



**MINUTES ARISING FROM THE INDEPENDENT CHIEF INSPECTOR OF THE UKBA,
INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP ON COUNTRY INFORMATION (IAGCI) ON 8TH
NOVEMBER 2012**

Venue: 5th Floor, Globe House
89 Eccleston Square
London, SW1V 1PN

**Present:
Members**

Khalid Koser (Chair) (KK)	- Geneva Centre for Security Policy
Laura Hammond (LH)	- School of Oriental & African Studies
Ceri Oeppen (CO)	- University of Sussex
Andrew Jordan (AJ)	- First Tier Tribunal

Representatives from ICIUKBA

John Vine (JV)	- Independent Chief Inspector's office
Charmaine Figueira	- Independent Chief Inspector's office
Melanie Harris (MH)	- Independent Chief Inspector's office

Representatives from COIS

Mike Gallagher	- Head of COIS, UKBA
Robin Titchener (RT)	- UK Border Agency
Rosana Atherton (RA)	- UK Border Agency
Debbie Gooier (DG)	- UK Border Agency
Syam Jeshram (SJ)	- UK Border Agency
Stewart Wheatley (SW)	- UK Border Agency
Jonathan Wright (JW)	- UK Border Agency

Representative from University of Bedfordshire

Ravi Koli	- Professor of Child Welfare
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Representative from ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development (Vienna))

Maegan Hendow	- Associate Research Officer
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Commissioned reviewers

Dr. David Bozzini and Kibrom Mehari (KM)	-	Eritrea Review
Markus Hoehne	-	Somalia Review
Elizabeth Williams and Peter Verney	-	Sudan Review

Apologies:

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (EFQ)	-	University of Oxford
Christopher McDowell (CM)	-	The City University, London
Blanche Tax (BT)	-	UNHCR (Geneva)
Michael Collyer (MC)	-	University of Sussex
Stuart Harwood (SH)	-	Independent Chief Inspector's office

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Issue</u>	<u>Action point</u>
<u>Introduction</u>	<p>The chair welcomed everyone to the Chief Inspector's Independent Advisory Group on Country Information.</p> <p>KK also took the opportunity to express his thanks to the authors of the reviews and reports that were to be discussed at today's meeting.</p> <p>MG introduced himself as the new head of COIS. KK noted that there had been a high turnover of heads of unit recently and was concerned that the role was only 50% of MG's new role. He is likely to flag this in his summary of the meeting for the Chief Inspector.</p> <p>Regrettably none of the reviewers could attend the meeting in person</p>	
1.0 <u>Chair's report</u>	The minutes from the IAGCI meeting in May 2012 were accepted.	
1.1	<p>KK reviewed the action points from the last IAGCI meeting. The outstanding issues and updates were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KK regretted that no IAGCI member attended the most recent RAF meeting. ○ Action point 13 from the last minutes regarding OGNs: this was discussed with SH and JV and it was agreed that IAGCI would now review the COI in OGNS as a standard part of its work 	<p>1. KK to try to ensure that an IAGCI member attends the next RAF meeting.</p> <p>2. SH to arrange for Robert Arnott to attend the next</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Action point 14. KK believed it was important for Robert Arnott to attend the next IAGCI meeting, given his work for the Agency on implementing recommendations made by the Chief Inspector, including those made by IAGCI ○ KK informed the Group that there was a better response rate to the Invitations to Tender for reviews for this meeting than for the last meeting. He put the higher response rate down to LH advertising the tenders through social networking. ○ Austria has a similar service to IAGCI and KK will invite the chair to attend the next IAGCI meeting and if possible attend one of the meetings in Vienna.. 	<p>meeting.</p> <p>3. KK to arrange for Austrian counterpart to attend next IAGCI meeting.</p>
<p>2.0 <u>IAGCI</u> <u>Commissioned</u> <u>Reviews:</u> <u>Eritrea</u></p>	<p>KK introduced KM who along with Dr. David Bozzini reviewed the Eritrea report and OGN. KM joined the meeting by teleconference.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KM commented that overall he was impressed with the Eritrea report. His review was positive with only a few minor issues. He had also reviewed an earlier report on Eritrea with DB and noted an improvement, and that most of the recommendations made on the earlier report and now been incorporated. ○ There was a discussion about whether there is a mechanism to ensure that the recommendations made by IAGCI are included in subsequent reports. RT said that new reports are reviewed by the line manager including to what extent IAGCI recommendations on earlier reports have been incorporated, but the process needs to be formalised. ○ Pending a review of this process by IAGCI and a meeting with Robert Arnott, it was agreed that COIS should write to IAGCI upon the completion of a new report to confirm that all accepted recommendations made in the review of the previous 	

