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Syria: Exit controls and procedures at Damascus International Airport, including whether a foreigner's passport is stamped upon departure; whether airport authorities verify upon departure if a foreigner entered the country legally; consequences if entrance was illegal (2012-January 2014).

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1. Exit Controls and Procedures at Damascus International Airport

Information on the exit controls and procedures at Damascus International Airport 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.

In a Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs general situation report on Syria published on 11 December 2013, covering the period of January to November 2013, the ministry reported that

[translation]

[f]or each entry a foreigner must complete a form which contains his/her name, profession, place of residence in Syria, and reason for stay. When exiting the country this form must be given to the customs official. According to available information this form is not connected to any legal residencies in Syria. Checks at Damascus Airport have intensified as a result of the current situation in the country. The number of international flights to and from Damascus has greatly decreased due to lack of safety and a regime of exclusion of social and business traffic. (Netherlands 11 Dec. 2013, 35)

The same information above is also included in a report on the general situation in Syria, published by the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs and covering the period of May to December 2012 (ibid. Jan. 2013, 38). The report also notes that

[translation]

[e]ntering or exiting Syria via Damascus Airport is only possible if the passport contains an entry or exit stamp. When entering, after having been through the immigration check, this is checked again by armed safety officials. The same goes for exiting the country; there will be an extra check after going through immigration, before being allowed to walk in the direction of the plane. Checks at Damascus Airport have intensified as a result of the current situation in the country. (ibid.)

Corroborating information for these two reports could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Agence France-Presse reported that, in March 2012, the Syrian government imposed a travel ban on Syrian men aged 18 to 42 (26 March, 2012). The US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012 reported that the government imposed travel restrictions by age, gender, and destination during April to May 2012; for example, men between 18 and 24 years of age were not permitted to enter Lebanon without government authorization, and "there was no evidence any permissions were granted" (US 19 Apr. 2013, 26). Further information on travel bans imposed by the government of Syria during 2012-2013 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Country Reports 2012 stated that the government of Syria "both continued and expanded its exit visa requirements (ibid.). The government services website eSyria.sy states that Arabs and foreigners in Syria that are holders of "temporary, regular and special residence [are] subject to exit and return visa before leaving the country" (Syria n.d.). The website indicates that the required documents to obtain an exit visa are

The application cost[s] 15 [Syrian pounds (SYP)] [C\$0.15 (XE 27 Jan. 2014b)].

Students need to provide an approval from the institutes where they study.

Experts need to provide an approval from the public sector where they work.

Journalists need to provide an approval from the Ministry of Information.

The value of [financial] stamps is: 40 [SYP] for a single trip and 80 [SYP] for multi trips. (ibid.)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Border Security and Consequences of Illegal Entrance to Syria

A 2010 report from a joint fact-finding mission to Syria on human rights issues concerning Kurds in Syria, conducted by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) of the Austrian Red Cross, indicated that "the computer system employed at border controls to screen persons upon their entry into Syria works well. Border guards check whether the name of someone who enters Syria can be found on one of the wanted persons lists of the security services" (DIS and ACCORD May 2010, 56). The lists contain information from all parts of the country, thus allowing immigration officials to see if someone has a file listed with one of the Syrian security services, and if they do, the person would be transferred to that services' detention facility (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), the national official news agency, which is "linked" to the Syrian Ministry of Information (SANA n.d.), released an article in June 2013 indicating that the President had issued a new law, Law No. 9 for 2013, on the penalties to be applied to those found to have entered Syria illegally (ibid. 25 June 2013). The law provides that individuals who enter Syrian territories illegally will be punished by a prison sentence of 5 to 10 years and/or a fine of 5 million [about C\$49,000 (XE 27 Jan. 2014a)] to 10 million SYP, according to SANA (SANA 25 June 2013). Further information on the implementation of this law could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The eSyria government services website about regulations on residence for foreigners indicates that the "Minister of the Interior has the right to deport any foreigner or Arab with the requirements of security and public interest and for any other reasons that the Minister is determined" (Syria n.d.). In 2008, Amnesty International reported that Iraqis without legal status, such as those entering Syria "irregularly or possessing false documents," would be at risk of deportation (June 2008, 11). Similarly, according to the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs' general situation report on Syria dated December 2011, [translation] "Iraqi citizens without a valid visa are in Syria illegally and can, if arrested, be deported to their country of origin" (27 Dec. 2011, 47).

The Egyptian State Information Services reported that Egypt's Foreign Ministry warned its citizens against illegal entry into Syria in 2012, as this would lead Syrian authorities to arrest and detain those Egyptians, while noting that the current crisis would make locating those detained for illegal entry difficult (Egypt 18 Jan. 2012). Ahram Online reported that, in March 2012, 12 Egyptians were detained in Syria due to illegal entry into the country from Lebanon, and that authorities were working to have them released and deported from Syria (12 Mar. 2012). Further information about the consequences of illegal entry into Syria 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 the following organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Austrian Airways; British Airways; Damascus International Airport - General Information Line, Immigration Section, Coordination Office; Emirates Air; Iran Air; Mahan Air; Syria - embassies in Paris, Sofia, Washington; Turkish Airlines; United Nations - UNHCR Damascus.

Internet sites: Assessment Capacities Project; Austrian Airways; British Airways; Danish Immigration Service; Ecolnet; Iran Air; Mahan Air; Syria - Civil Aviation Authority, embassies of Syria in Berlin, Canberra, London, Paris, and Washington, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Interior (not functional), Ministry of Transportation,; Syrian Air; Turkish Airlines; US - Federal Aviation Administration, OSAC; UN - Integrated Regional Information Networks, International Civil Aviation Organization, Refworld.

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