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Syria: Requirements and procedures to obtain, renew, and replace passports and national identity cards, including in Canada and in neighbouring countries; information and details contained in each document, including physical characteristics (2015-July 2017)

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1. Requirements and Procedures to Obtain, Renew and Replace Passports

According to the US Department of State's Reciprocity Schedule for Syria, there are four types of Syrian passports: Service (green), Diplomatic (red), Special (light brown), and Regular (dark blue) (US n.d.). Without providing further information, the Reciprocity Schedule further states that there is a "Transportation Letter in case the passport is lost or stolen abroad" (US n.d.).

A July 2017 report by Norway's Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo), citing meetings with the Directorate of Migration and Passports in Damascus in September 2013 and October 2014, and meetings with a Syrian lawyer in September 2013 and October 2014, indicates that passports are usually valid for six years, but that men between the ages of 18 and 42 who have not completed military service generally receive passports valid for two years (Norway 3 July 2017,

12). The same source, citing a meeting with the Directorate for Migration and Passports in September 2016, also notes that [translation] "validity periods other than six and two years are possible" in the case of boys under the age of 18 who receive passports valid until they turn 18 (Norway 3 July 2017, 12).

1.1 Passport Requirements and Procedures in Syria

The Landinfo report, citing meetings with the Directorate for Migration and Passports in September 2015 and May 2017, indicates that applications for passports must be submitted to an office of the Directorate for Migration and Passports, and that this can be done at any of the provincial capitals where offices are operating, not necessarily where the applicant is registered as a resident (Norway 3 July 2017, 13). Citing a meeting with the Directorate for Migration and Passports in May 2017, the same source reports that prior to the outbreak of civil war in the country, there were regional passport offices in all fourteen provincial capitals, and all were operating as of July 2017, with the exception of those in Raqqa, Idlib, and Dayr as-Zur, while additional offices located in: Nabak in Rif Dimashq province, Tadmur and Hesya in Homs, Manbij in Aleppo, and Albu Kamal in Dayr az-Zur had been closed (Norway 3 July 2017, 11).

The same source, citing Syria's Ministry of the Interior and a meeting with the Directorate of Migration and Passports in September 2015, states that the following are required to apply for a passport:

[translation]

- ID card or printout of information in the National Register, [including] a photograph,
- two passport photographs,
- authorization from the employer in the case of public servants, authorization from military authorities for all men between 17 and 42 years of age, and
- the old passport, if available (Norway 3 July 2017, 13).

Citing the same sources, the report further indicates that children under the age of 18 require the consent of their parent or guardian, and that children under 15 years of age require a printout of their information in the National Registry (Norway 3 July 2017, 13).

According to the website of the Syrian Ministry of Interior, the following documents are required for obtaining or renewing passports:

[translation]

1. Personal identification card, or a Registry Extract issued by the civil registry, including a photo of the applicant and the stamp of the locality chief;
2. Two colour photos with the applicant facing the camera and white or light background;
3. Approval of the place of work for employed individuals or a permit for non-employed individuals;
4. Approval of the conscription division for those aged between 17 and 50 who are not exempted from service;
5. Evidence showing occupation for those aged between 18 and 60;
6. The cost of a passport is 1,500 Syrian [Pounds] [\$C3.65], as well as the cash deposit [to guarantee the individual's return] and revenue stamps for the application; and
7. Approval of the guardian for minors and incompetent persons. (Syria n.d.a)

The Landinfo report, citing a meeting with the Directorate of Migration and Passports in May 2017, indicates the fee for a regular issue is currently 12,100 SYP [\$C29.71] or 29,500 SYP [\$C72.43] for an expedited application (Norway 3 July 2017, 12-13).

1.1.1 Passport Replacement

The website of the Ministry of Interior states that [translation] "[a] citizen can have his/her passport replaced when he/she so desires for valid reasons as per the discretion of the Immigration and Passports Department" (Syria n.d.a). The website indicates the procedure for replacing a lost passport as follows:

1. An application shall be submitted to the Immigration and Passports Department, or its branches in the provinces, in order to refer the application for investigation at police stations and Immigration Department branches about the loss;
2. A passport can be obtained as a replacement for a lost passport after the applicant pays the prescribed fine of 500 Syrian [Pounds] [\$C1.22] and the fee for a new passport with full validity period. The applicant shall be required to submit the same documents as required to issue a new passport. (Syria n.d.a)

The website further lists the procedure for replacing a damaged passport as follows:

