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Palestine: Issuance of the Palestinian Authority passport in the West Bank and Gaza

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Introduction

The following note describes the issuance procedure for the passport issued by the Palestinian Authority (the PA-passport) in the West Bank and Gaza.

The note includes a description of the Palestinian civil registry, the administrative structure in Gaza and the West Bank and the application procedure. The note also includes a description of the 00-passport and the VIP-passport.

The note is primarily based on interviews with Palestinian authorities and international organisations in Jerusalem and Ramallah in September 2019 and is one out of several notes published by the Danish National ID Centre focusing on Palestinian documents.

The Palestinian civil registry

In connection with the Oslo Accords in 1995, the Palestinian National Authority (PA) took over the administration of the Palestinian civil registry from Israel.¹

In the beginning, the PA could only make changes in the registry, but since 2000, the PA is allowed to register births and deaths and issue ID documents to Palestinians who are registered in the civil registry. Israel keeps a copy of the Palestinian registry and they receive information about updates in the Palestinian system. The PA cannot approve family reunifications or issue ID documents to persons who are not in the Palestinian civil registry, with exception of the 00-passport and ID cards to persons without a national number.²

¹ Landinfo, 2011, p. 7.

² Migrationsverket, Lifos, 2019, p. 22-33.

A Palestinian citizen receives an ID number when he/she is registered at birth (or later). The ID number must be written on the ID card and on all other ID documents issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Interior.³

The Palestinian civil registry contains personal information such as: first name, last name, name of father, name of mother, name of grandfather on the father's side, date of birth, gender, religion, place and date of issuance of ID card, address, civil status, name and ID number of spouse and children.⁴

Palestinians are either registered as residents in the West Bank, East Jerusalem or Gaza. Registrations cannot be moved without Israeli approval.⁵

Issuance of the PA-passport

The Palestinian Authority began issuing passports in 1995 after the Oslo Accords gave the authority to do so.⁶

The passport contains the following information: ID number, full name, name of father, name of mother, date and place of birth, gender, profession, passport number, date of issuance and photo.

The cover page was olive green for passports issued between 1995 and 2008 with green visa pages. The cover page is black for the current passport series issued from 1 January 2008 with pink visa pages. The signature of the passport holder is located on page 2, and the signature of the person responsible for the authorisation of the passport is located on page 3.⁷

³ Ministry of Interior, October 2019.

⁴ Migrationsverket, Lifos 2019, p. 22.

⁵ Migrationsverket, Lifos 2019, p. 22.

⁶ Migrationsverket, Lifos 2019, p. 31.

⁷ Migrationsverket, Lifos 2019, p. 31.

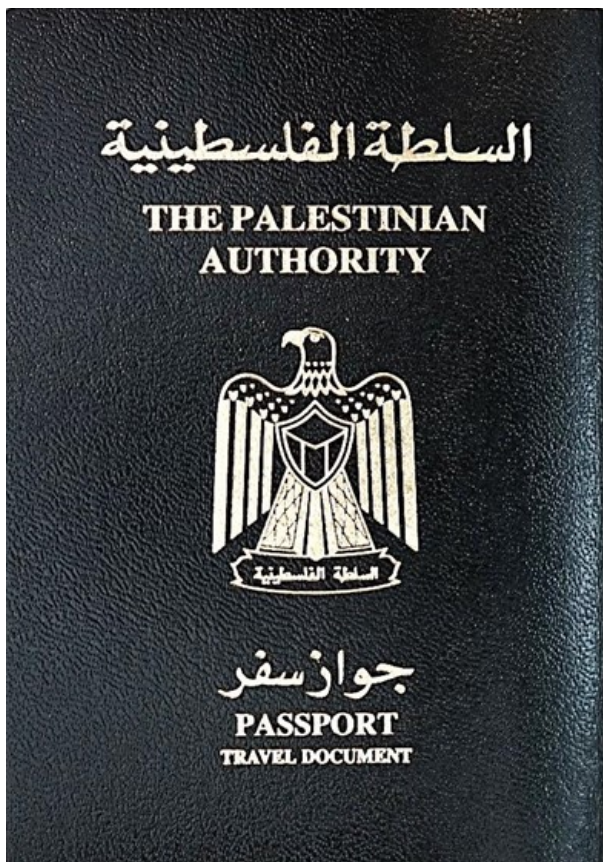


Image 1: Cover page of the PA-passport (NIDC reference material).

