

# Country of Origin Information (COI) Research



## Research Unit

Refugee, Asylum and International Operations

June 24, 2021



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# This Presentation Discusses:

- Overview of the RAIO Research Unit (RU)
- Navigating COI resources (RU ECN page)
- Identifying COI tools and sources
- Evaluating COI sources (reliability and biases)
- Practical Exercises

# Who are we?

- The Research Unit (RU) was established as an independent entity for COI in 1991
- Why?
  - To ensure that political considerations do not influence determinations regarding whether an applicant has a well-founded fear of persecution



# Who are we?

- The RU is a center of expertise in country of origin information (COI), including human rights conditions, in support of USCIS and DHS
- The RU provides:
  - Reliable COI and training to support timely and accurate adjudications
  - Other related assistance to fulfill the mission of USCIS and DHS



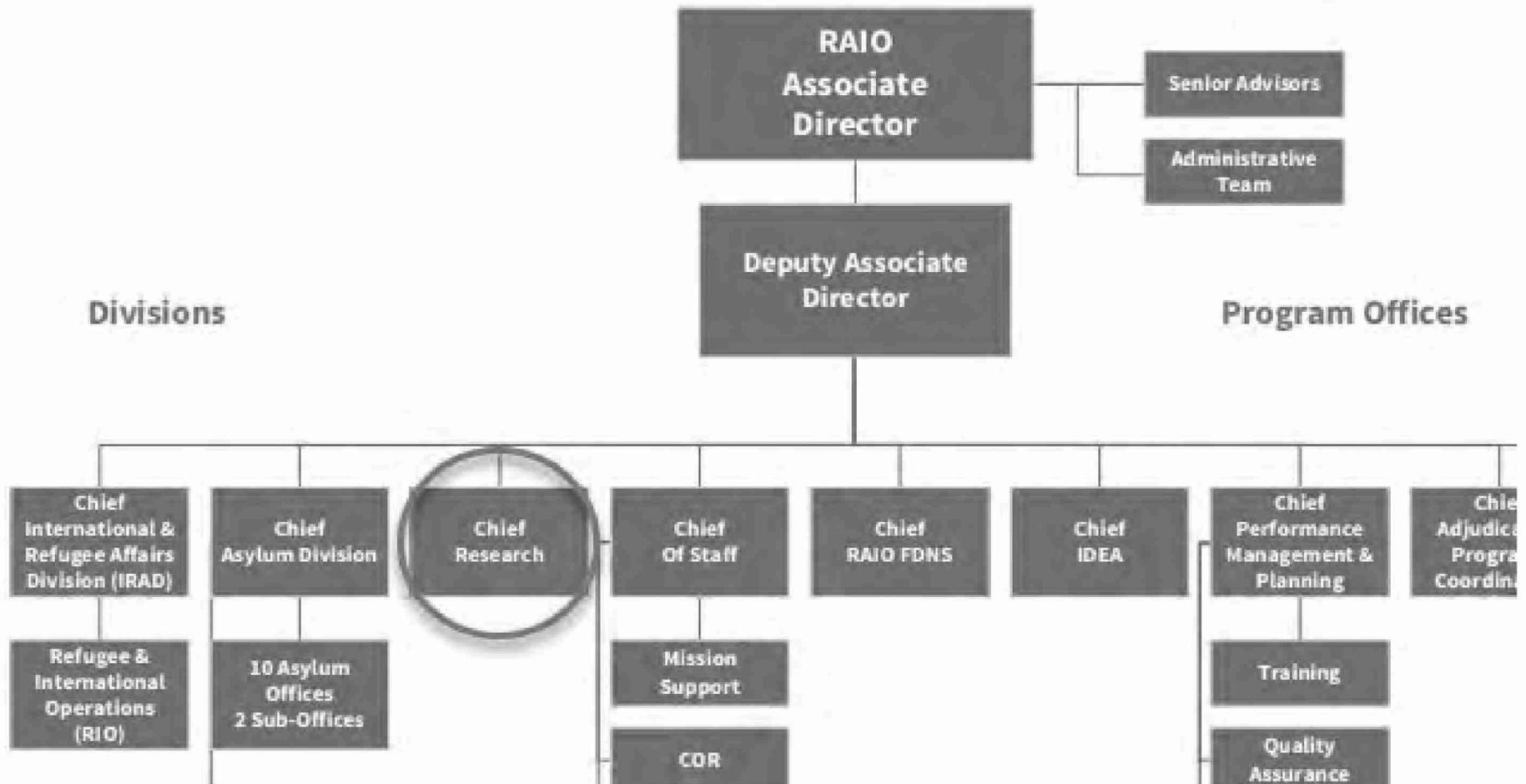
# Federal Regulation

## 8 C.F.R. §208.1(b)

“The Associate Director of USCIS Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations (RAIO) shall also, in cooperation with the Department of State and other appropriate sources, compile and disseminate to asylum officers information concerning the persecution [of protected groups]...in other countries, and other information relevant to asylum determinations, and shall maintain a documentation center with information on human rights conditions.”



# RAIO and RU



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# Navigating COI Sources



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# Common Challenges with COI

- Not having a familiarity with the country/issue
- There are not sufficient resources available in English/or another language in which the officer is proficient
- Too many separate venues to search for the information that you need
- Limited time to conduct COI research
- Lack of specific COI to address the COI issues in the case



# Social Media as a Source of COI

- Challenges with Wikipedia, Facebook, YouTube and other forms of social media
- Wikipedia itself is not a reliable source of information....why?
  - Vetting and evaluation of original sources is required
  - But it could direct you to reliable sources



# Suggested Places to Start

- Research Unit ECN
- ECOI.net (ACCORD)
- Janes (security-related)
- TAC Think, Analyze & Connect
- PiX (security-related- only for certain countries)
- Honorable mentions: ACLEL, ACAPS, Reliefweb, Refworld



# RU Homepage

## RAIO Research Unit

Search this site  

Use this box to search through the whole RU ECN.

### Announcements & Events

✓ Title Modified

There are no items to show in this view of the "Announcements" list.

Click on the map below to go to our regional pages, which contain country pages, regional resources, and researcher contact information.



New RU Products



Query Responses



Training Materials



Encyclopedia of Online Resources



Foreign Documents Collection



All Country Pages



E-mail Us



About Us: Contact Researchers



Speaker Series Videos



Hot Topics



News Summary Bulletins



All RU Products



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# RU ECN

- The Research Unit ECN page provides a variety of resources, including:
  - Country Pages
  - Query Responses
  - Training Materials
  - News Summary Bulletin and Hot Topics
  - Foreign Document Collection
  - Encyclopedia of Online Resources
  - Speaker Series Videos



# RU Scavenger Hunt

- Where would you look to find information about gangs operating in Central America?

## Europe & Central Asia

- Afghanistan
- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Iran
- Kazakhstan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Moldova
- Russia
- Tajikistan
- Turkmenistan
- Ukraine
- Uzbekistan

We have several options here, right?

## Latin America & Caribbean

- Brazil
- Central American Gangs
- Colombia
- Cuba
- Dominican Republic
- Ecuador
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- Haiti
- Honduras
- Jamaica
- Mexico
- Nicaragua
- Peru
- Venezuela

## Middle East & North Africa

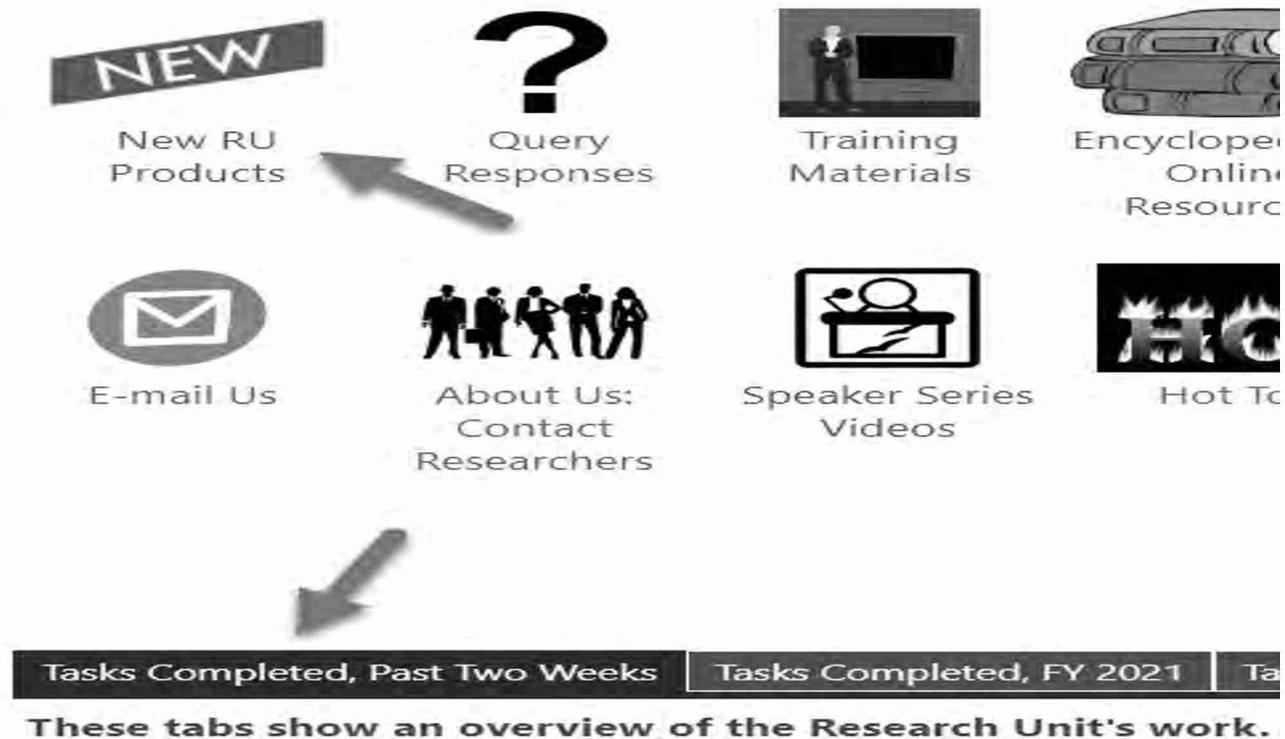
- Algeria
- Bahrain
- Egypt
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Libya
- Palestinian Territories
- Saudi Arabia
- Syria
- Turkey
- Yemen



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# RU Scavenger Hunt

- What is the most recently published RU product?