1. An application for a replacement passport attached to the damaged passport shall be submitted to the branch of Immigration Department in the province or to the branch that had issued the passport;
2. A new passport may be issued if there is no doubt, manipulation, forgery or deliberate damage done to the damaged passport, otherwise, necessary legal actions shall be taken; and
3. The same documents shall be required similar to issuing a new passport for the first time. (Syria n.d.a)

1.2 Passport Requirements and Procedures Abroad

The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016* for Syria indicates that, in 2015, the Syrian government "began allowing Syrians living outside of the country whose passports expired to renew their passports at consulates" (US 3 Mar. 2017, 36). According to sources citing *Al-Watan*, a "pro-government daily newspaper" in Syria (Al Jazeera 27 Apr. 2015), in 2015, the Syrian government announced that it would allow citizens abroad to obtain passports even if they had left the country "illegal[ly]" (VOA 8 May 2015) and without undergoing an "intelligence review" (VOA 8 May 2015; Al Jazeera 27 Apr. 2015; Al Araby 26 Apr. 2015). Al Jazeera further reports that the intelligence review "had long made it difficult for anyone who escaped the country's roiling war by sneaking across its porous borders or via rebel-held checkpoints - many out of fear of arrest or military conscription - to apply for travel documents" (Al Jazeera 27 Apr. 2015).

The Landinfo report, citing meetings with the Directorate of Migration and Passports in September 2015 and 2016, and the Syrian Foreign Ministry in September 2015, indicates that [translation] "many" embassies "have the capability" to issue passports, and that those that are unable to do so, forward applications to Damascus where the passports are processed and returned to the requesting embassy via diplomatic post (Norway 3 July 2017, 11).

Sources report that in April 2017, consular fees charged to issue and renew travel documents abroad were changed (Al Araby 4 Apr. 2017; Al Arabiya 2 Apr. 2017). Article 1 of *Law No. 18 of 2017*, passed by the Syrian government on 9 April 2017 provides the following

Article No. 1 of the Legislative Decree No. 17 of 2015, which amended Law No. 1 of 2014, shall itself be amended as follows:

- A. The consular fee for **immediate granting** or renewing of a passport or a travel document, for Syrian citizens (or those having the same legal status) who reside outside the Syrian Arab Republic shall be US \$800.
- B. The consular fee for **regular process to grant** or renew of a passport or a travel document, within the first-come first-served system, for Syrian citizens (or those having the same legal status) who reside outside the Syrian Arab Republic shall be US \$300.
- C. The processing time for immediate granting or renewing of a passport or a travel document at overseas representation offices shall be 3 working days maximum, as of the date of application and payment of fees. The processing time within the first-come first-served system shall be 10 to 21 working days maximum, as of the date of application and payment of fees. The required official documents shall be specified by a decision issued by the Minister of Interior, and shall be duly checked.
- D. The processing time for immediate granting or renewing of a passport or a travel document for a person who resides outside the Syrian Arab Republic, **through a relative or a legal representative inside the Syrian Arab Republic at one of the branches of the Immigration and Passports Department**, shall be 24 hours maximum; it shall be 7 to 15 days maximum within the first-come first-served system. (Syria 2017, emphasis in original)

Article 3 of *Law No. 18 of 2017* provides the following:

The fees specified above shall not be subject to any additional fees mentioned in the laws and regulations in force, including local administration fees; they shall be subject, however, to the addition of the consular registration fee at the overseas representation office, if [the person] is not already registered there. (Syria 2017)

In April 2017, according to Al Arabiya, a "pan-Arab news channel operated by MBC [a Dubai-based broadcaster]" (BBC 23 May 2016), the government of Syria announced that it would stop renewing passports at its consulates in Jordan and Turkey (Al Arabiya 24 Apr. 2017). In March 2017, according to Syria Deeply, "an independent digital media project led by journalists and technologists that explores a new model of storytelling around a global crisis" (News Deeply n.d.), the Syrian government stopped extending the validity of passports at the consulates in Jordan, Turkey, and Kuwait (News Deeply 29 June 2017). The Landinfo report, citing a meeting with the Directorate of Migration and Passports in May 2017, states that prior to 19 April 2017, it was possible to extend the validity of passports, but that this practice was stopped in Syria on 19 April 2017, and at embassies abroad between 19 and 25 April 2017 (Norway 3 July 2017, 12).

