

ARC and DCR comments on the EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Security Situation, January 2015

11th March 2015

Asylum Research Consultancy (ARC) and the Dutch Council for Refugees (DCR) welcome the publication of [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Security Situation, January 2015](#) [hereafter COI report on Afghanistan].

As our previous responses to EASO consultations and comments on EASO Work Plans and [Comments on the EASO Country of Origin Information report: South and Central Somalia Country overview, August 2014 \(published in October 2014\)](#) [hereafter COI report on Somalia] have indicated, we are particularly interested in the EASO COI methodology and await the formal consultation on its proposed revision in 2015.¹ With this in mind, we are pleased to note that the COI Report on Afghanistan does not 'draw conclusions' (as provided for in EASO's COI Methodology report), or include distinct 'summary' or 'analysis' sections as for example the previous COI report on Afghanistan 'Insurgent strategies —intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans' (December 2012) did.

As active members of the Consultative Forum, we would have welcomed the opportunity to input into the Terms of Reference of the report or to have been able to provide the following additional comments in advance of the report's final publication which we believe could have further improved the report. Nevertheless, we welcome the improvements in the COI report on Afghanistan compared to the COI report on Somalia, to be discussed in detail below. Our further comments are based on an initial reading of the report, focusing on 'Chapter 2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan, 2.1.1 Kabul city'.

We also welcome the following improvements in the COI report on Afghanistan, compared to the COI report on Somalia:

- The majority of paragraphs are now referenced and more footnotes cite multiple sources
- Indeed the report now cites all sources consulted (emphasis added):

Disclaimer

[...] This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2012)(1). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. **All sources used are referenced.** To the extent possible and unless otherwise stated, all information presented, except for undisputed or obvious facts, has been cross-checked.

- The report more clearly indicates when direct quotes are used by using inverted commas and indenting text

¹See [ARC and Dutch Council for Refugees \(DCR\), Comments on the EASO Country of Origin Information report methodology, November 2012](#)

- No key information such as further information on anonymous sources is included in the footnotes where it might have been overlooked
- The term “risk” is generally referred to with inverted commas, and the disclaimer now adds that with regards to risk that its usage is not related to judicial assessments (emphasis added):

Disclaimer

[...] Refugee, **risk** and similar terminology are used as a generic terminology and not as legally defined in the EU Asylum Acquis and the Geneva Convention.

- The use of language related to “risk” is explained within the document. For example (emphasis added):

1.6.1. Regional differences

[...] In figure 9, an overview is given per province of how the number of violent incidents relates to the number of inhabitants, **which can be used as one indicator in the assessment of the “real risk” of civilians suffering harm due to violent incidents. However, this is only one possible indicator among others.** The risk for an individual in a province is very complex to estimate and depends on other elements, such as detailed information on the nature and target of the violent incidents, the locations where they take place, the extent of civilian casualties, etc. Further information on the violent incidents taken into account in this quantitative calculation and more information on relevant indicators can be found in each provincial part of this report under “Regional description of the security situation”.

- The press release no longer contained reference to the report providing “a comprehensive overview of facts”, which would imply that the content of the report would be indisputable.

General observations and recommendations

- We welcome the more detailed methodology:

Methodology

- Collecting information

The present report presents information collected between September and November 2014. After this, some additional research was done in the review phase on selected topics only. A limited number of specialised paper-based and electronic sources were consulted within the time frame and the scope of the research. Regarding media reports on security incidents mentioned for illustration under the regional description of the security situation, there was a reference period from 1 January until 30 September 2014.

Furthermore, a number of contact persons were interviewed. For security reasons, not all contacts were named; the choice had to be made between not interviewing them at all and referring to them as “anonymous sources”. Considering the value of the information provided, the latter approach was preferred.

