage. In a first step, the Competence Center for Nonprofit Organisations and Social Entrepreneurship at the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration was commissioned to conduct qualitative interviews with ecoi.net users. The primary aim was to evaluate the impacts of ecoi.net for those people who use country of origin information in the preparation or decision-making process of asylum procedures. Subsequently, the impacts on the asylum procedure itself were to be determined.

Methodologically, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted on the basis of hypothetical impacts. These were structured with the help of a specially developed standardised guideline. Specifically, 20 interviews were conducted with ecoi.net users, whereby attention was paid to heterogeneity with regard to their nationality and function in asylum procedures. Thus, decision-makers, employees of asylum authorities, refugee advisors (from governmental and civil society organisations), but also people from other research platforms from Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Malta, Greece, Sweden, Norway, Africa and South America were interviewed.

It became particularly clear during the interviews that ecoi.net creates **significant added value**. This is true **for the users** and consequently also **for asylum procedures**. Although other platforms or internet search engines can also be used for research, **ecoi.net was consistently described as the first and best way to conduct a search**. In this context, ecoi.net was referred to as unique and particularly comprehensive. It can be assumed that the added value in the users' daily work of the is largely due to ecoi.net and would not have arisen to the same extent through research on other platforms.

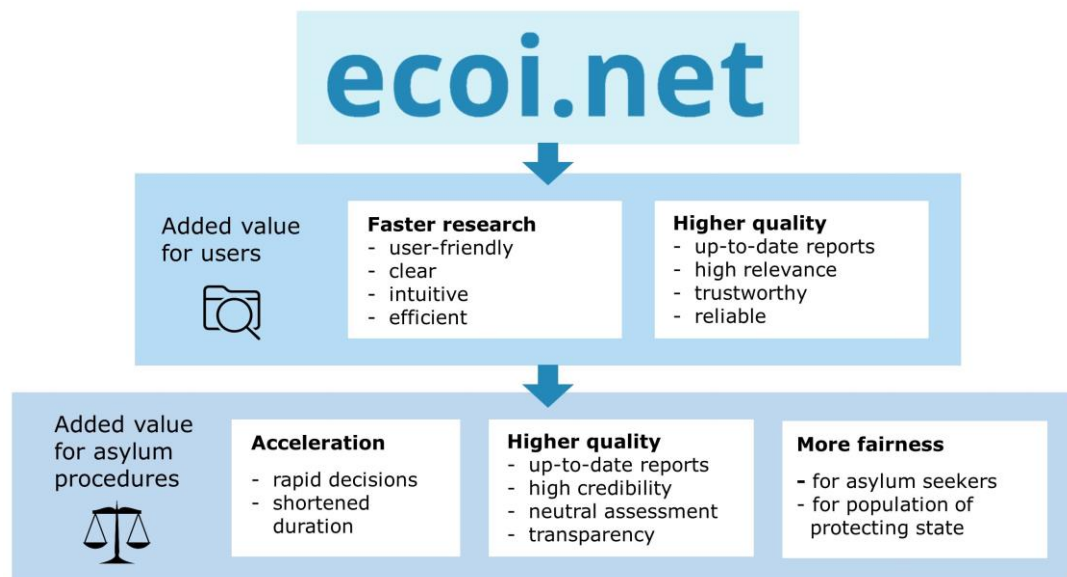
For the various **users** of ecoi.net, there is added value in many respects with regard to their activities in the asylum procedure. On the one hand, this consists of the fact that ecoi.net **facilitates research** and can thus be carried out more **quickly**. It is particularly appreciated that the platform is clearly laid out and structured, which is why it is described as intuitive and user-friendly. In this way, research can be carried out very quickly using ecoi.net. This speeds up the entire work process and increases work efficiency.

On the other hand, the added value for users lies in the **high quality of the results** of a search. The reasons for this are the high **topicality** and **relevance** of the content as well as the exclusive use of **trustworthy sources**. For example, users report finding the most up-to-date information and reports on ecoi.net, which are always tailored to the requirements of asylum procedures. Users also emphasise that they can rely on ecoi.net to find reputable sources and that questionable sources are not even displayed.

There is no doubt that the above-mentioned advantages of ecoi.net result in a clear added value for the **entire asylum procedure**. For example, asylum procedures are **accelerated** due to the quick and easy research in the preparation and partly also in the implementation. If ecoi.net did not exist, the research would take considerably more time, which would lead to an increase in the procedure's duration or additional staff would have to be hired. Both would be associated with corresponding costs. Longer procedures also mean a longer period of uncertainty for the asylum seekers, which is regularly accompanied by psychological stress.

The high quality of information and trustworthiness of sources reported by the interviewees also lead to a **higher quality of asylum procedures**. In this context, many users emphasise that ecoi.net gives them access to a variety of different sources that allow for an independent and neutral assessment of the situation. The greater the number and variety of sources referenced in a procedure, the more transparently a decision can be justified.

Last but not least, the users assume that the above-mentioned factors will also result in **more fairness** towards asylum seekers and, vice versa, towards the population of the protecting state, which also means added value for the asylum procedure.



In addition to analysing the impacts of using ecoi.net, it was also interesting from the perspective of the NPO&SE Competence Center at the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration to take a closer look at the importance of civil society organisations as sources of information on countries of origin in the course of the surveys. Here it became apparent that sources from civil society organisations, in addition to governmental and other sources, are considered very important in order to be able to draw a holistic picture of a country's situation. In many cases, NGO sources are seen as a counterbalance to government sources. It is particularly appreciated that NGOs work very close to the people and thus have easier access to information.

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