1.2.1 Passport Requirements and Procedures in Canada

In April 2016, the CBC reports that the Syrian Consulate in Montreal was ordered closed by Global Affairs Canada in February 2016, and that this action, coupled with the closure of the Syrian Embassy in Ottawa in 2012, left the Syrian consulate in Vancouver as "the only Syrian consular office in North America" (CBC 29 Apr. 2016). The website of the Honorary Consulate of Syria in British Columbia, without providing further information, states "[p]lease take notice that the Honorary Consulate for Syria in B.C. has no jurisdiction to issue or extend Syrian passports. Kindly contact the Syrian Embassy either in Brazil, Venezuela or by obtaining a new Syrian passport from Syria directly" (Syria n.d.b). Information on the requirements and procedures to obtain a passport from the Syrian embassies in Brazil and Venezuela could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.2.2 Passport Requirements and Procedures in Neighbouring Countries

1.2.2.1 Passport Requirements and Procedures in Jordan

The website of the Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic in Amman, Jordan, states the following with regard to issuing passports:

[translation]

Documents required for issuing passports for [Syrians] residing in Jordan or outside it

1. The consular fee is US\$800 for expedited issue or renewal of passports or travel documents for Syrians and those with similar status who are living outside the Syrian Arab Republic;
2. The consular fee is US\$300 for the regular queue system to issue or renew passports or travel documents for Syrians and those with similar status who are living outside the Syrian Arab Republic; and
3. The person concerned shall appear in person or his/her attorney shall appear with a duly certified power of attorney for those residing outside Jordan.

Required documents:

- Passport or travel document + a copy thereof;
- Three (3) personal photos with a white background which shall be 4 x 4 in size;
- Personal identification card + a copy thereof or a registration extract including a personal photo and duly authenticated by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for those who entered Jordan illegally and don't have the personal identification card + a copy thereof (for males under the age of 18), as well as the family book + two copies thereof or a true copy of the birth statement issued by the Embassy for those who were born in Jordan + two copies thereof;
- A copy of the Jordanian security card + a copy of the residency as issued by the country of residence for those residing outside Jordan; and
- A fine of US\$50 shall be imposed on damaged or lost passports. A passport replacing the lost or damaged one shall be issued subject to the approval of the Immigration and Passports Department. (Syria n.d.c)

With regard to passports with a six-year validity, the same source further indicates:

[translation]

Documents required for issuing a 6-year passport for [Syrians] residing in Jordan or outside it

1. The consular fee is US\$800, for expedited issue or renewal of passports or travel documents for Syrians and those with similar status who are living outside the Syrian Arab Republic. The fee for the regular queue system is US\$300.

The six-year passport shall be issued to:

- Those who have performed the military service (or paid the cash alternative) or those who are exempted for being the only son of both parents, or one of the parents, or those who are exempted on health grounds;
- Those who are exempted because they have performed the obligatory service in another country;
- Those who are over 42 years old;
- Females;
- Students studying outside the Syrian Arab Republic;
- Students who are on scholarships unless a shorter period is specified on a letter issued by the entity granting the scholarship; and
- Children under the age of 11.

The person concerned shall appear in person (provided he/she had left Syria legally). He/she shall bring the following with him/her:

- Passport or travel document + a copy thereof;
- Three (3) personal photos with a white background which shall be 4 x 4 in size;
- Syrian personal identification card + a copy thereof **or** a registration extract including a personal photo and duly authenticated by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **or** the family book + two copies thereof;
- A copy of the Jordanian security card + a copy of the residency as issued by the country of residence for those residing outside Jordan; and
- A fine of US\$50 shall be imposed on damaged or lost passports. A passport replacing the lost or damaged one shall be issued subject to the approval of the Immigration and Passports Department. (Syria n.d.d, emphasis in original)

The website also states that:

[translation]

1. The Embassy receives applications on Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays, from 8:30 AM to 12:00 noon, as per the waiting ticket which citizens receive at the information window in the Embassy;
2. The Embassy hands the completed expedited passports after 48 hours from the date of the application. As to applications submitted as per the regular queue system, they are handed one month after the date of the application. This shall be on Thursdays, from 12:00 noon to 2:00 PM; and
3. The Embassy receives applications to issue passports for those residing outside Jordan on Thursdays, from 8:30 AM to 12:00 noon. The expedited applications are handed within 48 hours from the date of the application. As to applications submitted as per the regular queue system, they are handed one month after the date of the application. This shall be on Thursdays, from 12:00 noon to 2:00 PM. (Syria n.d.c)

1.2.2.2 Passport Requirements and Procedures in Lebanon

The website of the Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic in Beirut, Lebanon indicates the following with regard to the issue of passports:

[translation]

1. Personal identification card, a passport or a recent registration extract (less than 3 months with a personal photo) authenticated by the Syrian Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ministry;
2. Three personal photos with white background, dark clothes and 4 x 4 in size;
3. The consular fee is US\$325 (US\$300 for passports requested under **the regular queue system** + US\$25 for consular registration);
The consular fee is US\$825 (US\$800 for **expedited** passports + US\$25 for consular registration);
The fine for lost or damaged passports is US\$50; and
4. The Application form.
*In case of damaged or lost passports, a fine of US\$50 shall apply, together with the fee for the issue of a new passport. (Syria n.d.e, emphasis in original)