In particular, one source was used as a standard for quantitative data on security incidents. A western security official, who cannot be named, provided a dataset on security incidents on a level of detail, per district, not available via any public source. The source has been assessed as highly reliable and as using a detailed and appropriate methodology for the collection of data on security incidents in conflict zones. The number and type of security incidents is an important indicator in the terms of reference of this report (see Annex 2) and is potentially very useful for the assessment of the situation in the different provinces and districts of Afghanistan. The information provided by the source is in line with trends or information provided by other (public) sources. For these reasons, the choice was made to use this anonymous source. However, the statistics provided by the source should not be used as conclusive for the assessment of the protection needs, but can be taken as indicative of security trends when read together with other indicators and information in this report.

However, whilst the methodology provides a time period when sources were collected, and a reporting period of 1 January until 30 September 2014 for media sources, it is not made clear what the reporting period is for non-media sources.

While understanding logistic difficulties of compiling such a report with so many different peer reviewers, we feel that the reporting period and the actual publication date should be kept to a minimum so as to retain the currency of the information this report contains.

With regards to the use of anonymous sources we note that page 207 of the report lists two, information from both of whom was obtained “during a Belgian fact finding mission to Kabul in October 2014”. Given that the Belgian Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, Cedoca (Center for Documentation and Research) is a co-author of the EASO report, it would have been useful to have further information on the fact-finding mission it undertook; for example was it conducted specifically with drafting this EASO report in mind, and what methodology was followed. Also it is recommended to make clear if the persons conducting the interviews also drafted the report, as their observations/impressions may have a bearing on analysis they provided.

With regards to the anonymous western security official, it would have been useful if further details on their “detailed and appropriate methodology” had been made public. Because information on incidents and the security situation on some provinces of Afghanistan is scarce and scattered, we do welcome the quantitative data provided by this anonymous source, and would find it useful if an update of this information is provided regularly.

Moreover it is suggested that the ‘Collecting information’ sub-section of the Introduction contain a cross-reference to the list of anonymous sources, given they are included at the end of the ‘Bibliography’ annex where they are easy to overlook.

- Some parts of the Afghanistan report are often quite limited/dense. This seems to be especially the case in ‘1.3. Recent security trends and armed confrontations’, which appear to be relatively short in comparison with other chapters. As a result, in relation for example to sub-section ‘1.3.4. Targeted killings’, the reader is forced to look into the referenced sources for more information on the profiles of persons targeted, despite this information being of great importance when assessing an asylum claim:

1.3.4. Targeted killings

Another strategy widely used by insurgents is targeted killings. Between 1 June and 15 August 2014, the UN recorded 470 assassinations and failed attempts, an increase compared to 2013. Insurgents rely on this strategy to exert influence through fear and intimidation.⁽⁸⁵⁾

(85) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, report of the Secretary General, A/68/910-S/2014/420, 18 June 2014 (http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/420), accessed 29 October 2014; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, report of the Secretary General, A/69/540-S/2014/656, 9 September 2014 (http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/656), accessed 29 October 2014.

Whilst it is appreciated that some of these sections in chapter ‘2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan’ have a sub-section on ‘Victims’, in order to gain an understanding of the extent and geographical regions in which particular profiles are targeted, useful for assessing the possibility of internal relocation, a user of the report would need to consult each region addressed in the report. Moreover, having to read the whole report to gain

an understanding of a particular issue goes against the intended use of the report (emphasis added):

Structure and use of this report

This report provides information on elements and indicators that may help assessing the need for protection. It **is not meant to be read as a whole**. In the first part a general description is given on the security situation in Afghanistan and regional differences are highlighted. These are then explained in greater detail in the second part, holding a regional description of geographic subdivisions (Kabul city and 34 provinces). [...]