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# RU Scavenger Hunt

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## Document Research and Resources

### Open Source Resources

### US Government Resources Links

- 



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# RU Scavenger Hunt

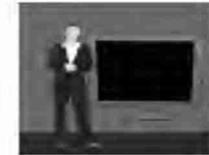
- How can I reach out to the Research Unit for questions?



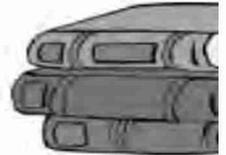
New RU  
Products



Query  
Responses



Training  
Materials



Encycloped  
Online  
Resourc



E-mail Us



About Us:  
Contact  
Researchers



Speaker Series  
Videos



Hot To



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# What to Include in a Query

- Specific question(s)
- Timeframe within which you need a response
- Supporting documents (if needed): e.g., I-589 application, statement, interview notes—  
encrypt the email to protect the PII.



# Queries

[RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov](mailto:RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov)

## RAIO Research Teams

- Informal query response
  - Help available via Skype, Teams or Email
  - Types:
    - List of relevant sources
    - Sources and select quotes
- Formal query response
  - Detailed response( 2-20 pages)
  - Response in hours to weeks

# How Can the Research Unit Help You?

- General or background COI
- Prepare to interview a specific case
- During or after the interview
- Citable COI sources in support of your decision
- Liaison with the Law Library of Congress and other external COI resources



# Evaluating COI



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# Reliability of Sources

- First step in assessing any source of information?
  - Identify the source
- Next? Evaluate reliability of source
  - Is there agenda/bias of the source if any?
  - Express its point of view or present an unbiased report?
  - Compare source's info to info from other sources?
  - Source's research methodology?

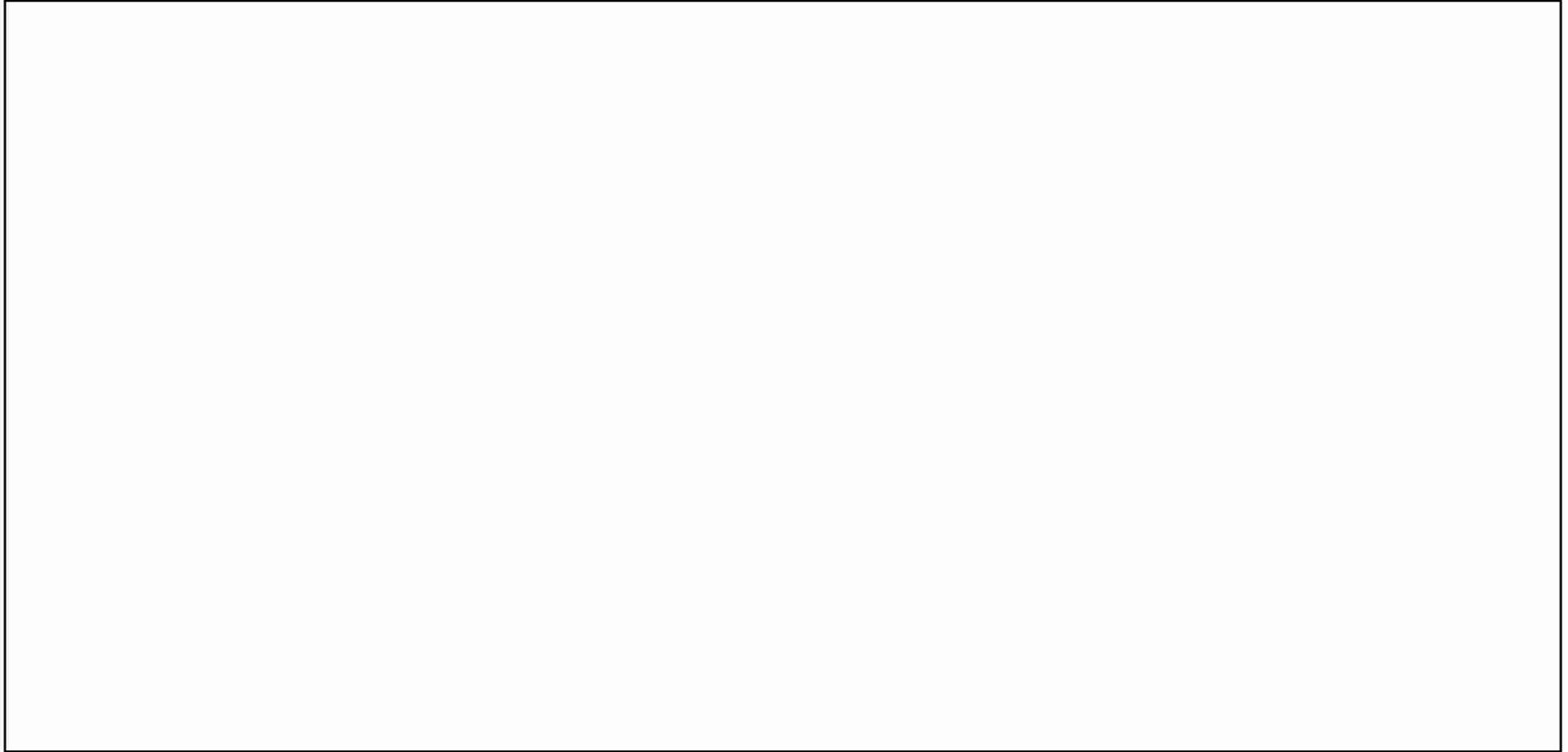


# Exercise 1



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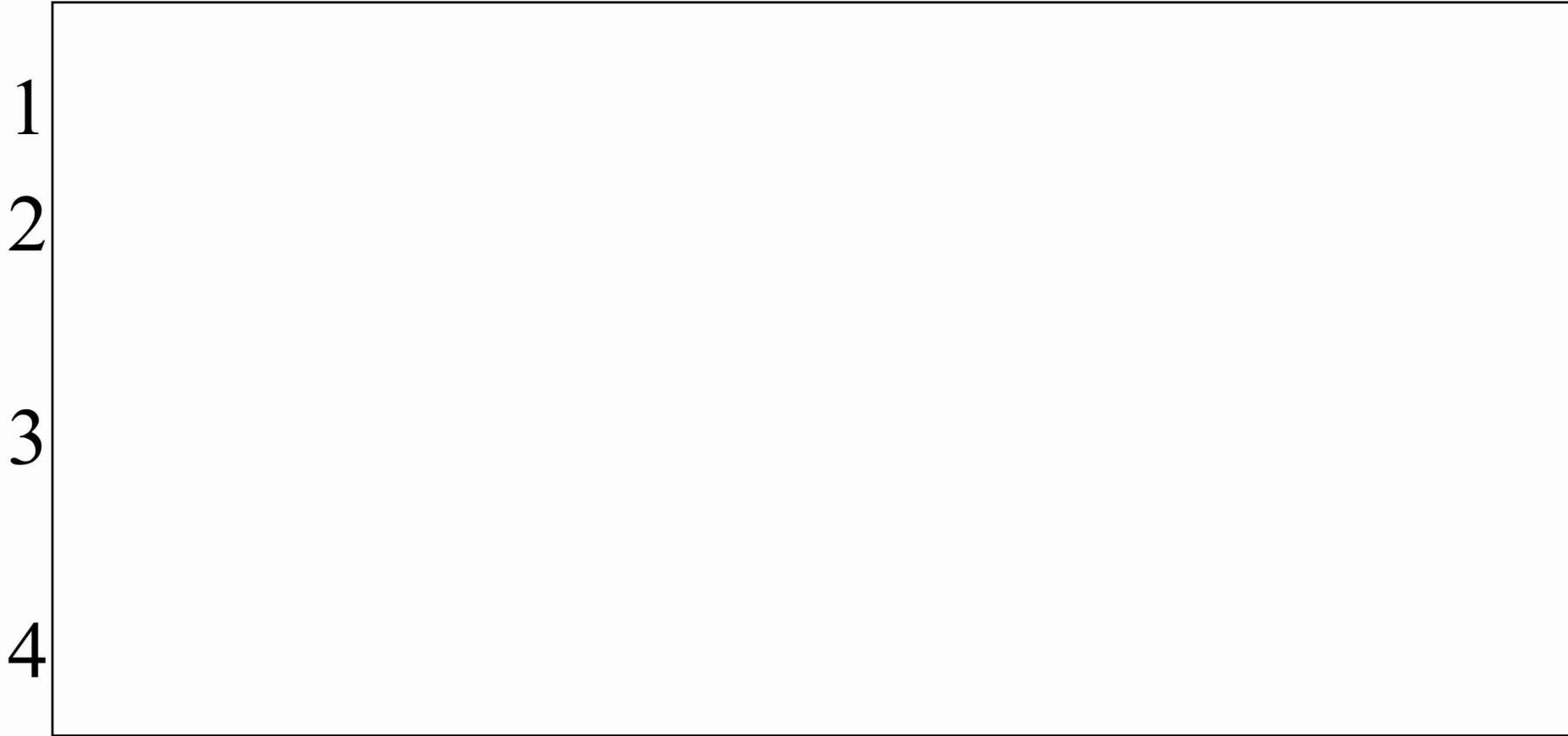
# Exercise: Evaluating Sources



