



Home Office

The Home Office response to the Independent Chief Inspector's report:

A short-notice inspection of the Amman Visa Section

March 2015

The Home Office thanks the Independent Chief Inspector for his report.

The Home Office is pleased that the Independent Chief Inspector (ICI) found that the Amman Visa Section had improved the quality of its decision making and of its record-keeping since it was last inspected in 2010. We particularly welcome the finding that the introduction of UKVI's Operating Mandate in November 2014 was also having a positive effect, providing greater visibility of cases across the UKVI global network and improving accuracy and consistency of decision making.

The Home Office is delighted that the ICI found staff and managers in Amman to be committed and enthusiastic, that the post showed a strong commitment to customer service and examples of this were identified. We welcome the ICI's recognition of the Amman management team's consultative approach with staff when reviewing and adjusting productivity targets and the recognition of the complexity of decision making.

We are also pleased that the ICI observed excellent relations between UKVI and RALON, whilst recognising that Amman faced an extremely challenging environment for risk management, identifying good examples where decision makers had applied careful scrutiny when issuing visa applications received from conflict zones.

We are grateful to the ICI for highlighting potential areas for improvements in Amman, including changes to processes for recording the outcome of verification checks and enrichment activities. The Amman Visa Section has already taken steps to make improvements in these areas.

The Home Office accepts four recommendations in full and one in part.

1. Recommendation 1: Ensure that Entry Clearance Officers allocate sufficient time to each visa application to allow for careful scrutiny of all the evidence

1.1 Accepted

We agree that it is important to allow decision making staff sufficient time to scrutinise evidence provided with a visa application. Prior to this inspection, we recruited additional staff to the Amman visa section following escalation of conflict in the region, allowing for more detailed scrutiny of high risk applications. Productivity targets in Amman were reduced and additional measures have been put in place to manage increased risk.

We consider these steps to have already addressed this recommendation and are satisfied that our staff give appropriate and comprehensive scrutiny to all cases.

2. Recommendation 2: Ensure that refusal notices show clear and balanced consideration has been given to both positive and negative evidence in reaching the decision to refuse

2.1 Accepted in part

We are pleased that the ICI has highlighted that a much higher percentage of refusal notices were clear and factually accurate since the last inspection in 2010. We accept that a small number of applications sampled did not meet this high standard and case-workers have been reminded of the requirement to maintain high standards of accuracy.

The ICI has highlighted the absence of reference to the consideration of positive evidence in some refusal notices. While we accept that refusal notices should show a balanced consideration of the application, including reference to positive evidence, we do not agree that the *detail* of positive evidence always needs to be included.

Our customers need clarity on what they might need to do with any future applications in order to satisfy us that the Immigration Rules are met, and feedback from applicants tells us that repeating positive information from the application that has limited relevance to the reasons for refusal can be confusing.

Our structure for refusal notices aims to clearly set out:

- How we make our decisions
- What information/evidence we have taken into consideration with that decision
- How we have reached the decision that the Rules are not met
- What parts of the Rules are not met

We use short paragraphs and direct links to the relevant paragraph of the Rules to make the decision easier for the customer to understand.

3. Recommendation 3: Improve monitoring of verification checking for entry clearance staff, and ensure that all checks and results are recorded

3.1 Accepted

We accept that there should be a consistent method of recording verification checks, including additional enrichment activities when entry clearance staff are assessing applications.

Verification checks undertaken by RALON were identified as having been consistently recorded in a separate database, however we acknowledge some inconsistency in the recording of additional enrichment checks by entry clearance staff in the case-working system. Having reviewed the applications provided to the ICI team within the original file sample, we are satisfied that case-workers evaluated the outcome of all commissioned checks as part of their overall decision making process. Those checks were all recorded, however this was done in an inconsistent manner.

Since the inspection was conducted the Amman Visa Section has introduced a single database for recording all verification and enrichment checks undertaken and has also introduced a new enrichment framework mandating the minimum level of checks to be undertaken for all nationality groups. This framework will ensure consistency in the way that checks which are undertaken are recorded, supporting the decision making process.

4. Recommendation 4: Require companies managing Visa Application Centres on its behalf to advise applicants of any known or potential circumstances that might delay the processing of their application

4.1 Accepted

We accept that customers should be informed of all circumstances which will cause a delay in the processing of their application. We will continue to work with our commercial partners to ensure that the most up to date status of any delay is known and we will communicate this to our customers through a number of formal and informal channels. Throughout the 2014 conflict period in both Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territory of Gaza, applicants were regularly informed of barriers likely to delay application deliveries due to restrictions to overland movements. Agreed information was delivered in person at the visa application centres by staff and through notices displayed in the centres and published on commercial partner websites.

5. Recommendation 5: Provide signage and information in local languages for customers at Visa Application Centres

5.1 Accepted

We accept that signage and information published at visa application centres should be available both in English and the appropriate local language.

Since the inspection was conducted, missing translations for signage and information have been produced and displayed at all Amman spoke visa applications centres.