- The Structure of chapter ‘2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan’ is not consistent for each region. Kabul city, Kabul province, Kapisa, Parwan, Logar, Nuristan, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar, Badakhshan, Faryab, Jawzjan, Balkh, Samangan, Ghor, includes sub-sections on:

Description of the city/province
Impact of the violence
 Violent incidents
 Victims
 Displacement
Actors in the conflict

However, the sections on Panjshir, Wardak, Bamyan, Daikundi (Dai Kundi), Kandahar, Helmand, Nimroz, Uruzgan, Kabul, Ghazni, Paktya province, Khost province, Paktika province, Laghman, Nangarhar, Kunar, Sar-e Pul, Herat, Badghis, Farah have no such sub-section on ‘victims’. If such COI was researched and not found then this should be made clear in the report. It is also considered that the relevant sub-sections should have been listed on the contents page, which for example would have made it clearer where readers can locate COI on profiles of targeted persons.

- Regarding the subsection on ‘displacement’ of the Ghazni section (page 86) we note that there is an omission in interpreting the cited UNHCR reports:

Displacement

According to UNHCR, during April and May 2014, 237 families, or 1,908 individuals, were displaced from the district of Giro to the provincial centre of Ghazni. The main causes of displacement were general insecurity, intensified armed conflicts between AGEs and ANSF and military operations.(611) For July 2014, UNHCR reported no IDPs originating from the province of Ghazni.(612) No IDPs were reported by UNHCR from August and September 2014.(613) According to the latest update in October 2014, 250 families, or 3,363 individuals, were displaced in late September to October from the villages of Kang Khai and Mahmoud Khail in the district of Ajrestan. The families were displaced to the villages of Bat Khil and Hazarak Khil within the respective district. The main cause for displacement was the armed conflict between AGE and ANSF. However, intimidation by AGE was also a major push factor.(614)

(611) UNHCR, Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, May 2014 (<http://www.refworld.org/docid/537220114.html>), accessed 20 October 2014.

(612) UNHCR, Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, July 2014 (http://unhcr.af/UploadDocs/DocumentLibrary/July.2014_IDP_Report_635439485339293664.pdf), accessed 16 October 2014.

(613) UNHCR, Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, August 2014 (<http://www.refworld.org/country,,UNHCR,,AFG,,542147ec4,0.html>), accessed 27 October 2014; UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement - Monthly Update, September 2014 (<http://www.refworld.org/docid/5469d5fa4.html>), accessed 4 December 2014.

(614) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement - Monthly Update, October 2014 (<http://www.refworld.org/docid/5469cb2b4.html>), accessed 4 December 2014.

The quoted UNHCR report from July 2014 [reference 612] only mentions the Top 10 provinces of origin of profiled IDPs. Ghazni is not mentioned in this Top 10. This, however, does not mean that one can conclude that no IDPs originate from Ghazni. In UNHCR's August and September reports, the province of origin was not at all mentioned.

In other sections on displacement, e.g. Kabul (page 37) and Takhar (page 119), a lack of data on the origin of IDPs could easily be misinterpreted as the security situation not being serious enough to “generate” IDPs:

Page 37, Kabul

Displacement

In the UNHCR Monthly Updates on Conflict Induced Displacement, Kabul is not mentioned as a province of origin for conflict induced IDPs, only as province of arrival of certain IDP movements from other provinces.(164)

(164) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, January - August 2014 (<http://www.refworld.org/country,,UNHCR,,AFG,,,,0.html>), accessed 16 October 2014.

Page 119, Takhar

Displacement

In the UNHCR Monthly Updates on Conflict Induced Displacement, Takhar is never mentioned as a province of origin for conflict-induced IDPs, only as province of arrival of certain IDP movements from other provinces.(933)

(933) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, January-August 2014 (<http://www.refworld.org/country,,UNHCR,,AFG,,,,0.html>), accessed 16 October 2014.