# Evaluating Sources (Cont'd)



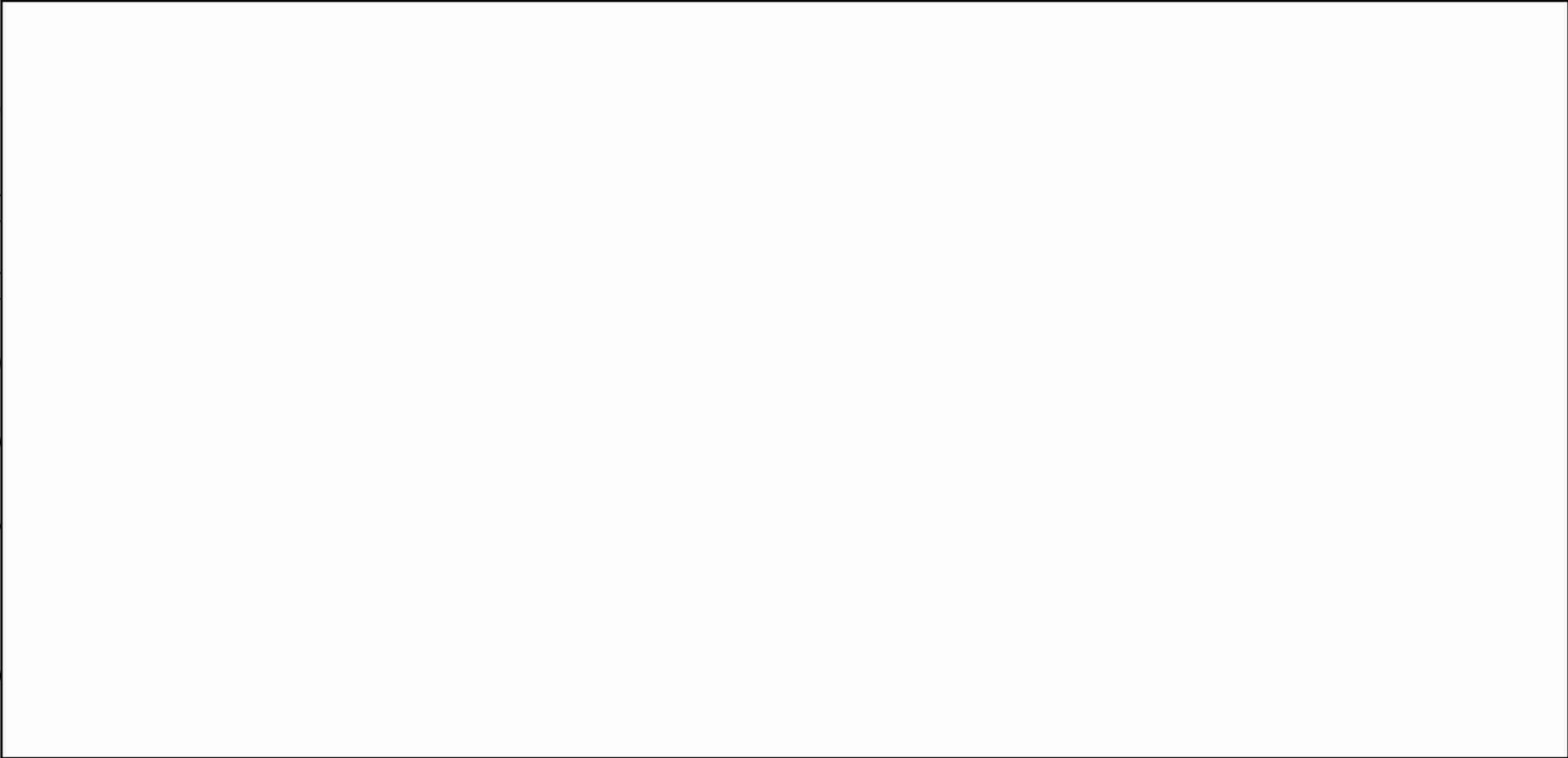
# Four Sources Reporting On Eritrea



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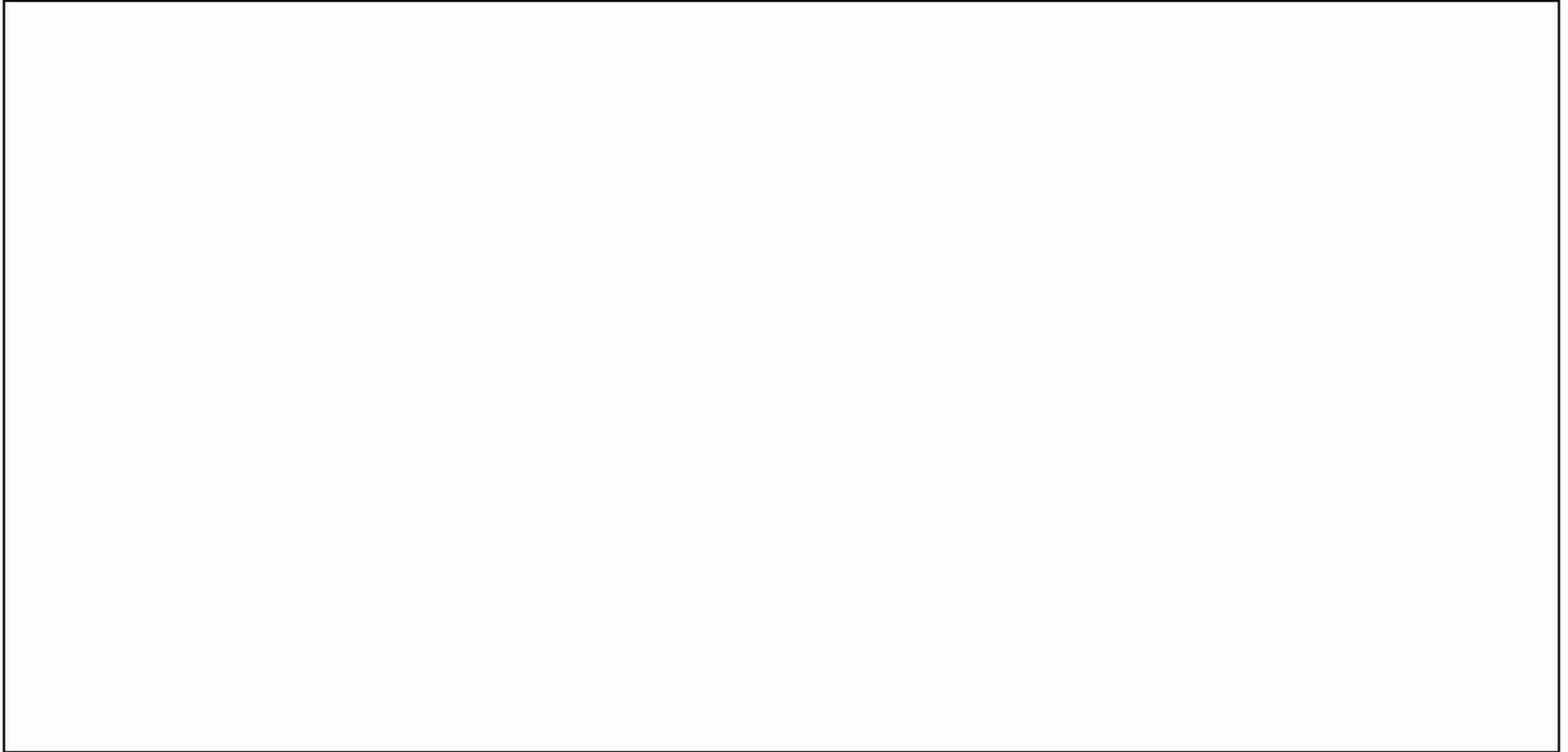
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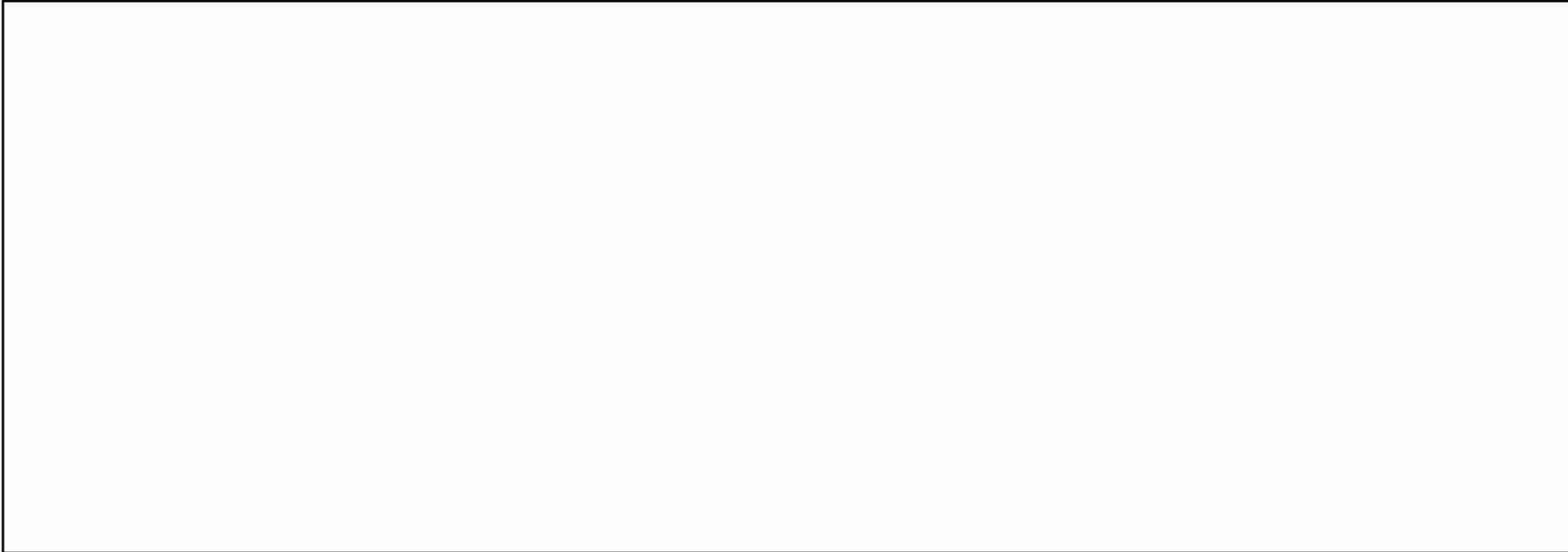