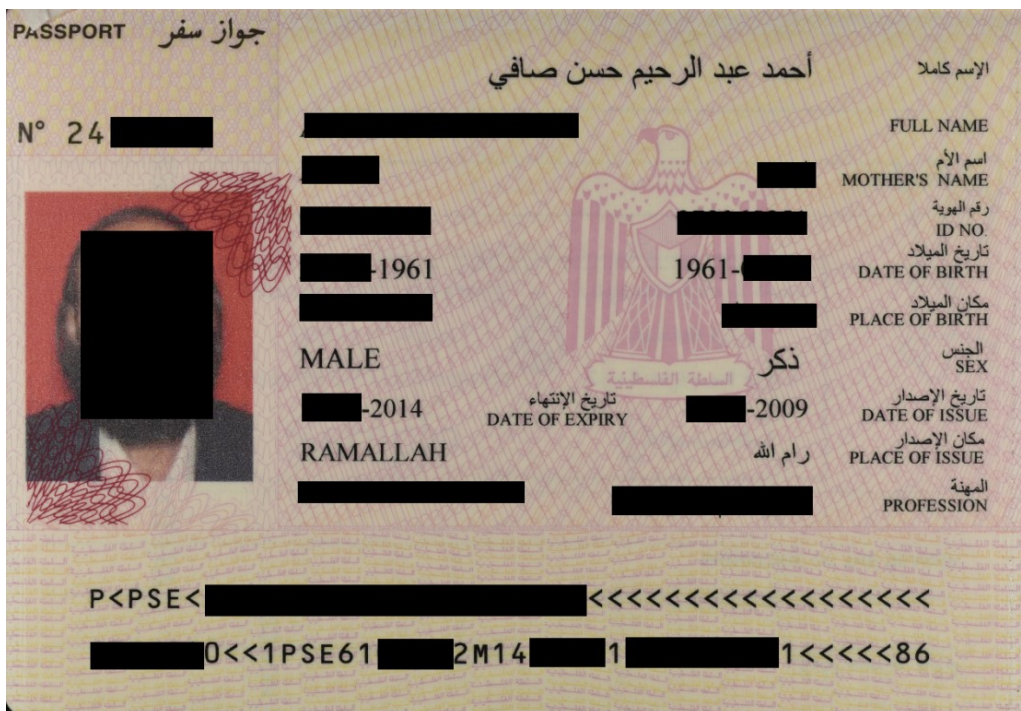


Image 2: Biographical data page of the PA-passport (NIDC reference material).

Administrative structure in the West Bank and Gaza

There are 14 local directorates in the West Bank plus a central civil registration unit at the Ministry of Interior (Mol) in Ramallah.⁸ Hence, in Ramallah exist both the central civil registration unit and the local directorate of Ramallah. There are five local directorates in Gaza. Every directorate is divided into six departments: Civil status affairs, passports, administrative affairs, NGO and public affairs, policy and tribal law.⁹

All of the local civil status departments in the West Bank as well as Gaza have access to a digital database. Before 2007, it was a common database, but after the administrative split between the West Bank and Gaza in 2007, the database was separated into two separate systems; one in Gaza and one in the West Bank. There is no link between the two systems. Information stored in the database before 2007 appears in both databases, but information stored after 2007 is only stored locally in either the West Bank or Gaza.¹⁰

Gaza and restrictions on freedom of movement

Some documents are only issued in the West Bank, i.e. the PA-passport. Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, and since 2007 Gaza has been controlled by Hamas.

After the second intifada in 2000, Israel imposed severe restrictions on movement for Palestinians including checkpoints and the building of the separation barrier around the West Bank in 2002. A permit from Israeli authorities is required for a Palestinian to travel to Israel or East Jerusalem or to move between Gaza and the West Bank.¹¹

Application procedure for PA-passports in the West Bank

A person with a valid ID number in the West Bank or Gaza can have a PA-passport issued. A person in the West Bank can apply for a passport at all 14 directorates located in the West bank. The passport is only printed in Hebron, Nablus and Ramallah and will have these cities as places of issuance. Each of the 14 directorates in the West Bank is connected to one of the passport issuance centers according to geographical considerations. However, Ramallah also has a department printing passports for people living in Gaza.¹²

⁸ The 14 directorates in the West Bank are: Jenin, Qalqilya, Tulkarm, Nablus, Tubas, Salfit, Ramallah, Ram, Jericho, Abu Dis, Bethlehem, North Hebron/Halhoul, Hebron, South Hebron/Dora.

⁹ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹⁰ Ministry of Interior, October 2019.

¹¹ Migrationsverket, Lifos 2019, p. 19 f.

