



Home Office

Home Office Response to IAGCI Review

Syria: Country of Origin Information (COI) Requests, 2014-15

November 2015

Review Conclusions/ Recommendations		Response	Home Office Comments
	Response to COI Request 02/14-123 (Military Service)		
1.	Note that the links provided in response to this information request are intranet links and therefore not available to the general public however, I was able to see that this was a reference to the first information request on military service and the Home Office COI on Syria for 2013 for which the correct external link would be: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/312738/Syrian_Arab_Republic_report_2013.pdf	N/A	This is correct but COI Requests are an internal tool for asylum decision-makers so we consider intranet links acceptable and necessary.
	Response to COI request 04/14-134 (Military Service)		
2.	The author of this response has used links to previous Information responses that I cannot access with the exception to the two IRs mentioned above that I have seen and commented on.	N/A	This is correct but COI Requests are an internal tool for asylum decision-makers so we consider intranet links acceptable and necessary.
3.	Note that there is a typo in this answer: "Additional sauces" should be "Additional Sources".	Partially accepted	Thank you, we agree. However we do not propose to make this amendment at the current time – the response was time and case-specific.
	Response to COI request 01/15-15 (Daraa)		

4.	<u>On hospitals:</u> Footnote 2 should be updated. However a better footnote would be to refer to the UN habitat city profile of Daraa referred to in footnotes 6 and 7, the correct link is now: http://unhabitat.org/city-profile-daraa-multi-sector-assessment/ . This document mentions at page 6 that 11 percent of healthcare is operational in Daraa. It further mentions, “Al Balad remaining population has extremely limited access to health service, either through the remaining private clinics, or by crossing into the northern Al Mahatta side which is frequently interrupted. ...Al Mahtaa has access to all remaining operational private hospitals and public clinics”	Partially Accepted	Thank for you the correction. However we do not propose to make this amendment at the current time – the response was time and case-specific – but the correction will be useful for future CIG.
5.	<u>The nearest military airport:</u> With regards to point 8, it is likely that the nearest military airport to Daraa may be in Sweida, but there is no way of knowing for certain (footnote).	Partially Accepted	We do not propose to make this amendment at the current time – the response was time and case-specific – but observation may be useful for future CIG.
6.	Point 8 starts off talking about an airport but ends the sentence with hospital.	Partially Accepted	Thank you. We do not propose to make this amendment at the current time – the response was time and case-specific.
7.	Suggested additional sources	Accepted	Thank you for the suggested sources; we will include these in future CIG
Response to COI request 05/15-81 (Passport renewal for nationals outside Syria)			
8.	The link to the first footnote has changed to: http://www.refworld.org/docid/46dd2a5e2.html .	Not Accepted	The link to the first footnote (Danish Fact-Finding report) is correct

9.	There is further evidence that the Syrian government appears to have relaxed the rules on the re-issuance of passports. Whilst the Syrian Embassy in the United Kingdom stopped issuing passports in August 2012, Syrians can send their passports abroad to be renewed. Moreover, it is worth noting that it is now very easy to get a fake Syrian passport. As stated in the NL Times: "Since the outbreak of the Syrian war, thousands of blank passports and the Assad regime's printers have ended up in the hands of Sunni insurgents, according to Revu. These insurgents will sell passports showing any photo given to them to anyone willing to pay."	Partially Accepted	Thank you for the additional sources; we will include these in future CIG
Response to COI request 6/15-141 (ISIS and oilfields)			
10.	Perhaps the question here is why would it not be possible for a Kurdish person to gain employment as a petroleum engineer with the Syrian government.	N/A	This is indeed the question but the answer could not be found from public sources, as indicated
11.	Response to COI request 06/15-137 (Security Situation ISIS)		
12.	<p>The response given in paragraph one appears to be missing text. The response states:</p> <p>"There is widespread fighting throughout Syria, including in Damascus and its suburbs. Fullscale military operations involving the use of small arms, tanks, artillery and aircraft are ongoing. In Aleppo and elsewhere, the regime has been undertaking an indiscriminate campaign of aerial bombardment since mid-December 2013, using so called 'barrel' bombs – huge containers packed with explosives and shards of metal dropped by helicopter – against largely civilian targets. The situation remains extremely volatile...Fighting has caused the temporary suspension of commercial flights, closed roads, impeded access to land border crossing points and led to the closure of some border crossings."</p> <p>However the original FCO website places text between 'ongoing' and 'In Aleppo:...</p>	Partially Accepted	Thank you. We do not propose to make this amendment at the current time – the response was time and case-specific.

	Response to COI Request 02/14-035 (Police Uniforms)		
13.	<p>This Information Request is well researched but should take into account that it is unlikely that most Syrians would be able to provide the answers in the response provided. Having been inside Syria myself between April 2011 and September 2014 I observed that most police officers wore some type of military-looking uniform, namely in Olive Green. There were occasions when I saw grey shades, say at the airport, in customs and at the border crossings with Lebanon and Jordan but even then many officials wore military outfits.</p> <p>Having spoken to others who were present inside Syria long before the crisis, they do believe that it is possible that the traffic police in Damascus may have changed in 2009 to wearing a whitish color. If this happened, it was short-lived and information does not indicate it was countrywide. In summary, whilst the information provided in answer to the information request is plausible, it should be emphasized that the dark blue, civilian white and grey shades were not the norm, but the exception, as was emphasized in the relevant extracts.</p>	N/A	<p>We can only reflect the sources consulted. However, this is useful information and could be quoted (sourced to the reviewer) if this is agreed.</p>
	Response to COI Request 06/14-002 (LGBTI persons)		
14.	<p>There is very little evidence of the ill treatment of lesbians in Syria, which should perhaps provide an indication of the magnitude of the problem compared to other societal issues. Links provided to the Syria COI report dated 15 August 2012 no longer work.</p>	N/A	<p>Thank you. We will correct in future CIG</p>

15.	<p>However, the extract provided in the US Department of State Report that:</p> <p>“..the law criminalizes any sexual act that is “contrary to nature.” In previous years police used this charge to prosecute lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals. There were no reports of prosecutions under the law during the year; however, reports indicated that the government arrested dozens of gay men and lesbians over the past several years on charges such as abusing social values; selling, buying or consuming illegal drugs; and organizing and promoting “obscene” parties.”</p> <p>This is supported by other objective material. Namely the guardian article written after the “gay girl in Damascus” scandal, which provides a more balanced picture of the life of a lesbian in Damascus where in 2011; there was allegedly a strong lesbian community. Early/ forced marriage is a problem reported throughout and before the crisis but it does not necessarily happen as a result of being gay. It is likely, that the authorities inside Syria are not focusing on this issue, if they ever did, given the current crisis. However, evidence of no/reduced persecution is always hard to find. There is some evidence that gay men are ill treated by ISIS although no examples are yet to be found of the targeting of lesbians. In light of this assessment, it is recommended that the Home Office update their advice with information from the cited Guardian article.</p>	Partially Accepted	<p>Thank you. We do not propose to make this amendment at the current time – the response was time and case-specific – but the information will be useful for future CIG</p>
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