Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's Refworld website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the Knowledge and Information Management Unit.

COL105468.E

Colombia: requirements and procedures to obtain a biometric passport from within Colombia and abroad, including requirements and procedures to replace a lost or stolen passport and to renew an expired passport; appearance and security features of the passport (2014-April 2016)

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1. Overview

Resolution 5392 of 2015 (Resolución 5392 de 2015) outlines the types of Colombian passports (Colombia 2015, c. I). A translation of Chapter I is attached to this Response (Attachment 1). According to the website of the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, MRE), Colombian passports can be obtained at one of two offices of the MRE in Bogotá (ibid. n.d.g; ibid. n.d.h), in authorized departmental governors' offices, and in Colombian consulates abroad (ibid.). The MRE states that no Colombian can hold more than one valid Colombian passport at a time, except if an emergency passport is granted (ibid.).

2. Passport Formats

A special MRE webpage about Colombian passports indicates that there are three passport formats: conventional, machine-readable and electronic (ibid. n.d.g).

2.1 Conventional Passports

The MRE reports that the conventional passport, which contains a pink biographic information page with a colour picture pasted on, is no longer valid for travel as of 24 November 2015 (ibid.).

2.2 Machine-readable Passports

The MRE website states that machine-readable passports [which were issued from 2010 until 31 August 2015 (ibid. 31 Aug. 2015)] are valid for 10 years and remain valid for travel until their expiry date (ibid. n.d.g).

2.3 Electronic Passports

The MRE reports that electronic passports were introduced on 1 September 2015 and include a chip containing the biographical and biometrical information of the holder (ibid.). The MRE also reports that the electronic passport was introduced in all [translation] "passport offices" worldwide at the same time (ibid. 28 Dec. 2015). The same source indicates that as of 1 September 2015, only electronic passports are issued (ibid.).
n.d.f). The MRE further states that this includes regular, executive, diplomatic, and official passports (ibid. n.d.g). The same source also reports that emergency and exempt passports continue to be issued as machine-readable (ibid. n.d.k). For further information on these types of passports, see Attachment 1 of this Response.

The MRE reports that the electronic passport was introduced as part of a visa-waiver program with the Schengen countries (ibid. n.d.g). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Colombian embassy in Ottawa noted that the electronic passport includes “additional information” on the passport holder (ibid. 17 Mar. 2016). The MRE indicates in its special information webpage about Colombian passports that the chip contains the photograph and fingerprints of the holder, [translation] “among other information” (ibid. n.d.g). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Appearance and Security Features

3.1 Appearance

According to the MRE, the electronic passport [translation] “is very similar” to the machine-readable one (ibid. 31 Aug. 2015). The MRE website states that machine-readable passports have a hard plastic biographical information page with a barcode at the bottom and an imprinted black and white photo (ibid. n.d.g). The same source indicates that a chip icon on the bottom of the front cover distinguishes the electronic passport from the machine-readable passport (ibid.). For information about the appearance of the machine-readable passport, see Response to Information Request COL103875.

According to Keesing Reference Systems' document checker, the electronic passport’s biographical page includes the following information fields: passport number, last name(s), first name(s), nationality, date of birth, personal identification number, gender, place of birth, date of issuance, issuing authority, expiry date, and signature of the holder (Keesing n.d.). The representative of the Colombian embassy in Ottawa indicated that the sample passport in the Keesing Reference Systems' document checker is a sample of the ordinary electronic passport, which contains 32 pages, and that the executive electronic passport, which contains 48 pages, has the same appearance (Colombia 17 Mar. 2016).

3.2 Security Features

Keesing Reference Systems’ document checker indicates that the following security features are included in the Colombian electronic passport: multiple laser image, optically variable ink, microprint, relief embossing, hologram, collate printing, intaglio printing, letterpress printing, latent image, number perforation, binding, see-through register, multitone watermark, and continuous security thread (Keesing n.d.). A sample electronic passport, including its security features as detailed by Keesing Reference Systems’ document checker, is attached to this Response (Attachment 2).