- The following section of the report also includes rather limited COI:

1.4. State ability to secure law and order

1.4.1. Justice

Seven authorities are involved in the criminal justice sector: the Ministry of Justice, the Attorney General's Office, the Supreme Court, the MoI, the NDS, the MoD and the High Office of Oversight.(87) The formal court system, as established in the Constitution, consists of a Supreme Court, High Court of Appeal, Provincial Courts, lower Primary Courts and some specialised courts such as the Juvenile and Family Courts and Counter-Narcotics Courts. However, these courts are not operational in all provinces and all courts lack capacity.(88)

The judiciary is relatively strong in the larger urban centres, where the government is in control, but very weak or nonexistent in rural areas, where local elders and shuras(89) settle both criminal and civil cases. In some areas the Taliban have enforced a parallel judicial system based on strict interpretation of sharia. Both unofficial systems provide no guarantees for Rule of Law and basic rights of defence. Often, women are victims of these traditional judicial systems and harsh punishments are executed, such as mutilation. The Taliban target official courts and kill judges, court officials, prosecutors.(90)

USDOS reported for 2013 that “the judiciary continued to be underfunded, understaffed, inadequately trained, ineffective, and subject to threats, bias, political influence, and pervasive corruption.” Impartiality of the judiciary is impossible due to bribery and pressure from different parties. Courts use a mixture of law systems (codified; sharia; local custom) without uniformity and even in Supreme Court, judges appeared to have limited knowledge of civilian jurisprudence.(91)

1.4.2. Security Forces

The US Department Of State (USDOS) reported for 2013 that the “civilian authorities generally maintained control over the security forces, although there were instances in which security forces acted independently and some committed human rights abuses.” Extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and abuse of detainees and other human rights abuses by security forces were

reported. Efforts have been made to train security forces. Nevertheless, ANP personnel appeared to be largely unaware of their responsibilities and defendants' rights.(92)

1.4.3. State Protection

According to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Afghan authorities are, in general, unable to provide protection against violence, with the only possible exception being the city of Kabul, but only to some extent.(93) Taliban and other armed actors continue to kill, abduct and injure civilians and security personnel.(94) For 2013, USDOS reported widespread disregard for the Rule of Law and impunity for human rights abusers. Abuses by officials were not prosecuted.(95)

1.4.4. Detention

Detention conditions are very bad. A lack of resources, limited numbers of defence attorneys, unskilled legal practitioners and corruption were factors contributing to a disregard of legal provisions that protect the detainee. The maximum period of detention by the court without indictment is 30 days. Many detainees, however, were held beyond 30 days, even without being informed of what they are accused of.(96)

(87) USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Afghanistan, n.d. (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220386>), accessed 12 November 2014; Nederland, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Algemeen Ambtsbericht Afghanistan, September 2014 (<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/bz/documenten-en-publicaties/ambtsberichten/2014/09/17/afghanistan.html>), accessed 14 November 2014, p. 49-52.

(88) Tahmindjis, P., The Rule of Law, Democracy and the Legal Profession in the Afghan Context: Challenges and Opportunities, International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), January 2014 (<http://www.ibanet.org/Article/Detail.aspx?ArticleUid=85ac71e3-e13e-43bd-8c97-48ac526a8d23>), accessed 12 November 2014.

(89) A shura is a community council.

(90) Tahmindjis, P., The Rule of Law, Democracy and the Legal Profession in the Afghan Context: Challenges and Opportunities, International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), January 2014 (<http://www.ibanet.org/Article/Detail.aspx?ArticleUid=85ac71e3-e13e-43bd-8c97-48ac526a8d23>), accessed 12 November 2014; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Afghanistan, n.d. (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220386>), accessed 12 November 2014; RFE/RL, Militants Storm Afghan Court, Killing Prosecutors, Officials, 28 October 2014 (<http://www.rferl.org/content/militants-storm-afghan-court-killing-prosecutors-officials/26659589.html>), accessed 11 November 2014; Nederland, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Algemeen Ambtsbericht Afghanistan, September 2014 (<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/bz/documenten-en-publicaties/ambtsberichten/2014/09/17/afghanistan.html>), accessed 14 November 2014, p. 46-48.

(91) USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Afghanistan, n.d. (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220386>) accessed 12 November 2014.

(92) USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Afghanistan, n.d. (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220386>) accessed 12 November 2014.

(93) USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Afghanistan, n.d. (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220386>) accessed 12 November 2014.

