

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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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.

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Afghanistan: Passports, including issuance procedures within and outside Afghanistan; types of passports issued (2008-2012)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, an official at the Embassy of Afghanistan in Ottawa indicated that the country issues five types of passports:

- ordinary, issued by the Ministry of Interior to Afghan citizens and valid for five years;
- official or service, issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to government employees travelling on official government business and valid for the term of deployment
- diplomatic, issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to diplomats travelling on government business and valid for the term of deployment;
- business, issued by the Ministry of Interior through the Ministry of Commerce and Industries to people holding a valid business license, and valid for five years;
- student, issued by the Ministry of Interior through the Ministry of Higher Education to students with a letter of acceptance from a foreign university, and valid for five years (Afghanistan 10 Jan. 2013).

The Afghan embassy official also indicated that Afghanistan began issuing machine-readable passports about August 2012, although they are not being issued in all places (*ibid.*). He added that manual (handwritten) passports will still be recognized until they expire and are replaced by machine-readable passports (*ibid.*). A 17 September 2011 report by Pajhwok Afghan News, a Kabul-based news agency, indicates that, on 18 August 2011, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs started to issue machine-readable passports to diplomats and public servants.

According to the embassy official, minors can be included on their parents' passports, but since it is common for other countries to require minors to have their own passports, the Afghan government can issue individual passports to minors (Afghanistan 10 Jan. 2013).

2. Issuance of Passports

2.1 Issuance in Afghanistan

The Afghan embassy official indicated that, in order to obtain an ordinary passport in Afghanistan, citizens, including children six years old and over, must go to a passport office of the Ministry of Interior and provide a photograph, the application form, the fee and a copy of their *tazkira* [identification card] (*ibid.*). Provincial police offices also have passport outlets that receive passport applications for processing (*ibid.*). Children under six years of age must present a birth certificate (*ibid.*). Children under 18 years old must be accompanied by an immediate family member, such as one of their parents, the eldest brother, or an uncle, or by a legal guardian (*ibid.* 26 Jan. 2013).

A business person wishing to obtain a business passport must, in addition to meeting the requirements for an ordinary passport, present his or her business license (*ibid.* 10 Jan. 2013). A student wishing to obtain a student passport also must meet the requirements for an ordinary passport and submit a letter of offer from a foreign university (*ibid.*). Student passports are issued only to higher education students (*ibid.* 26 Jan. 2013).

The official at the Embassy of Afghanistan in Ottawa indicated that, in the fall of 2012, Afghanistan started a process of replacing student and business passports with ordinary passports (*ibid.*). The "profession" field in the ordinary passport indicates whether the holder is a student, business person, or other (*ibid.*).

Sources indicate that it takes about two weeks to obtain a passport (ibid. 10 Jan. 2013; AREU 12 Jan. 2013).

The Afghan embassy official noted that, in cases where there are no ordinary passport booklets available, business people may be issued official passports, but stamped to indicate they are business passports (Afghanistan 10 Jan. 2013). He indicated that this service is not offered to applicants for ordinary passports (ibid.).

2.2 Issuance in Canada

The website of the Embassy of Afghanistan in Ottawa provided all of the information in this section (n.d.a).

The embassy only issues ordinary passports. For other types of passport, a person must contact the Department of Consular Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul. In exceptional circumstances, the Consular Section in Ottawa may seek approval from Kabul to extend the validity of official or student passports.

The website indicates the following requirements to obtain a new passport:

- a completed and signed application form;
- three passport-size photographs;
- an original Afghan identity document, such as a tazkira, a previous passport, or a marriage certificate (if endorsed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul).

A person who cannot provide any of these documents must provide two Identity Guarantee Forms completed and signed by two Afghan citizens "of an established social or professional background."

In order to extend the validity of a passport, a person must submit their current passport, an application form, and two passport-size photographs.

All applicants, whether applying for a new passport or for an extension, must present proof of residence in Canada, proof of their current address, and pay the fee. Applications can be made by post or in person. Processing takes about two weeks for a new passport and about a week for an extension, although there is the option for fast-tracking for an additional fee.

3. Shortages and Fraud

Sources indicate that a shortage of passports in October 2011 led to a "thriving" black market for the documents (IWPR 12 Jan. 2012; RFE/RL 9 Feb. 2012). Government officials indicate that the shortage was due to both "an inundation" of applications from people wanting to travel to Saudi Arabia for the annual Hajj [pilgrimage] and people who rushed to obtain passports after Iran started to deport Afghan citizens without proper documentation (ibid.; IWPR 12 Jan. 2012). The same two sources report that "corrupt" passport officials sell the document for "large" amounts of money (ibid.; RFE/RL 9 Feb. 2012). The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), an international media development charity (IWPR n.d.), reports that, when the shortage was announced, passports came on the black market for US\$200-300 with the cost rising to US\$500-700 (ibid. 12 Jan. 2012). Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), an international news organization, reports that the black-market price for a passport can go as high as US\$800 (RFE/RL 9 Feb. 2012). Sources indicate that the High Office of Oversight and Anti-corruption (HOOAC), a government watchdog, "confirmed" that government officials were selling passports on the black market for "large" amounts of money (ibid.; IWPR 12 Jan. 2012). The Afghanistan's HOOAC, established by presidential decree in 2008, is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the anti-corruption strategy (Afghanistan n.d.b). In contrast, the head of the Afghan passport office reportedly denied that his officials were involved in wrongdoing (IWPR 12 Jan. 2012; RFE/RL 9 Feb. 2012).

The May 2012 report of a fact-finding mission to Afghanistan conducted by the Danish Immigration Service indicates that, according to the UNHCR in Afghanistan, "there has recently been a black market for sale of Afghani passports" and that this black market "is well known" (Denmark May 2012, Sec. 8.1). The UNHCR also indicated that the shortage had been going on for about a year (ibid.).

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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Internet sites, including: Afghanistan – embassies in the United Kingdom and the United States, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, High Office of Oversight and Anti-corruption; Amnesty International; Australia – Department of Immigration and Citizenship; BBC; Council on Foreign Relations; Factiva; Freedom House; United Kingdom – Border Agency; United Nations – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Refworld; United States – Department of State.

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