1.2.2.3 Passport Requirements and Procedures in Turkey

The website of the Consulate of the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul, Turkey indicates the following with regard to passports:

Required documents for issuing passports:

- Original passport with a legal entry seal into Turkey or evidence showing applicant has entered or residing legally in Turkey;
- Identification document of the applicant;
- Military service book;
- Six (6) personal photos (white background, 4 x 4 in size, non-glossy/matte)
- A written request submitted by the applicant in person for those who are above 18 years of age;
- The consular fee is US\$325 (US\$300 for passports requested under **the regular queue system** + US\$25 for consular registration);
- The consular fee is US\$825 (US\$800 for **expedited** passports + US\$25 for consular registration); and
- The fine for lost or damaged passports is US\$50.

'Syrian citizens or those with similar status can receive Syrian passports or travel documents for up to two years. As to those desiring to receive passports or travel documents valid for six years, they can obtain them subject to the approval of the Immigration and Passports Department.' (Syria n.d.f, emphasis in original)

Syria Deeply describes the process of obtaining a passport from the Syrian Consulate in Turkey as follows:

The standard procedure involves first getting an appointment to confirm one's identity as a Syrian citizen and request permission to apply for a passport. This preliminary step involves a full security and background check from the Syrian Interior Ministry - a daunting prospect for the sizable number of Syrian men who have evaded military conscription.

After these initial screenings, it takes another 45 days to get a response to the passport request. If accepted, submitting the application and providing the necessary personal details requires another appointment. A passport is usually issued 45 days after this final interview.

Overall, it should take an average period of three months to obtain the passport after the first screening. (News Deeply 29 June 2017)

The same source further reports that the cost of the process in Turkey "starts at \$330 and can go up to \$830 if an expedited passport is requested" (News Deeply 29 June 2017).

1.2.3 Obtaining Passports through Third Parties

Syria Deeply reports that "Syrian law allows the mother or father of an applicant to submit a passport request inside Syria" and that this process "usually costs as much as a passport would in Istanbul - \$330 for a regular passport and \$830 for an expedited one" (News Deeply 29 June 2017). The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), a state-run news agency in Syria (BBC 13 Feb. 2015), reports that in March 2017, the Syrian Cabinet "approved a bill on amending the consular fees granting and renewing passports and travel documents for Syrians residing abroad," adding that this bill included the option for a person's passport to be issued to families and persons with power of attorney within Syria (SANA 7 Mar. 2017). Article 2 of *Law No. 18 of 2017* provides the following:

The fees specified [by the law] shall be collected from Syrian citizens (or those having the same legal status) who reside outside the Syrian Arab Republic, or from their relatives or legal representatives inside the Syrian Arab Republic, in US dollars or the equivalent thereof in Euros or in an adopted local currency of the country in which a Syrian Arab Republic embassy or consulate is operational, as per the selling exchange rate listed in the first quarterly bulletin issued by the Central Bank of Syria. At payment, fractions are to be rounded up to the higher denomination. (Syria 2017)

The Landinfo report, citing meetings with the Directorate of Migration and Passports in September 2015 and May 2017, states that a third party may apply for a passport on a person's behalf, but that they must either be a relative or have written authorization from the applicant (Norway 3 July 2017, 13). The same source, citing meetings with the Norwegian Embassy in Amman in June 2013 and September 2015 and a Syrian Lawyer in September 2013, further reports that the third party must submit a pre-filled application form, passport photos, and the printout of information from the National Registry (*ikrhrhaj qaid*); the printout is mandatory, but a brother, father or authorized lawyer in Syria may obtain the printout on behalf of the applicant (Norway 3 July 2017, 13).

1.3 Physical Characteristics and Information Contained Within Passports

The US Reciprocity Schedule for Syria indicates the following concerning the "Regular" Syrian passport:

The Syrian Government issues a photo-digitized machine-readable passport with security features. 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 onto 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-pages are covered by laminate as well.
- The signature is also printed at the back of the bio-page.
- The passport is laser perforated.
- There is micro-text printing on the regular pages underlining the word visas, and in a straight line down each page "Syrian Arab Republic" in English and French
- The background of the regular pages show historical or modern sites printed in blue.
- There is intaglio printing on the inside of the front and back pages of the passport. (US n.d.)