(94) USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Afghanistan, n.d. (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220386>) accessed 12 November 2014.

(95) USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Afghanistan, n.d. (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220386>) accessed 12 November 2014.

(96) USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Afghanistan, n.d. (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220386>) accessed 12 November 2014.

It is assumed that the intention of the above sections is to address the state's ability to protect civilians against security incidents in the context of an internal armed conflict as well as the state's ability to provide effective protection to persons that are specifically targeted due to their individual profile.

However, it is considered that the COI above only addresses a limited number of the range of issues required to assess both the state's *ability* (which should include inter alia: capacity; resources and equipment; training; oversight and accountability; functioning of the judicial system; evidence of security forces themselves being directly targeted; impunity for human rights abuses committed by state actors) and *willingness to protect* (which should include inter alia: insurgent infiltration of the security forces; extortion and corruption e.g. evidence of bribes required to open cases, or police accepting bribes from perpetrators resulting them dropping cases, judicial corruption; denial of protection to particular groups e.g. women, ethnic minorities etc).

The above section on 'Justice' is the most detailed, but the section on '1.4.2. Security Forces' is overly short; it is the only sub-section in the Afghanistan report in which abuses committed by government forces are addressed. It should include COI on: the scale and location of particular abuses; numbers of civilian casualties; whether particular profiles are more vulnerable etc. and be cross referenced to the relevant regional sections.

Moreover the section on '1.4.3. State Protection' reads more like a policy summary, and it is noteworthy that it only provides the Dutch position on whether protection is available. For example, it overlooks the UK Home Office's Country Information and Guidance report '[Afghanistan: persons supporting or perceived to support the government and/or international forces](#)', Are those at risk able to seek effective protection? Or UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), [UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan](#), 6 August 2013, C. 2. The Ability of the State to Protect Civilians from Human Rights Abuses.

The relevance of the section '1.4.4. Detention' is not made clear to the ability of the state to secure law and order, and omits relevant issues. It is an oversimplification to describe detention conditions as "very bad", with no detail on potential breaches of human rights such as denial of food, water, medication, the right to practice one's religion, whether there is access to due process and evidence of abuses including torture being committed.

- The report often summarises reports, sometimes several reports in one sentence. Whilst it is appreciated that this makes it more user friendly and the report more succinct, it could be made clearer what information is EASO analysis, and what is a summary of COI. For example, in the following excerpt it is not obvious whether reference 20 applies to the last sentence, or to the whole paragraph:

1. General description of the security situation in Afghanistan

The general security situation in Afghanistan is mainly determined by the following four factors: The main factor is the conflict between the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), supported by the International Military Forces (IMF), and Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), or insurgents. This conflict is often described as an "insurgency". The other factors are: criminality, warlordism and tribal tensions. These factors are often inter-linked and hard to distinguish. (20)

(20) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, report of the Secretary General, A/68/789-S/2014/163, 7 March 2014 (http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/163), accessed 28 October 2014, p. 13; Ruttig, T., Warlords, Religious Leaders, Insurgents: Three external publications, AAN, 7 October 2014 (<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/publication/other-publications/warlords-jihad-leaders-insurgents-three-external-publications/>), accessed 28 October 2014; Dorronsoro, G., 'Afghanistan: The impossible transition', The Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment, June 2011 (http://carnegieendowment.org/files/impossible_transition.pdf), accessed 28 October 2014, p. 10, 12 and 15; Giustozzi, A., Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop. The Neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, Hurst Publishers, 2007, p. 55-62.

- It would aid user friendliness if internal references to other sections were actively hyperlinked within the report.
- It is surprising that in the section on '1.5. Impact of the violence > 1.5.2. Civilian population > Refugees, returnees and IDPs' that no information on the humanitarian conditions internally displaced persons (IDPs) face is provided. Similarly in the 'Displacement' subsections of the areas addressed in chapter '2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan' the COI focuses on whether the particular area generates or hosts IDPs and for some areas, the number of IDPs. Given the relevance of the humanitarian situation for returnees or for IDPs in

assessing the reasonableness of relocation and eligibility for international protection for this profile of applicant, it is suggested that the report also address by region:

Erosion of traditional support mechanisms
Access to basic infrastructure and essential services for returnees and IDPs
Livelihood opportunities
Criminality rate
Mental health treatment and psychological support.