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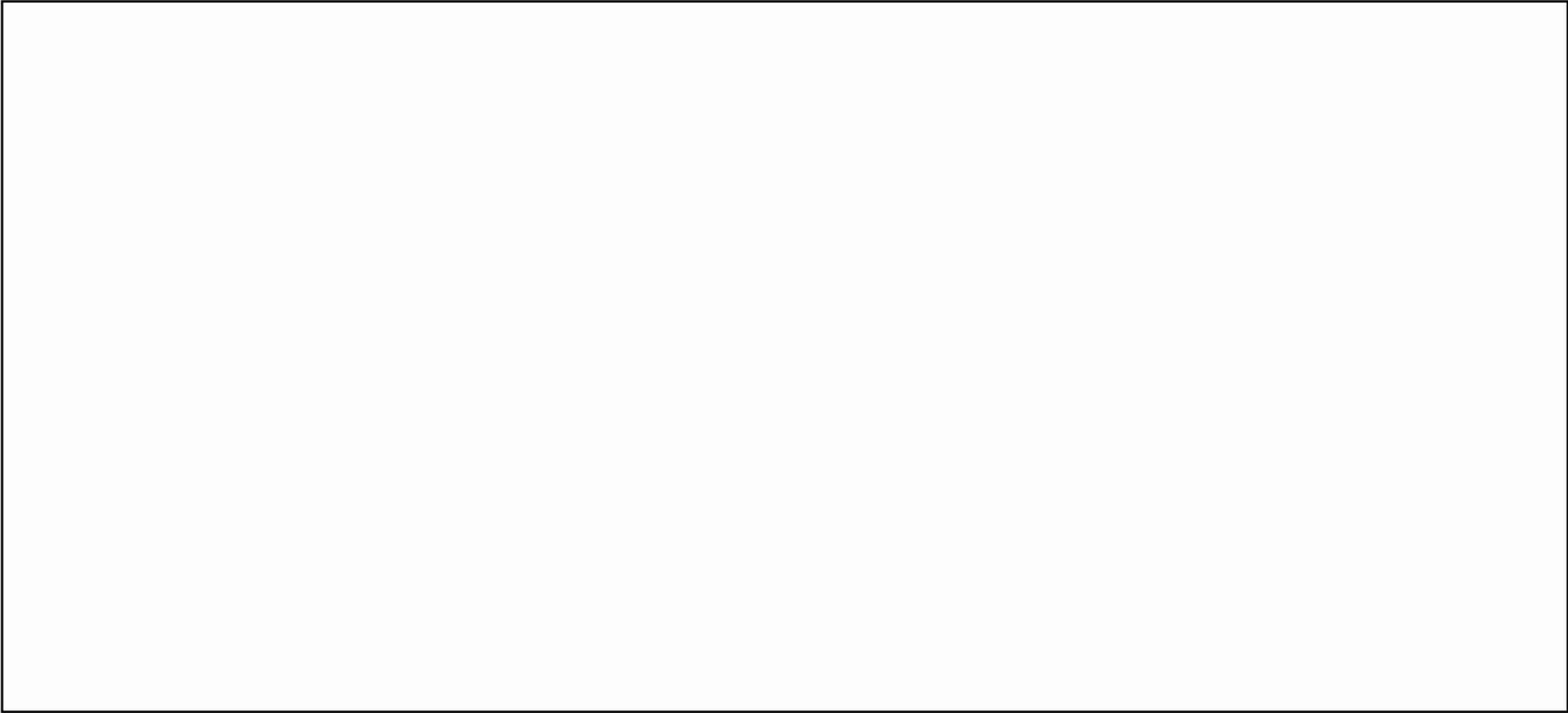
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# Four Sources Reporting On Eritrea



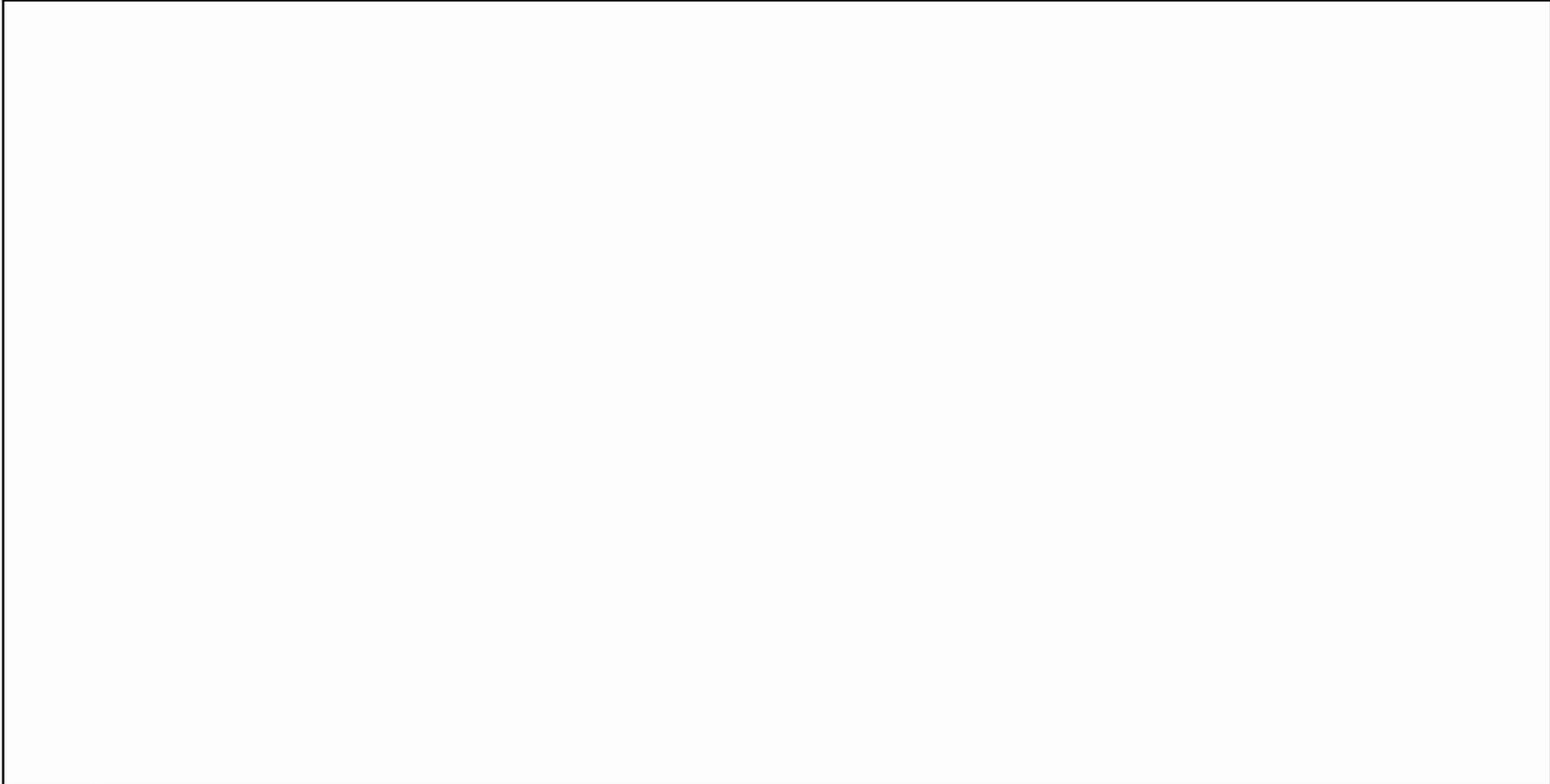
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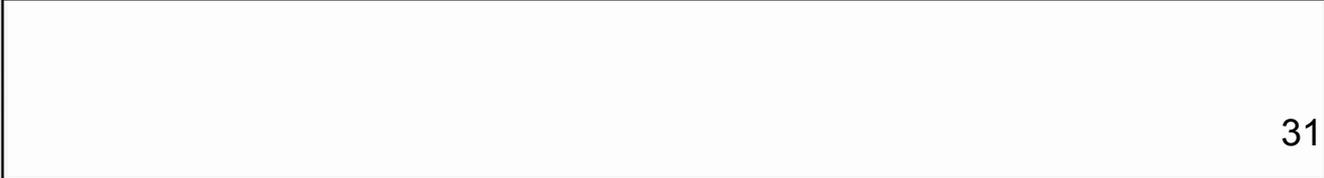
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# Recap

- Research Unit and several of the most useful COI databases, including the Research Unit's ECN page.
- Tips on how to conduct research.
- Intro to evaluating the reliability or biases of sources



# COI & Adjudications



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# What Determinations Use COI Evidence?