¹² Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

When submitting an application for a passport, a form is filled out and three personal photos with blue background must be submitted. The required documentation is the original ID card. If the application is submitted by a third person an original power of attorney from a notary public is required. The fee for applying is 35 Jordanian dinars.¹³

The information on the ID card is verified against the digital civil status register and the picture is verified against the person and the old passport.¹⁴

The local registry office receives the passport by mail in normally two days, and the applicant receives a text message stating that the passport is ready to be collected.¹⁵

Application procedure for PA-passports in Gaza

It is not possible to apply for a passport directly in Gaza. A person from Gaza has to apply by proxy at the Ministry of Interior in Ramallah.¹⁶

Private businesses in Gaza specialize in facilitating passport applications. A person from Gaza sometimes has to wait for months to have a passport issued.¹⁷ The application and supporting documentation is sent by post together with a power of attorney from the private office in Gaza to a proxy in the West Bank. The proxy takes the application with him to the Mol where the passport is issued. When the passport is ready, the proxy picks it up, and he sends it by post to either the private office or the passport holder in Gaza.¹⁸

In urgent cases, the application and supporting documentation can be scanned and sent to the Mol by e-mail (e.g. for persons needing medical treatment abroad or cases of pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia).¹⁹

It is possible to apply for a passport without using the services of the private companies. In this case, the person has to arrange with a person who can act as proxy for him in the West Bank and bring a power of attorney from a notary public in Gaza.²⁰

¹³ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹⁴ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹⁵ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹⁶ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹⁷ OHCHR, Ramallah September 2019.

¹⁸ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

¹⁹ Landinfo 2011, p. 11.

²⁰ Landinfo 2011, p. 11.

There have been reports that some persons in Gaza have been denied passports presumably due to political affiliation with Hamas. It is not clear to what extent this has happened or whether it is still the case.²¹

Passport application from a diplomatic mission abroad

A person with a valid ID number can bring a copy of the old passport and residency permit from the country of residence and fill out the passport application at the diplomatic mission. The passport application is sent to the MFA and after that to the MoI in Ramallah. The MoI issues the passport and sends it back to the embassy. The process can take more than two weeks.²²

Passports for travels related to registration of children born abroad

For children below the age of 15 born abroad a passport without an ID number can be issued based on the birth certificate of the child and the marriage certificate and passports of the parents, so the child can travel with a parent to the West Bank and register the child in the Palestinian civil registry. If only one parent is present, a written approval of the other parent is not needed.²³

Once the child is registered, they can have a normal passport with ID number issued.²⁴

Profession

The profession of the passport holder is written on the bio-data page of the passport. There are fixed procedures to verify professions for doctors, engineers and lawyers, whose occupation is verified through the university or association. An employee from the public sector is required to submit a salary slip or a formal letter from the work place, and an employee from the private sector is required to submit a recent letter from the employer and a tax notice.²⁵

Passport issuance for children

Children are required to have their own passport. The child is not required to be present when applying for a passport before the age of 16 years. Both parents can apply without the presence of the other parent, unless there is a court decision that prohibits one of the parents to have a passport issued for the child. Written consent is not needed from the other parent.²⁶

²¹ Landinfo 2011, p. 10.

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ramallah, September 2019.

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ramallah, September 2019.

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ramallah, September 2019.

²⁵ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²⁶ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

Passport issuance for women

There are no special regulations regarding women.²⁷

Israeli approval

Issuance of the passport is technically approved by the Palestinian authorities, however the Palestinian authorities are obligated to report every passport registration to the Israeli authorities.²⁸

Every passport registration is sent to the Israeli authorities, so they can register the update in their database. The passport holder cannot travel through an Israeli border control before the data is approved by the Israeli authorities and registered in the Israeli system. It can take between 7 to 14 days before registration in the Israeli system is final. The list of updates is sent from the MoI in Ramallah on a CD to the Israeli authorities without sending the passport itself. There is no link between the Palestinian and Israeli electronic systems.²⁹

The Palestinian authorities are advised when the registration is accepted and final in the Israeli system. The Israelis cannot technically reject an application for passport, which does not impact the issuance itself since the passport has already been issued, but it will make the passport invalid for travel since the person has to cross an Israeli border control on the way out of the country (typically the Al-Ilenby/King Hussein border crossing). If the passport is not accepted by the Israelis, the Palestinian authorities will be notified through the Israeli liaison office in Beit El.³⁰

The central passport database

The central passport database contains personal information such as name, date and place of birth, place and date of issuance, gender and occupation. The database does not contain biometric data.³¹

VIP passport

VIP passports are only issued in Ramallah. Diplomatic personal and military personal is allowed a VIP passport. The issuance procedure is the same, but the fee is double (70 JD).³²

²⁷ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²⁸ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