Consultative/review process

Methodology

- Defining the terms of reference (18)

[...] In August 2014, a request for input for the terms of reference was sent to members of the EASO COI Specialist Network on Afghanistan and UNHCR. On 17-18 September 2014, during a preparatory meeting, the terms of reference were finalised by the co-authors taking all the inputs into account.

(18) See annex 2.

- We would welcome the opportunity if Consultative Forum members were invited to input in to the terms of reference.

Methodology

- Quality control

In order to ensure that the co-authors respected the EASO COI Report Methodology, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the Acknowledgements section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report.

- Our recommendation on this as was submitted with regards to EASO's 2015 work plan² remains:

We would propose that production or updating of existing EASO COI products should be undertaken in consultation with civil society, especially regarding the Terms of Reference and the proposed methodology (also see our recommendation below on EASO's COI methodology). Quality control mechanisms should be publicly defined and established. It is recommended that EASO sets up a review committee comprising of State COI Unit experts and NGO COI researchers, UNHCR, country experts, academics, and other relevant civil society organisations to review existing and future COI products. In this regard, the structure, working methods and outputs of the UK-based [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information \(IAGCI\)](#) is recommended for consultation. (Please also see our comments on the 2014 Work Programme referring to ECRE's strategy paper³).

We would gladly give our time to such a review committee.

2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan, 2.1.1. Kabul city

The following general observations, recommendations and comments are based on an initial reading of section '2.1.1. Kabul city'. The security situation in Kabul city was chosen for a snapshot review as

² ARC and the Dutch Council for Refugees responded to an EASO invitation for input into their work plan for 2014/2015. This was not made public.

³ [ECRE, Enhancing Intra-EU Solidarity Tools to improve quality and fundamental rights protection in the Common European Asylum System, January 2013](#)

it is often the city COI researchers need to focus their research on, given its designation as a location of return or proposed site of internal relocation.

General observations and recommendations

- It is also advisable that for each referenced report the correct and specific heading or page number be provided from where the information was originally taken.
- Some of the acronyms referred to are rather unusual and very technical (e.g. VBIEDs, BBIEDs, RCIEDs, MIEDs) and should therefore be spelled out, especially the first time they are being used in a new sub-section even if they are mentioned in the 'Glossary and Abbreviations' section of the report.
- Some of the referenced sources are not in English. Whilst this is not a problem *per se* and does not mean that they are not valid providers of COI, it would be especially useful if in these instances the exact location of the excerpt or summary be indicated to facilitate transparency and the ability to locate the information more easily.
- The use of summaries together with the report referencing style means it is difficult to ascertain whom some of the information is attributable to. Whilst it is appreciated that this makes it more user friendly and the report more succinct, it could be made clearer when direct quotes are used and by whom.

Content specific observations

Description of the city

- Information presented in relation to the number of inhabitants in Kabul city is outdated. The report suggests that "current estimates for inhabitants [in Kabul] vary from between 3 and 7 million". However, a brief review of the two references listed in footnote 144 suggests that these estimates were made between 2005 and 2007, so barely 'current'. The source provided in footnote 145 provides a more accurate estimate by listing the 'Population of Kabul City by District and Sex 2012-13'. Adding up the figures indicates a total of approximately 6.5million inhabitants.