- Well-founded fear (PACI)
- Pattern or practice of persecution exists
- Changed circumstances (overall or during a certain period)
- Countrywide threats
- Reasonability of internal relocation
- Credibility of testimony
- Unable or unwilling to control a non-government persecutor
- Questions of nationality
- Persecutor bar
- Addressing terrorism-related grounds of inadmissibility

**\*Almost every part of your adjudication\***



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# Citing COI in an Assessment

- In asylum decisions, COI must be cited if it is relied upon in making the decision
- DOS Int'l religious freedom report must be used when religion is the basis of the claim
- If COI informed your decision, it can be helpful to cite it even when not required.



# Citing Sources - RU Guide

- Uniform Citation Guide, found on the RU's ECN page
- Use your office's guidance when citing sources



# COI in Decision-making

Does COI:

- Match the specific details of the claim?
- Lend support to the broad outlines of the claim but not the specific details?
- Neither support nor cast doubt upon the claim?
- Cast doubt upon the claim?



# Exercise 2



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# Before Beginning Practical Exercises

- \*Never Use WikiLeaks and do not open or attempt to open WikiLeaks EVER\*



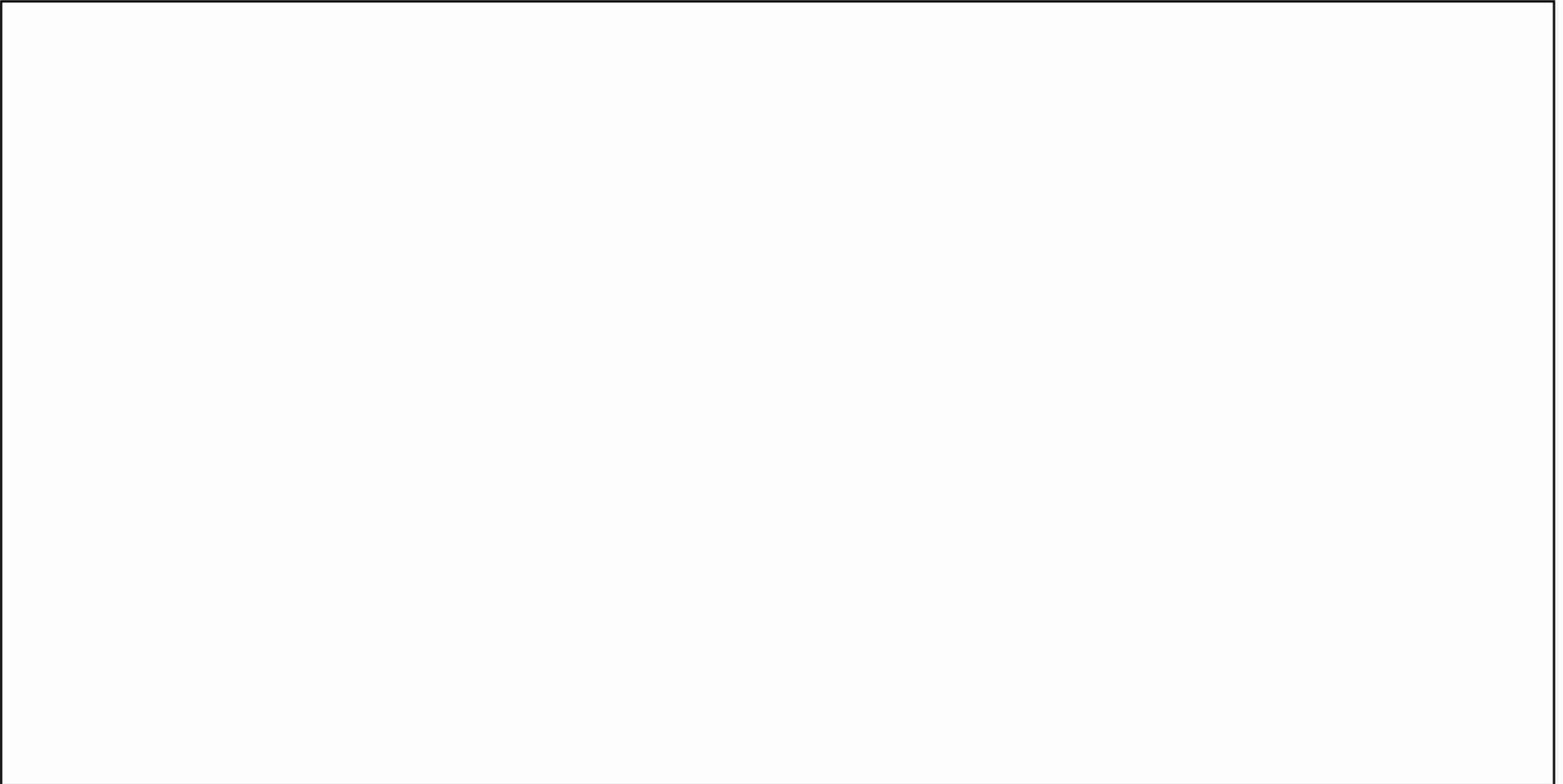
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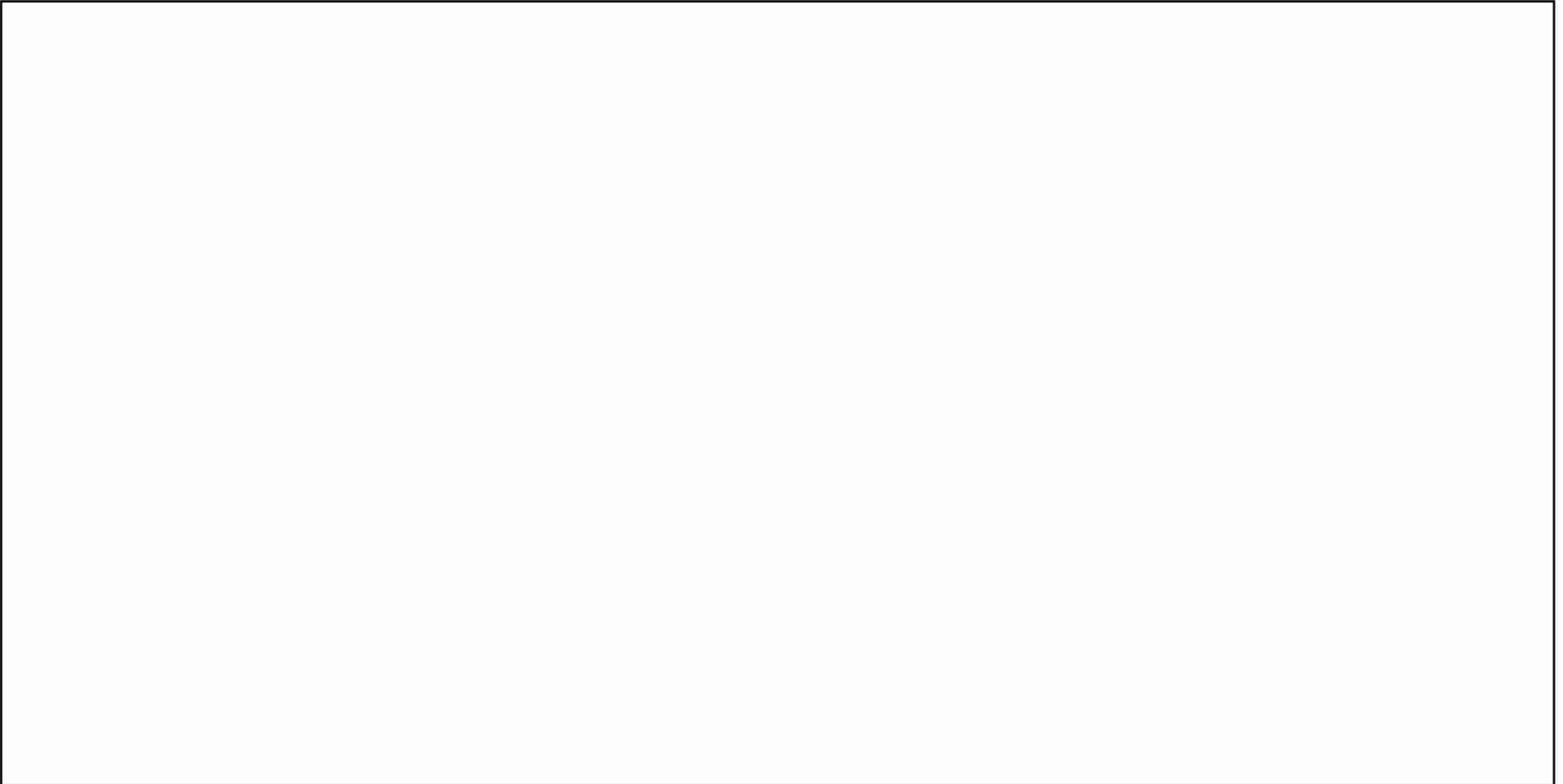
