

Immigration Advisory Service submission to APCI: An Analysis of Home Office Country Reports, August 2005: Home Office response

Introduction

The Immigration Advisory Service (IAS) submitted an analysis of four of the April 2005 Home Office Country Reports to the 5th meeting of the APCI on 8 September 2005. The Reports examined were China, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Turkey and Zimbabwe. It had been intended that all four Reports would be considered by APCI, but in the event China was dropped from the agenda.

The Home Office response to the IAS analysis is in two parts. This paper briefly responds in general terms to the issues raised in the analysis. Detailed responses to every individual comment on the Country Reports are also provided, annotated directly onto the IAS analysis. Where accepted, most of the suggested amendments have been made to the October 2005 editions of the Reports.

General comments

We are very grateful to IAS for the thorough and detailed work undertaken in examining these four reports. As with previous IAS analyses, the overwhelming majority of their comments relate to typographical and editing errors. Although such minor errors are difficult to completely eradicate from documents of this size, the number identified was disappointing. We have accepted most of these and corrected them where appropriate. The October 2005 Reports were professionally proof-read and we expect this to have led to an improvement in this area.

The IAS analysis cites some 'occasional examples' of '...“house opinion” underpinning the selection of which sources make it into the final Reports'. As with previous IAS comments regarding selective inclusion of material, most of the examples cited are based on the premise that if some 'negative' information is omitted in the process of summarising this must be evidence of bias. As we have noted before, given that most source documents essentially catalogue concerns about human rights issues it is virtually inevitable that any information excluded in the process of summarising will be 'negative' in character.

The researchers found relatively few examples of what they considered to be selective inclusion of material and almost all of these are listed in the Key Findings section of the analysis. We have accepted the suggested amendments in relation to some of the examples, though we do not accept that these significantly affect the content of the Reports. Nor do we accept the suggestion that there is a general tendency to seek to produce an overly positive representation of the source material.

As noted in our response to the previous IAS analysis, we do not consider that any of the issues highlighted by IAS would have any impact on individual asylum decisions. We see no basis for undertaking research on this issue of the kind suggested by IAS. However, if IAS or any other organisation has evidence to suggest that any asylum decision has been affected by an error or concern identified in relation to Home Office COI material, we would be grateful if this could be brought to our attention.

At the 5th meeting of the Panel, the IAS representative, Amanda Shah, noted that the IAS's approach to examining Home Office COI material was very much a 'nose to ground' methodology, going back to the original source material and checking word by word whether it was adequately reflected in the COI Report. This approach is clearly very useful for identifying typos and errors such as where a source name has not been cited exactly. But we consider that the APCI researchers, who have expert knowledge of the countries concerned, are better placed to evaluate whether the COI Reports examined provide an accurate and balanced representation of the sources and country situation. In the case of DRC, Turkey and Zimbabwe (as well as all the other reports considered at the last meeting) the country experts concluded that they did; and found no evidence of any bias in the selection of material.

Conclusion

IAS has again provided a very useful detailed analysis of some of our COI Reports. Although we do not accept the conclusions drawn by IAS, the painstaking work of the individual researchers has been very helpful in highlighting minor errors that should have been picked up by our own quality assurance procedures. As noted above, professional proof-readers were engaged for the October 2005 edition of the Reports and we expect that their input will have reduced the incidence of such errors. However, we are also looking at other options for improving the quality assurance process and would welcome suggestions from the Panel on this.

Home Office
February 2006