Impact of the violence

Violent incidents

- Information presented is outside of the stated security situation reference period for media reports of 1 January – 30 September 2014 as indicated in the 'Disclaimer' section of this report. The report states that "high-profile and often complex attacks have targeted Afghan and international offices". Yet, footnote 152 refers to a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty article documenting the storming of the UN Office in Kabul by the Taliban in May 2013.
- Misleading and inaccurate analysis is noted. For example it is stated that "the attack on the Ismaili cultural centre, which killed one guard, is an exception in a conflict that does not, so far, feature the sectarianism associated with the violence in Syria, Iraq or neighbouring Pakistan". However, the attack on the Shia cultural centre occurred in February 2014 and it was reported that "No one claimed responsibility but in the past such strikes have been claimed by the Taliban"⁴, whilst the analysis linked to the incident is taken from a December 2011 Al Jazeera news article, pre-dating the actual event.

Victims

⁴Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Suicide Bomber Targets Shi'ite Cultural Center in Kabul](#), 20 February 2014

- The analysis in this section states that

As seen from the incidents already outlined, the violence in Kabul city targets mostly government officials. The prime target is security personnel and their vehicles.

Based on the incidences referenced for the previous sub-section 'Violent incidents' which are not specifically disaggregated by profile, Westerners (civilians, NGO workers, journalists etc.) are equally targeted.

- Another example of the report providing misleading and inaccurate analysis is noted. The report states that (emphasis added)

As seen from the incidents already outlined, the violence in Kabul city targets mostly government officials. The prime target is security personnel and their vehicles. Although many of these attacks happen without consideration for collateral damage to civilians, according to analyst Fabrizio Foschini the choice of targets appears to indicate that AGEs are somehow looking for legitimacy for their actions.(160) **As such, it appears that civilians do not seem to be a target of the AGEs.**

(160) Foschini, F., Striking at Kabul, in 2013: the attack on the traffic police HQ, AAN, 21 January 2013 (<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.net/index.asp?id=3218>), accessed 14 October 2014.

The analysis included by Fabrizio Foschini is from January 2013 so pre-dates the actual incidents referred to further above. In addition, civilians continue to be a target of the AGEs in Kabul city as highlighted in this report with references to attacks on Westerners at locations which appear to target civilians such as hotels and restaurants.

- It is considered that the delay between the publication date of 13 February 2015 (not January 2015 as the report states) and the cut off for consulting media reports on the security situation of 30 September 2014 means that key current COI is overlooked. For example the 'Afghanistan Annual Report 2014: Protection of civilians in armed conflict' published in February 2015 by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan lists "Examples of suicide and complex attacks leading to civilian casualties" and "Examples of deliberate Taliban attacks against civilians and claims of responsibility" in Kabul city.⁵ This renders the above conclusion of the report that "it appears that civilians do not seem to be a target of the AGEs" inconsistent with UNAMA's position. Moreover, the UNAMA mid-year report available at the time of publication reported:

➤ [UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014](#)

[...] Anti-Government Elements and the Protection of Civilians

UNAMA also documented four separate attacks against courthouses in Farah city, Kabul city, Marja district Helmand province and Pashtunkot district, Faryab province, which caused 57 civilian deaths and 145 injuries (202 civilian casualties) including judges, prosecutors, legal and clerical staff. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attacks which followed a public statement by the Taliban announcing their intention to target and kill judges and prosecutors. UNAMA highlights that deliberate attacks on civilians including civilian Government officials are prohibited at all times and may amount to war crimes. [...]

Improvised Explosive Devices

UNAMA also documented Anti-Government Elements using RC-IEDs to deliberately target civilians. For example, on 18 June, a RC- IED detonated against the convoy of a Member of Parliament in Kabul

⁵ See UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan/UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Afghanistan: [Annual Report 2014: Protection of civilians in armed conflict](#), February 2015, *Suicide and Complex Attacks, Examples of suicide and complex attacks leading to civilian casualties*, p. 52 and *Taliban claims responsibility for attacks impacting civilians, Examples of deliberate Taliban attacks against civilians and claims of responsibility*, p. 70

city, in front of the office of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission killing four civilians and wounding 31 others. [...]