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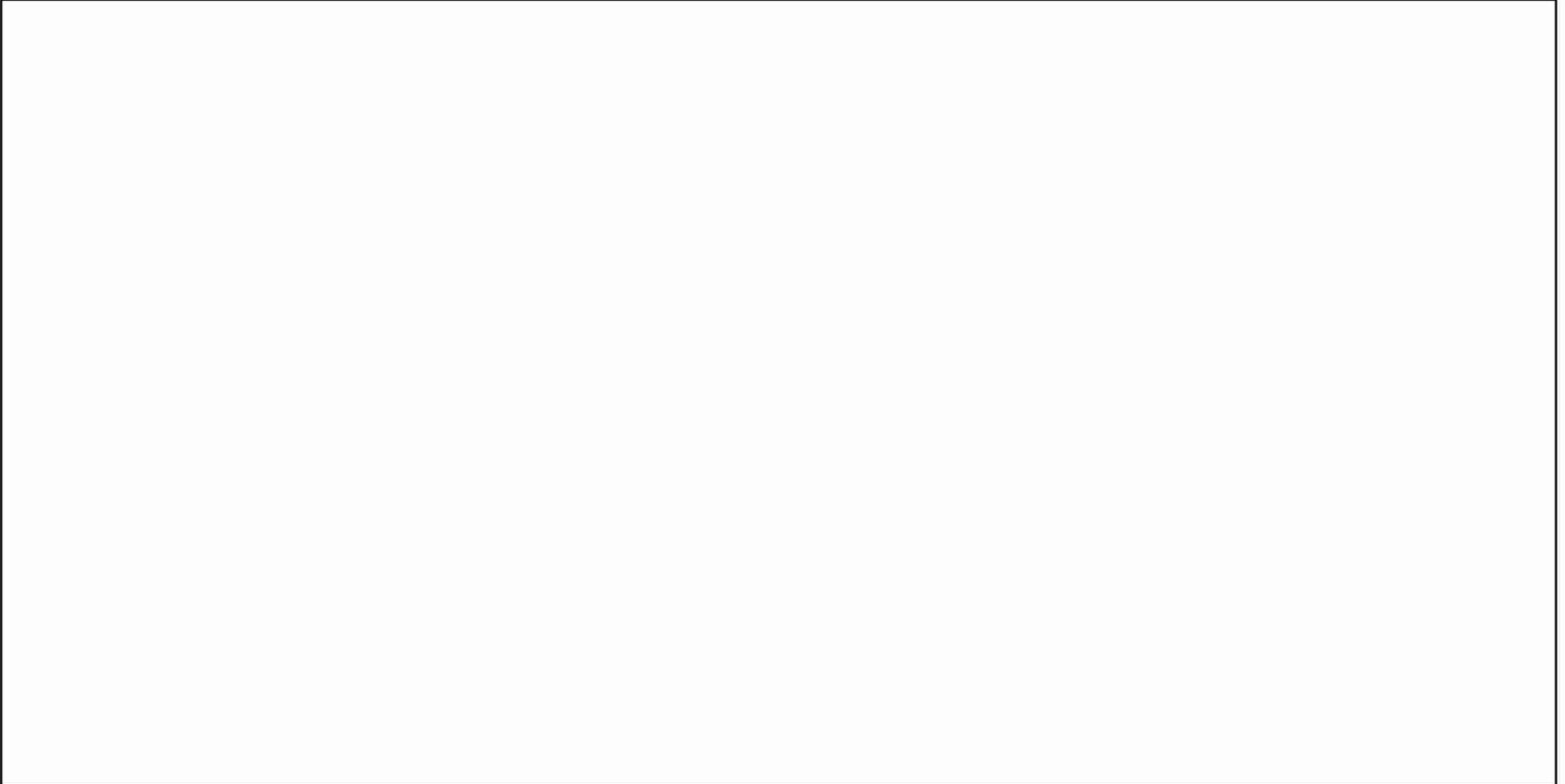
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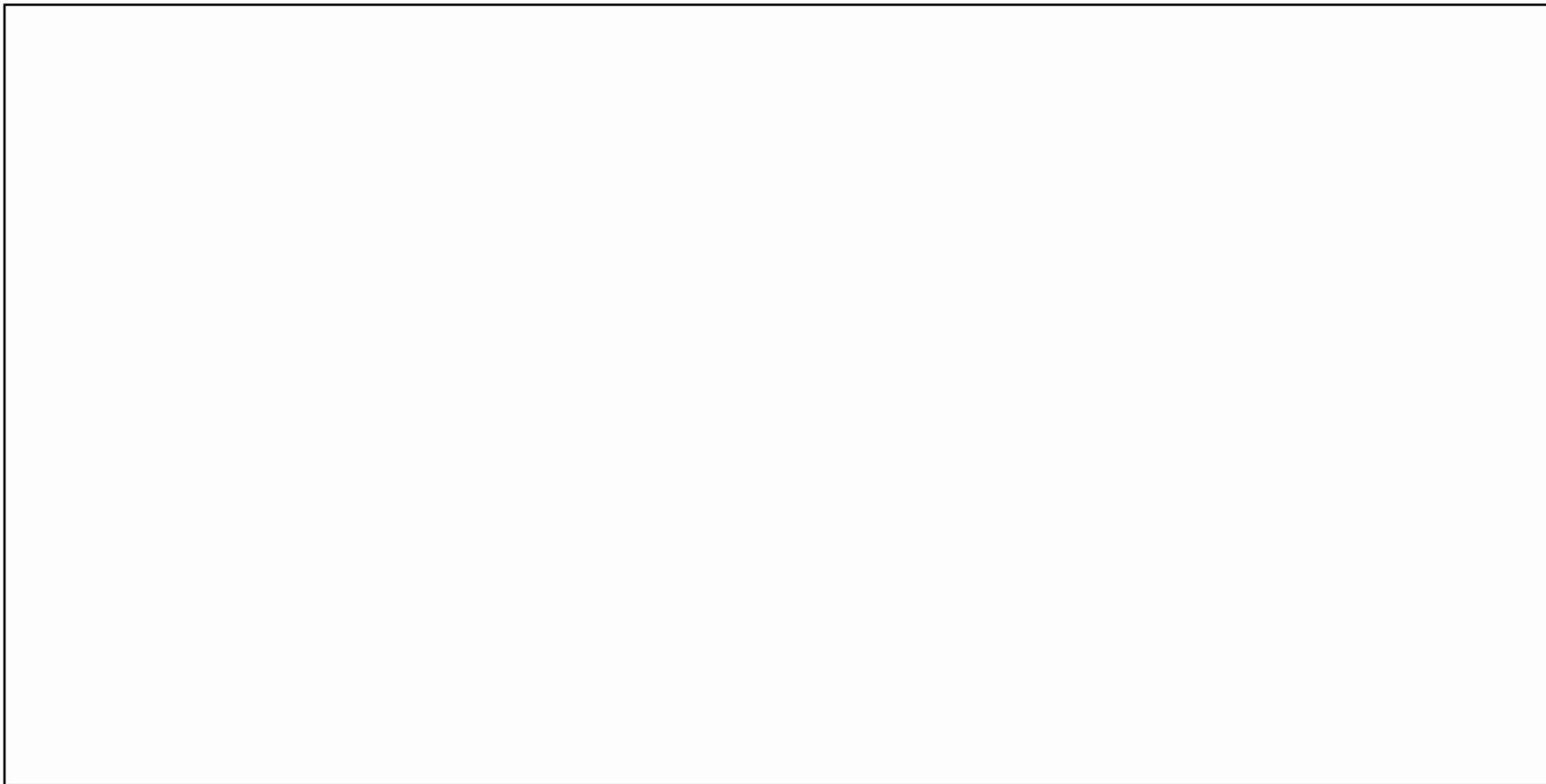
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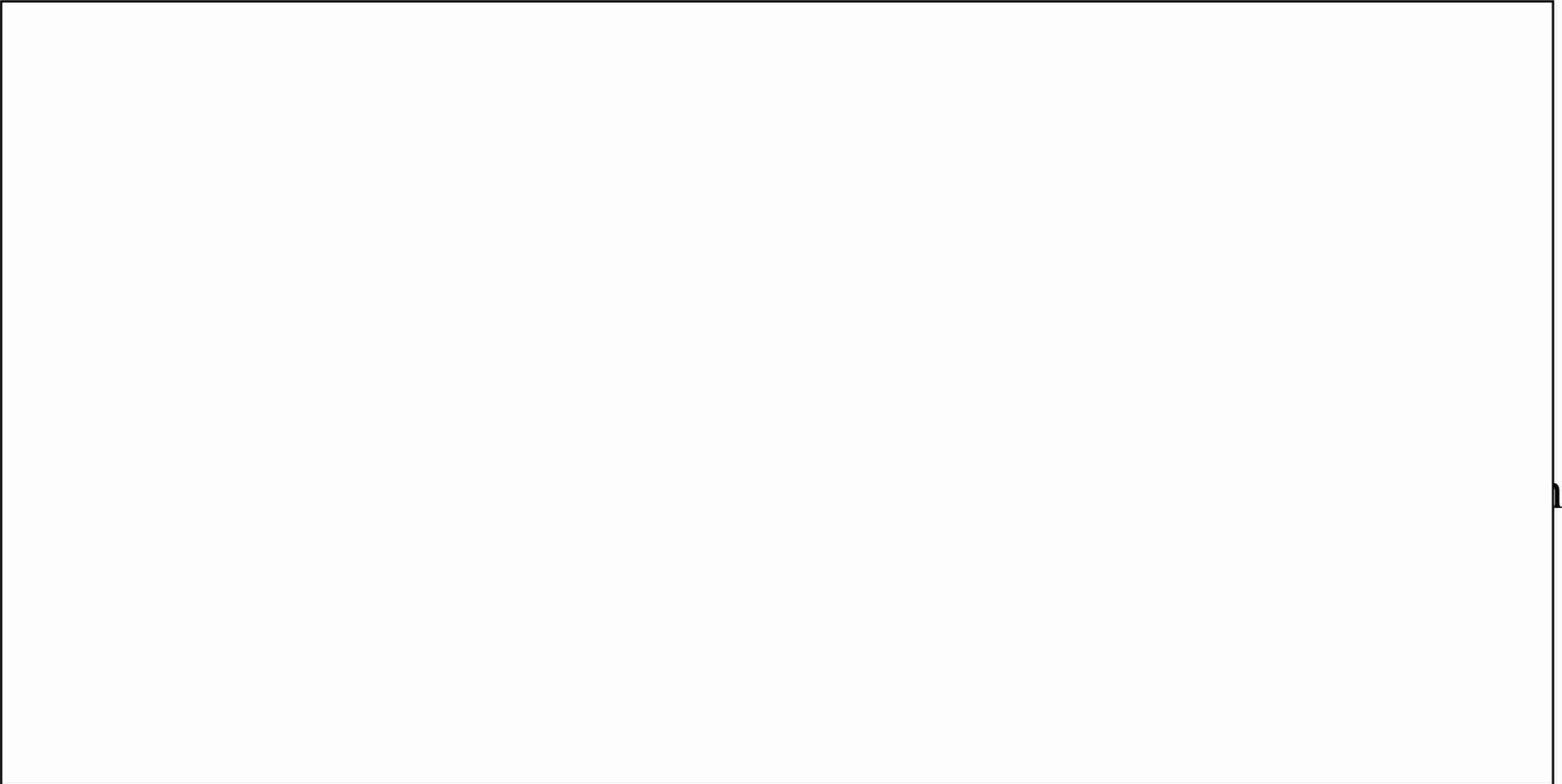
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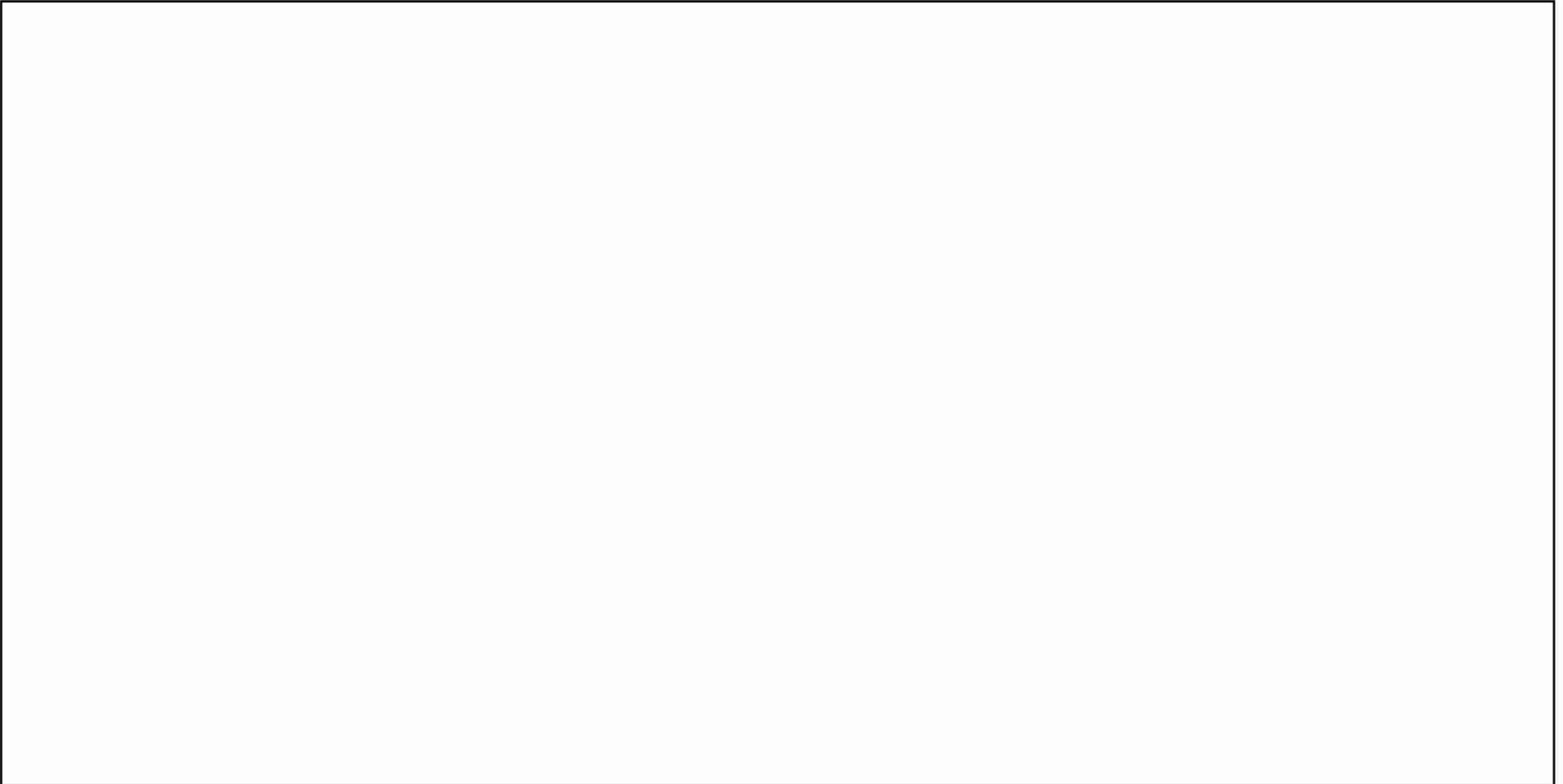
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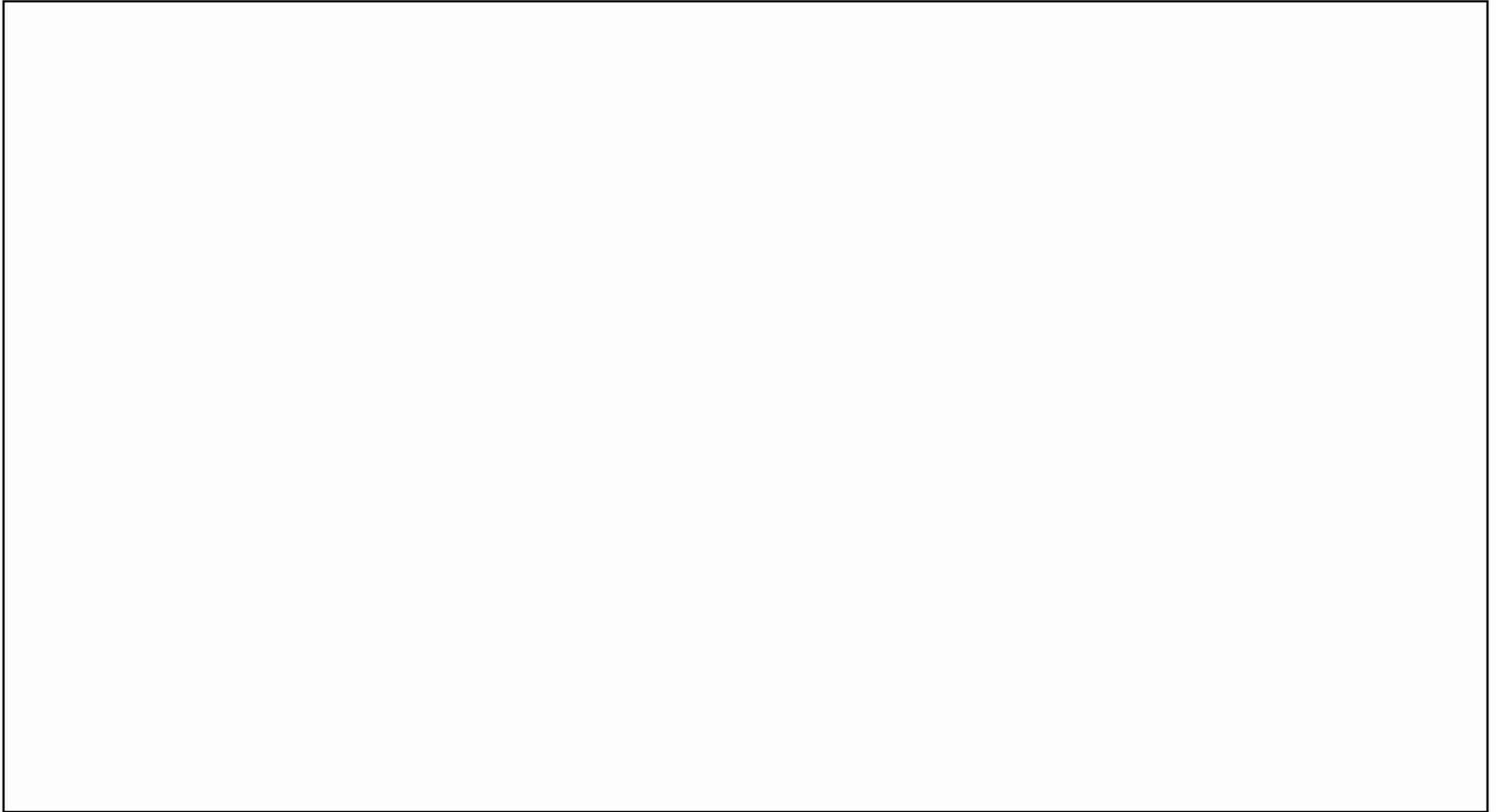
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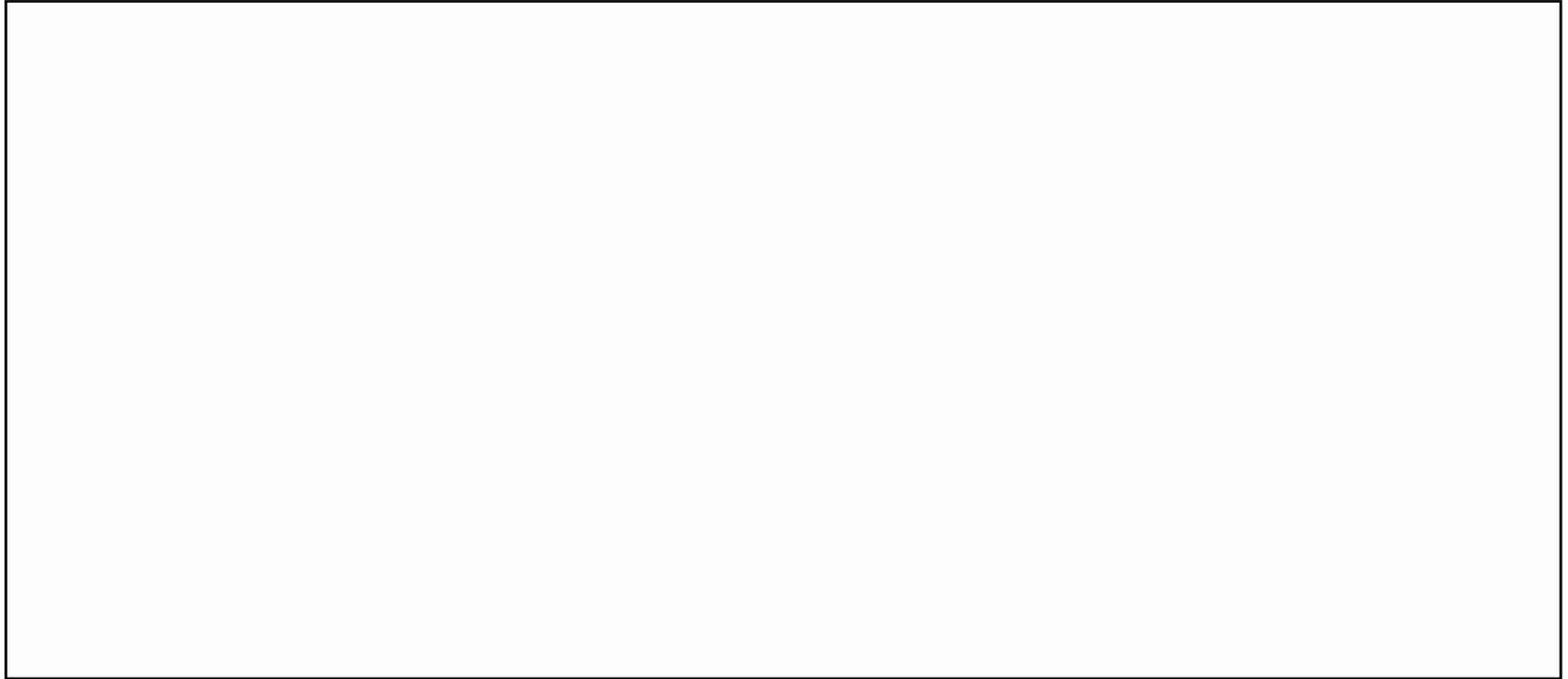
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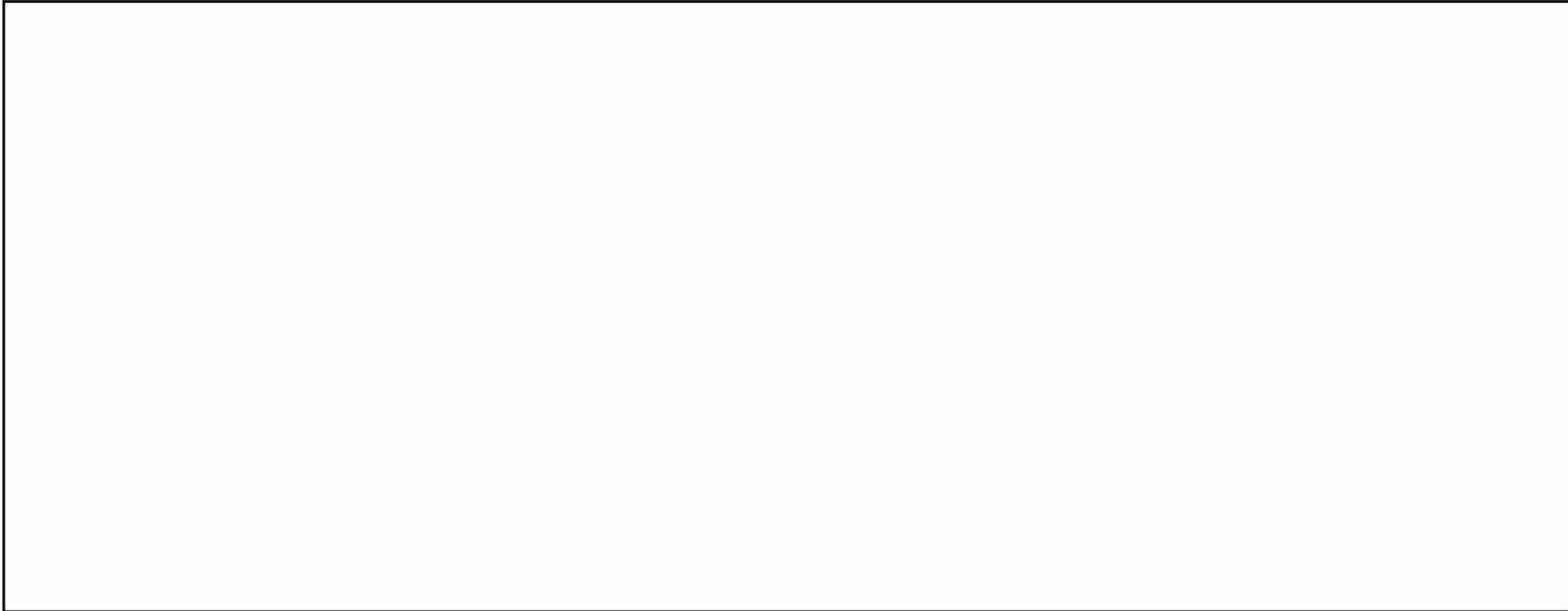
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# Practical Exercise: Honduras