4. Requirements Within Colombia and Abroad

The website of the MRE as well as the website of the Colombian embassy in Ottawa indicate that applicants need to present the following documents to obtain or renew a Colombian electronic passport:

- Original valid cédula de ciudadanía [citizen identity card];
- One of the following documents, whichever is applicable, if the applicant is not in possession of a valid cédula de ciudadanía:
  - proof of submission (contraseña) of first application for a cédula de ciudadanía from the National Registry Office (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, RNEC), which must include a photo and a fingerprint, as well as a notarized copy of the birth certificate;
  - proof of submission of application for renewal or duplication of the cédula de ciudadanía from the RNEC, which must include a photo and a fingerprint, as well as an online query of certification of the validity of the cédula, carried out on the website of the RNEC or done by the passport office;
  - proof of submission of application for correction of the cédula de ciudadanía issued by the RNEC, which must include a photo and a fingerprint, as well as a notarized copy of the birth certificate;
- The previous passport, if in possession; in case the passport is lost or stolen, the applicant [translation] "only" has to inform the passport office through a sworn statement at the passport office [1] (Colombia n.d.i; ibid. n.d.b).

The Colombian embassy in Ottawa and the MRE note that a passport office may also ask for a nationality certificate to verify the applicant’s identity (ibid.; ibid. n.d.i).

5. Procedures
Resolution 5392 of 2015 states that an individual can fill out the online application or apply in person at a passport office (ibid. 2015, Art. 9.1). The MRE's online application website indicates that applying online speeds up the process at the passport office (ibid. n.d.j).

According to the MRE's website, the applicant must go to one of the passport offices in order to present the required documents for verification, sign and have their picture and fingerprints taken (ibid. n.d.i).

The MRE states that the next step is to pay the passport fee (ibid. n.d.l). In Colombia, the applicant can pay via an electronic payment system, by bank payment or by credit card (ibid. n.d.c). The processing fee for a regular electronic passport is 160,000 Colombian pesos [approx. C$67], plus departmental taxes, if applicable (ibid.). According to the MRE's website, payments for passport applications from outside of Colombia have to be made via the ministry's electronic payment system (Proveedor de Servicios Electrónicos, PSE) via an active Colombian bank account, but the website also indicates that the Colombian consulate in Calgary and certain consulates in the US accept Money Orders, and recommends that applicants check with their closest consulate to find out what payment methods are available (ibid. n.d.d). The MRE website indicates that passports are issued only after they have been paid (ibid.). The processing fee is 103 euros in Europe and Cuba, and US$140 in the rest of the world (ibid.).

According to the MRE and the Colombian embassy in Ottawa, once the passport is ready, the applicant must pick it up in person, presenting an original identification document and proof of payment to retrieve the passport (ibid. n.d.h; ibid. n.d.a). The same sources note that the passport has to be picked up within six months of issuance or it will be cancelled and a new application will have to be submitted (ibid.; ibid. n.d.h). The passport holder needs to verify the information when receiving the passport and report any errors within one month after pick-up in order for the passport to be replaced (ibid.; ibid. n.d.a).

5.1 Processing Times

The MRE reports that processing times are 24 hours in Bogotá, 48 hours in departmental governors' offices and 8 days in Colombian consulates (ibid. n.d.h). In contrast, El Colombiano, a Medellín-based newspaper, reports that the processing time is four days in the governor's office of the department of Antioquia (El Colombiano 7 Nov. 2015). Further and 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.

**References**

Colombia. 17 March 2016. Embassy in Ottawa. Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate.


Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Colombia – Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; BBC; eci.net; Edisontd.net; El Espectador; El Tiempo; European Union – Public Register of Authentic Travel and Identity Documents Online (PRADO); Factiva; Human Rights Watch; Latin News Periodicals; Minority Rights Group International; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Radio France internationale; United Nations – Refworld, ReliefWeb; United States – Department of State.

Attachments