Details and images of three Syrian passports as made available by the Council of the European Union's Public Register of Authentic Travel and Identity Documents Online (PRADO) are attached to this Response (attachment 1). Details and images of a Syrian passport, issued November 2002, as contained in the Kessing Reference Systems database, are attached to this Response (attachment 2).

The Landinfo report, citing Edison TD, email correspondence from the National ID Centre in November 2016, and a meeting with the Directorate of Migration and Passports in September 2016, indicates that there is a 12-digit number on the personal details page, and that the first three numbers correspond to the place of issue; the code for Damascus is 002, for Aleppo 004, and for Homs 007 (Norway 3 July 2017, 12). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. National ID Cards

Syrianationality.org [1] reports that the National ID Card is an official proof of identity and nationality that is "used for official purposes and everyday use," and is also used to establish the right to vote once the holder turns 18 (Syrianationality.org n.d.a). Landinfo, citing a meeting with the Civil Status Department in September 2016, reports that the ID card is mandatory and it is the responsibility of the guardian to ensure that applications are submitted when it becomes required (Norway 3 July 2017, 8). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.1 Requirements and Procedures to Obtain, Renew and Replace National ID Cards

Without providing further information, the US Reciprocity Schedule for Syria notes that the National ID Card is free, available "after the age of 14," issued by "[t]he Civil Affairs - Ministry of Interior," and is obtained in person (US n.d.). Syrianationality.org reports that the National ID Card is obtained from the Civil Registrar at the Ministry of Interior, "must be obtained from the age of 14," must be obtained in person and can only be obtained inside Syria (Syrianationality.org n.d.a). Without providing further detail, the same source reports that the following documentation is required to obtain a National ID card: four colour photographs, the guardian's ID, and the family booklet (Syrianationality.org n.d.a).

The Landinfo report, citing a meeting with the Civil Status Department in May 2017 and the Civil Status Act, indicates that National ID cards do not list an expiration date, but must be renewed after ten years (Norway 3 July 2017, 8). Citing meetings with the Civil Status Department in September 2016 and May 2017, the report states that when the ID cards are renewed, the photographs, serial numbers, and issuing dates will change, but all other information will remain the same (Norway 3 July 2017, 8). The same source, citing a meeting with a Syrian lawyer in October 2014 and an international organization in 2017, reports that there can be delays of over one year in obtaining a National ID Card, and that in the interim, a receipt is issued as proof of having applied (Norway 3 July 2017, 9).

Based on information obtained from meetings with the Civil Status Department in September 2016 and May 2017, the Landinfo report indicates that the applications must be submitted to the Civil Status Department office in the applicant's home city, as that is where the person is registered in the National Registry (Norway 3 July 2017, 9). The same source, citing the same meetings, further reports that civil status offices in rebel-held areas cannot issue National ID cards, and as a result, "a number of new offices have been established" to replace them (Norway 3 July 2017, 9). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.2 Physical Characteristics and Information Contained Within National ID Cards

Without providing further information, the US Reciprocity Schedule for Syria describes the format of the National ID Card as being a "[p]lastic ID" with "[n]o seal" (US n.d.). A photograph of a Syrian National ID Card from the Syrianationality.org website is attached to this Response (attachment 3).

3. Obstacles to Obtaining Passports or Identity Cards

According to the US *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016*, in Syria, "[w]hile citizens have the right to travel internationally, the government denied passports and other vital documents based on the applicant's political views, association with opposition groups, or ties to geographic areas where the opposition dominated" (US 3 Mar. 2017, 35-36). The same source further reports that

[t]here were reports Da'esh [also known as ISIS, ISIL, IS and Islamic State] destroyed Syrian passports and legal records and produced its own passports, not recognized by any country or entity. These policies disproportionately affected children, because many left the country before obtaining a passport or identification card. Additionally, Syrians born abroad to parents who fled the conflict and remained in refugee camps generally did not have access to Syrian citizenship documents. (US 3 Mar. 2017, 36)

Syria Deeply reports that the decision to stop passport extensions in Turkey has made it more difficult to get an appointment at the consulate to obtain a passport, with many applicants resorting to using third party "fixers" for additional cost to arrange appointments (News Deeply 29 June 2017). Corroborating information 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.

Note

[1] Syrianationality.org is a project on "understanding statelessness in the Syria refugee context" by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI), "an independent non-profit organisation committed to ending statelessness and disenfranchisement through the promotion of human rights, participation and inclusion," and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), "an independent, humanitarian, non-governmental organisation, which provides assistance, protection, and contributes to durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people worldwide," and "is part of the research agenda of the Knowledge Platform on Security & Rule of Law and funded by the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs through NWO-WOTRO [Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research - Science for Global Development]" (Syrianationality.org n.d.b)

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Attachments

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