# Practical Exercise: Honduras



And remember – “Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.” If you can’t find COI on it, it doesn’t necessarily mean it didn’t happen.



# But wait!

If these were actual cases, how many of you would have asked RU for help with COI research?

Um, can we do that?

Yes!

For real?

Yes!! That is what we are here for – to provide COI research support to RAIO officers and staff.



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# But Wait!

When?

Before, during, or after an interview. Just follow your division's procedures for interacting with the RU.

How?

Email, Skype, Teams, Phone, etc.



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# What to Take Away

- COI is important at all phases of adjudication: pre-interview preparation, eliciting testimony, decision and assessment
- Familiarize yourself with the many resources on the RU ECN Page
- Identify the sources you are referring to using appropriate citations.
- If you have questions, ask the Research Unit (in accordance with your office's procedures):



Email Us and Teams!

[RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov](mailto:RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov)

RAIO Research Teams



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# Contact Information

General Inbox (if in doubt, send queries here)

[RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov](mailto:RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov)

[redacted] RAIOResearch Unit Chief [redacted]

[redacted], Asia [redacted] (b)(6)

[redacted] Horn of Africa [redacted]

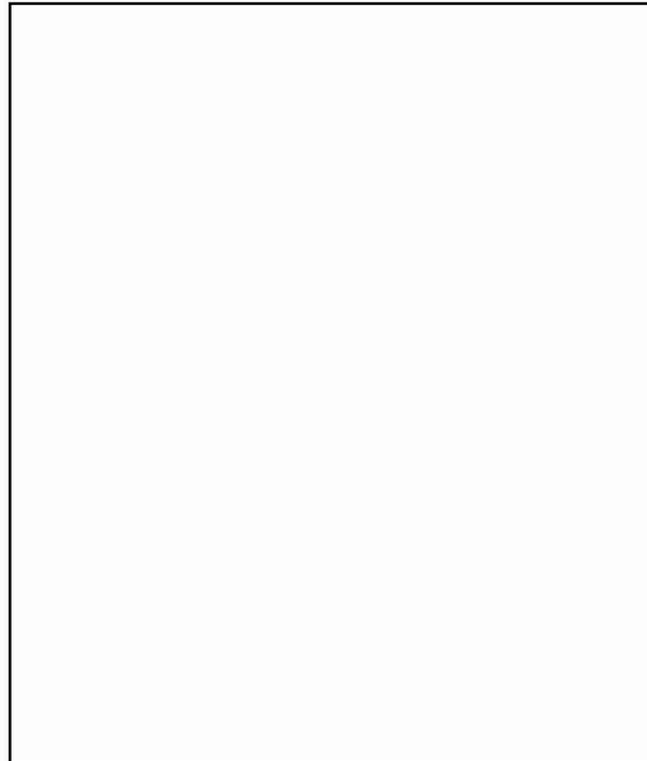
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# The End

Thanks for participating!

QUESTIONS?

[RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov](mailto:RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov)

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# Disclaimer

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