²⁹ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

³⁰ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

³¹ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

³² Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

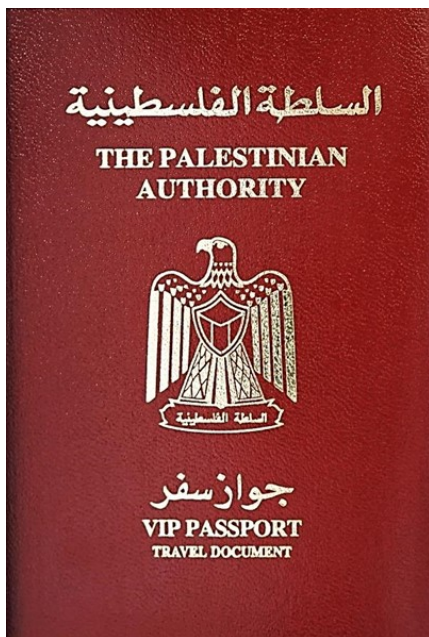


Image 3: Cover page of the VIP-passport (NIDC reference material).

00-passport

00-passports are issued at the Ministry of Interiors headquarter in Ramallah to persons of Palestinian descent without a valid Palestinian ID number in the West Bank or Gaza. Only one of the parents has to be of Palestinian origin in order for a person to have a 00-passport issued.³³

Because the person does not have a valid ID number, the field where the ID number would normally be starts with two zeros.³⁴ The field can have two or more zeros.³⁵

The 00-passports are only issued in special cases for Palestinians living outside of the Palestinian areas with no other possibility to have travel documents issued. It could be Palestinians living in the United Arab Emirates, Palestinians fleeing war in Lebanon or Syria or Palestinians with residency in European countries.³⁶ Palestinians from Syria or Lebanon are refused a 00-passport except if the person is staying outside of the two respective countries.³⁷

Palestinians in many countries like Egypt, Iraq and Yemen are sometimes refused to have their travel document from these countries renewed. The issuance of 00-

³³ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

³⁴ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

³⁵ Landinfo, 2021, p. 1.

³⁶ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ramallah, September 2019.

passports stems from Iraq where Palestinians were unable to obtain travel documents.³⁸

00-passports are not issued to persons from East Jerusalem.³⁹

Application for a 00-passports can be submitted at all Palestinian representations. If the applicant is a child, the parents can submit the application on behalf of the child. It is required that the child is present when the application is submitted. However, according to Landinfo the child can be absent if the family is known to the representation.⁴⁰

When an application for a 00-passport is submitted at an embassy abroad, a security officer from the embassy checks up on the father's or mother's Palestinian origin (e.g. according to a birth certificate or passport from one of the parents). After the authentication of the documents, the embassy sends the application and the submitted documents to the MoI headquarters in Ramallah where the application and the documents are checked again. After the verification, the 00-passport is issued in Ramallah and sent back to the embassy. Only the head office in Ramallah can issue the 00-passport.⁴¹

If the applicant is a child the required documents is the following: Parents travel documents, the child's travel document (if such one has been issued), birth certificates of the child and parents, marriage certificate of the parents and the parents ID card/Residence permits. The documents must be originals.⁴²

After five years, the person is able to renew his/her 00-passport. The authorities check whether it has been used, and if it has not, the passport is not renewed. The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates that around 10.000 or more 00-passports are issued per year.⁴³

The passport does not give access to enter the Israel, the West Bank or Gaza, so 00-passports do not require Israeli approval.⁴⁴

³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ramallah, September 2019.

³⁹ Palestinian Population Registry, Ramallah, September 2019.

⁴⁰ Landinfo, 2021, p. 2.

⁴¹ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

⁴² Landinfo, 2021, p. 2.

⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ramallah, September 2019.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

Procedures for lost or stolen passports

When a passport is reported lost or stolen a police report is filed as and an announcement posted in a local newspaper. If the passport is lost or stolen outside Palestine only a police report is required. Interpol and the Security Intelligence Services are notified and the person is questioned about the case. If they approve, a new passport can be issued. According to the Ministry of Interior, the procedure is the same in Gaza.⁴⁵

Confiscations

Passports are not confiscated by the Palestinian authorities unless it is according to the law and a court resolution; for instance a case of fraud, a criminal case or if the passport is reported stolen by Interpol.⁴⁶

According to the Ministry of Interior there have been no cases of blank stolen documents in the West Bank or Gaza.⁴⁷

Distribution of blank documents

The blank booklets are located in Ramallah and shipped from there to the three issuance centers. The serial numbers of the passports are registered before being shipped to the local offices with special vehicles and trusted personnel. When a stock is sent, Israeli approval is required, because the guards need to bear weapon.⁴⁸

Because of the low stock of the current passports series, the blank booklets are delivered in small batches to the local offices every second week at the moment.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

⁴⁷ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

⁴⁸ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Interior, Ramallah, September 2019.

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