Additional COI located in a brief search documents the following attacks against civilian targets in Kabul (an illustrative, non-exhaustive list):

- [Al Jazeera, Taliban launch attack in Afghanistan's Paktia, 29 September 2014](#)
A suicide attack by the Taliban killed four civilians and injured two others near Kabul's airport, despite much of the city being under a security lockdown.
 - [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Taliban Launches Helmand Offensive; More Than 160 killed, 25 June 2014](#)
[...] In the Afghan capital overnight, four civilians were wounded by a rocket that struck a house near Kabul's international airport [...]
 - [Institute for War & Peace Reporting Tensions Rise in Kabul Ahead of Vote, 2 April 2014](#)
Violence has surged in recent weeks with attacks on civilians and election infrastructure [...] A spate of recent and deadly suicide attacks against civilian targets has done little to soothe residents' nerves [...] Over the last fortnight, Kabul has already been hit hard, with numerous attacks against both civilian targets and the capital's electoral infrastructure [...]
 - [The Guardian, Taliban gunmen kill nine civilians in attack at Kabul's Serena hotel, 21 March 2014](#)
[...] Teenage Taliban gunmen who slipped into a top luxury hotel in Kabul on Thursday night shot and killed two young girls along with seven other civilians in the latest attack in a wave of violence hitting Afghanistan ahead of presidential elections. Six others were injured [...]
- It is also a little surprising that the timing of the Afghanistan report was not co-ordinated with the publication of the annual report from UNAMA, given the relevance of the COI included in this report and that the publication date is known to be in February of each year. At the least it is suggested that the EASO make reference to the expected date and URL of the 2014 UNAMA report becoming available, to enable users to more readily access more up to date COI.
 - Inaccurate information is presented. Firstly, the report states

On a UNOCHA map showing the level of civilian casualties by district from 1 September 2013 to 31 August 2014, Kabul city is ranked highest, with from 151 to 234 civilian casualties (killed and injured respectively).(162)

(162) UNOCHA, 2015 Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan, November 2014 (<https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Afghanistan/humanitarian-needs-overview.pdf>), accessed 8 December 2014, p. 4.

The actual map, as referenced in footnote 162, indicates that Kabul city's civilian casualties range from 151-354.

Secondly, the report states

Although Kabul district has a high number of victims compared to most other districts in the province, and the country as a whole, according to UNOCHA the risk to a civilian in Kabul province is relatively low. This is because Kabul has a very high population; UNOCHA estimates there are about 4 million inhabitants in Kabul province, more than double the second most populated province, Herat, and almost triple that of the third province, Nangarhar.(163)

(163) UNOCHA, 2015 Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan, November 2014, (<https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Afghanistan/humanitarian-needs-overview.pdf>), accessed 8 December 2014, p. 42.

The presentation and referencing of this paragraph may be read to imply that all the information is based on the source in footnote 163. However, the UNOCHA report does not state that “the risk to a civilian in Kabul province is relatively low” nor does it provide as one of its explanations that this may be due to Kabul’s “very high population”. The table referred to in footnote 163 at page 42 of the UNOCHA report merely places Kabul at the bottom of its ‘Humanitarian Risk Profile’ table based on indicators such as conflict incidents, civilian casualties, conflict induced IDPs, possible escalation etc. It is therefore recommended that EASO summaries/analysis be made more visible, for example by including them in distinct paragraphs.

Displacement

- Additional information on the socio-economic situation of returnees and those IDPs living in Kabul city would have been useful. Despite this report focusing mainly on the security situation in Afghanistan’s provinces, a section on the living conditions and situation of returnees and IDPs living in these provinces are also important indicators of the humanitarian situation on return or the reasonableness of relocation, which is necessary for decision-makers to assess eligibility for international protection for this profile of applicant.

Actors in the conflict

- Information on criminality being a source of insecurity in Kabul is included which is taken from a report published back in January 2013. Given that currency is of utmost importance for reports focusing on the security situation in a particular city, province and country it would be advisable to mention the date of publication and include more recent COI backing up that this trend is still continuing.