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Syria: Procedures to obtain, renew and replace national identity cards and passports; information contained in the passport and the identity card

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1. National Identity Cards

Information on Syrian national identity cards was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. However, the following information may be of interest:

The US Department of State's Country Reciprocity Schedule for Syria states that ID cards are issued by the Civil Registrar within the Civil Affairs department of the Ministry of the Interior, are free of charge, and must be obtained in person (n.d.). They are available to individuals over the age of 14 (US n.d.). They must be carried at all times (UN 2009, para. 8). The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) notes that "citizen[s] can vote with [their] identity card[s]" (26 Feb. 2012). The UN reports that, while information on religion is collected by the civil registry, religious affiliation does not appear on identity cards (UN 2009, para. 10).

An article published by SANA on 26 April 2010 describes an overhaul of the Syrian civil registry, which will include assigning each citizen a national identification number, which will appear on their national identity card. Further information on the reform of the Syrian civil registry could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Procedures to Obtain, Renew, and Replace a Passport

The US Department of State's Country Reciprocity Schedule for Syria states that passport applications must be completed in person and that the fee to obtain a passport is 1850 Syrian Pounds [\$C 18.97 (XE 18 June 2013)] (US n.d.). The National, an English-language publication based in Abu Dhabi (The National n.d.), reports that, prior to the uprising, the passport application procedure would be completed within a few days and would cost between \$US 20 and \$40 (ibid., 25 Oct. 2012).

In a 2007 document produced by the Danish Immigration Service, an official with the Immigration and Passports Department of Syria's Ministry of the Interior stated that persons who are banned from leaving Syria cannot obtain a passport (Denmark Apr. 2007, 19). The same report also notes, citing an embassy in Damascus, that "Syrian (immigration) authorities have a computer registry that indicates the date and place of exit and the [date of] issue of a passport of a given person," and that persons who are subject to travel bans are also registered in this database (ibid., 20-21).

A news report by Al Arabiya, the English online presence of the Al-Arabiya News Channel, which serves the Arab world (Al-Arabiya n.d.), states that "if [the applicant] is originally from the Syrian capital, he will be asked to submit an official military document for which fees" are required (ibid. 11 Oct. 2012). The National reports that men over the age of 18 are also screened so as to ensure that they have completed their military service and are not required for active duty (25 Oct. 2012). Sources report that in 2012, there was a six month delay in passport issuance in Syria (Al Arabiya 11 Oct. 2012; The National 25 Oct. 2012). The Al Arabiya news report also explains that citizens from Homs, Hama, and Dara'a who sought new passports were fined for not applying in their home regions, despite the lack of functioning government offices in those regions (11 Oct. 2012).

Gulf News, an English daily based in the United Arab Emirates (Gulf News n.d.), reports that in February 2013, the Syrian consulate in Dubai rejected applications for passport renewals because they no longer had a stock of passport booklets and were unable to receive shipments of new ones (ibid. 14 Feb. 2013).

Sources report that the Syrian authorities announced in 2013 that they would renew, for an additional validity period of two years [Al Arabiya says up to four years (5 Mar. 2013)], any passports and travel documents of Syrian citizens abroad (Al Arabiya 5 Mar. 2013; Los Angeles Times 27 Feb. 2013; SANA 28 Feb. 2013). According to new sources, the Syrian Ministry of the Interior stated in February or March 2013 that passports would be renewed "regardless of the reasons that had earlier prevented their renewal, and without obtaining the necessary authorizations" (Al Arabiya 5 Mar. 2013; Los Angeles Times 27 Feb. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A BBC report covering Arabic-language press states that the Syrian opposition movement, which opened its first embassy after taking over the embassy in Doha, Qatar (Reuters 27 Mar. 2013), would begin renewing Syrian passports under the jurisdiction of the "embassies of the [opposition] Coalition," but that these passports would not be recognized by countries such as Russia (BBC 21 Mar. 2013). Further information on passports issued by the Syrian opposition movement and whether the Syrian authorities have begun to renew the travel documents of Syrian citizens abroad could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. For information on how to apply for a passport outside of Syria, please see Response to Information Request SYR104421.

2.1 Information Contained in a Syrian Passport, Including Issuing Authority and Validity

The US Department of State notes that the issuing authority for passports is the Department of Immigration and Passports in the Ministry of the Interior (US n.d.).

The US Department of State's Country Reciprocity Schedule for Syria states that there are four different types of Syrian passports: Service, Diplomatic, Special, and Regular (ibid.). The regular Syrian passport is described as follows:

The current passport is 5 inches by 3.5 inches. The color of the passport is dark blue and has a golden eagle seal in the middle. The Syrian passport displays the following key features:

The passport is 48 pages and is in ICAO format (smaller than the previous one).

It is machine readable.

The photograph is photo-digitized and printed on the bio-page.

A small OVD eagle is printed on the bio-page.

Father's and mother's names are added to the bio-page.

The biographic page is covered by a thin plastic laminate.

The perforations on the bio-page are covered by laminate as well.

The signature is also printed at the back of the bio-page. (ibid.)

According to Keesing Reference Systems, the Syrian passport contains the bearer's name, date of birth, place of birth, nationality, signature, gender, personal number, the document number, the period of validity, the date of issue, and issuing country (n.d.b). Photographs of the front cover, the photograph and bearer's data, and the second spread of a sample Syrian passport provided by Keesing Reference Systems are attached to this Response.

Keesing Reference Systems reports that the Syrian passport is valid for six years (n.d.a). A report produced by the Danish Immigration Service indicates that a passport is valid for six years, but passports issued to men who have not yet completed their military service are only valid for two years (Denmark Apr. 2007, 19). SANA states that the "Ministry of Interior has extended the validity of passports from six to ten years for one time starting off January 1st, 2013" (SANA 28 Feb. 2013). Corroborating information on the validity period of Syrian passports could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful: Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons in Belgium; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Representatives from the following organizations were unable to provide information: Canada Border Services Agency; Syrian consulate, Montreal; Syrian embassy, US. A representative from the Canadian embassy in Jordan was unable to provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: Arab News; Associated Press; carim.org; ecoi.net; Factiva; Migration Policy Centre; Syria - Ministry of the Interior; United Nations - Refworld.

Attachments

Keesing Reference Systems. N.d. "Syria - SYR - National Passport - General." Front cover, Photograph and Bearer's Details, and Second Spread. [Accessed 10 May 2013]

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