	<p>report have been included.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Another issue that arose from the review was to what extent it was possible to update reports between publication dates to reflect changing circumstances. RT explained that reports would usually not be changed unless factual errors were identified, and that interim bulletins are issued regularly. It was suggested that reviewers might be asked to flag those recommendations that are time-sensitive and need to be dealt with before the publication of the next report. ○ KM said that a specific gap in the report Eritreans in transit. LH reinforced this point, and also wondered to what extent transit is also a gap in other country reports.. ○ SJ felt that many of the comments in the review were rather specific and narrow but was broadly happy with the report. KM confirmed that SJ could contact him with any specific questions regarding the report. ○ LH wanted to know how crucial it is that the Agency does not have the capacity to translate sources and social media in foreign languages. KM felt that this was not a critical issue for preparing a COI report on Eritrea. ○ . ○ KK noted that the review of the COI in the OGN for Eritrea was generally positive, but that the reviewers felt that its coverage of national service was lacking. ○ AJ gave the position of the Tribunal regarding National Service in Eritrea, that people leaving to avoid conscription are considered by the authorities to have left the country illegally and face the risk of persecution if they return ○ KK thought that there should be a co-ordinated approach to the publication of COI reports and OGNs. JW said that this is the principle, but that in reality the timetables do not always coincide. Interim bulletins provide the basis for updating the COI in OGNs when they are published significantly later than the relevant COI report. KK asked if a list of publication dates of 	<p>4. COIS to write to IAGCI to confirm that accepted recommendations have been fully included in new reports</p> <p>KK to include in the brief to reviewers a request to flag time-sensitive recommendations</p>
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	<p>reports and OGNs could be provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○○ RT said that the tone of the review can have an impact. KK assesses each of the reports with the reviewers to try to ensure that they are constructive, before they go to the Agency.	<p>5. RT to provide a list of report and OGN publication dates over the last 12 months.</p>
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<p>3.0 <u>IAGCI</u> <u>Commissioned</u> <u>Reviews:</u> <u>Somalia</u></p>	<p>KK introduced LH who reported on the review undertaken by MH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ LH found the report to be well balanced ○ While the the COI report mostly focused on claims from South Central Somalia, MH’s review raised important issues facing those from other areas. ○ There was a need to triangulate as much as possible by using other sources of information. ○ KK noted that MH had reviewed bulletins and emails that are not normally reviewed. Should this be done in all reviews? ○ RT stated that it depends on the country. The bulletins are more focussed that the reports.. ○ KK asked the panel to what extent should they be looking at other COI products not just the main COI report? ○ AJ said that the other products aren’t produced with the same amount of academic rigour. ○ CO said that if they contain COI information then they should be reviewed. Maybe worth looking at the bulletins as a whole in a single review rather than individually by country. ○ KK asked if a list of other products that the COIS produce exists. Is there a broad list of categories? ○ The review of the COI in the Somalia OHN was generally positive, and the recommendations accepted by COIS, so there were no issues for further discussion. ○ 	<p>6. LH to email report to COIS</p> <p>7. RT to provide a list of COI products.</p>
<p>4.0 <u>IAGCI</u> <u>Commissioned</u> <u>Reviews:</u> <u>Sudan</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KK spoke to Liz at ARC prior to the meeting. Her comment was that the COI response to the review seemed a little defensive. In fact she thought that the report was very strong. ○ SW said there were competing pressures as to what goes in to the report. The recommendations were good. ○ JV asked that rather than accepting recommendations in principle or ‘in part’ and not then implementing them, it would be better for COIS to state 	

	<p>clearly which recommendations they will accept, and which they will not with an explanation why not.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KK asked SW to go through the review and clarify the 'partially accepted' recommendations. ○ SW asked if the reviewer can indicate their recommendations more clearly, for example in bullet point form. ○ AJ noted that reports are being read more and more on screen and that the links in the report need to work. RT agreed but stated that the links were to websites out of their control and can be subject to change. ○ The review of the COI in the Sudan OGN was generally positive, and recommendations accepted by COIS, so there were no specific issues for further discussion. 	<p>8. COIS to clarify for the reports under review and in future which recommendations are accepted and which are not</p> <p>9. KK to brief future reviewers to clearly indicate their recommendations</p>
<p>5.0 <u>Children's Issues</u></p>	<p>KK introduced RK RK apologised for the length of the report. It was more detailed than expected.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Broad headlines were that there were significant improvements on the focus on children in the reports and a more systematic effort to make children more visible in the reports. ○ RK was thankful that the recommendations he made when undertaking a similar review for APCI had mostly been implemented. ○ RK suggested that there should be an explanation for the presence or absence of information. There is a need to know why information is not included in reports. He recommended that standard information included in the report should be tabulated at the start of the report. e.g. standardised information on age of consent etc. RT replied that this would require a defined template for the section on children that would need to be applied consistently. ○ In regards to links within the report it would be used for the name of the source and document to be added to the link so that the reader could use a search engine to find the documents themselves if the link ceased to work. ○ RK noted that the reports vary considerably in length. RT said that reports are becoming longer, not least 	

	<p>because of recommendations from IAGCI.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RK suggested a clear statement in the reports of the parts of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that apply. ○ RK offered to work with the Agency to develop a template for the sections on children. MG said he would consider this kind offer, but questioned whether it might make these particular sections too long and detailed in each report. ○ In a note tabled for the meeting, EFQ asked if 'statelessness and children' should be included in all reports. RK said yes they should where relevant. ○ EFQ also noted that there was more consideration on girl children than boys. RV replied that the reports try to strike an appropriate balance. ○ KK asked MG if he found the thematic cross cutting review useful. MG replied that it raised issues that they might not normally broach. ○ 	<p>10. RK to provide a list of headings and guidance for each country</p>
<p>6.0 <u>Checklist on Women's issues</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ LH confirmed that she has extended the checklist on women's issues to a gender checklist. This will be shared among the Group for final comments then passed to COIS for consideration. 	<p>11. KK to email the gender</p>

		checklist for feedback.
7.0 <u>AOB</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KK asked if caseworkers are using old reports for decisions? RT said yes, however if the intake from that country is low then there is no need to reissue the report. Bulletins are issued to cover any changes. The caseworker should always look at the date of the report. ○ KK asked the researchers if they found the meeting helpful. DG found it helpful. SW found the thematic review interesting. SJ found it instructive and enjoyable with a good exchange of views. ○ Regarding the next countries reports to review: KK to advise. 	12. KK to advise of the next countries to be reviewed.
8.0 <u>Next Meeting</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The next meeting will take place in 2013 – exact date to be advised by SH in due course 	13. SH to advise Panel members of date and time of next meeting