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### ALB103817.E

Albania: The biometric identity card; its appearance, use and the biometric data stored on it; requirements and procedures to obtain a biometric identity card within Albania; whether it can be replaced and renewed from abroad, including requirements and procedures

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Media sources report that in November 2008, state authorities compiled an electronic national data register as a preliminary step to issuing biometric identity cards (ATA 27 Nov. 2008; Reuters 3 Nov. 2008). According to the Interior Minister, data was transferred from old ledgers into the national electronic database, which was, in turn, connected to a network of 340 civil registry offices and 400 application centres throughout Albania (ibid.). The Deputy Minister of the Interior, as reported by the news agency Albanian Telegraphic Agency (ATA), announced the completion of the new national electronic register on 27 November 2008 (ATA 27 Nov. 2008).

Sources indicate that in January 2009, the Albanian government began issuing new biometric identity cards [*letërnjoftimi* (Albania n.d.c)] throughout Albania (*SETimes* 20 Jan. 2009; EU 14 Oct. 2009, para. 4.3.1; ATA 24 July 2009). The ATA reports that, as of 24 July 2009, over 1.3 million applications for biometric identity cards had been processed (ibid.). An official at the Embassy of Albania in Ottawa stated, in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, that as of September 2011, at least 2 million people have been issued the biometric identity card (Albania 7 Sept. 2011). A report produced by Albania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs notes that verification of an applicant's biometric data complies with International Civil Aviation Organization standards (Albania 16 Nov. 2009, 3).

According to the *Southeast European Times* (*SETimes*), a regional media source sponsored by the United States European Command (30 Dec. 2005), the biometric identity cards contain "fingerprints, general information and a digital photo[graph] of the card-holder" (20 Jan. 2009). In addition to the card-holder's photograph and signature, the card includes the following information fields: surname, given name, nationality, place of birth, date of birth, date of issue, issuing authority, card number, gender of the card-holder, date of expiry and personal number (Albania n.d.c). The names of the fields are written in both Albanian and English (ibid.). See photos of a sample identity card from the Albanian Ministry of Interior's website in the attachment to this Response.

Albanian state authorities indicate that all Albanian citizens 16 years of age and over are required to have a biometric identity card (Albania n.d.b). Media sources report that to ensure citizens applied for the biometric identity card, the government said it would withhold wages from public service employees and pensions from retired people (*SETimes* 20 Jan. 2009; BIRN13 Jan. 2009). Students were also given a deadline by which they had to have applied for the new card or they would not be allowed to take final exams (*ibid.*) or enrol in schools and universities (*SETimes* 20 Jan. 2009). The embassy official reiterated that the biometric identity card is a requirement in Albania, that it has replaced the former identity card and that it is in wide use (Albania 7 Sept. 2011). The biometric identity card is reportedly valid for 10 years (*SETimes* 20 Jan. 2009) and costs 10 euros [13.59 Canadian dollars (XE.com 21 Sept. 2011)] (*ibid.*; BIRN 13 Jan. 2009).

Media sources note that the government's objectives in issuing the new identity card include preventing voter fraud (*SETimes* 20 Jan. 2009; Reuters 3 Nov. 2008) and providing Albanians with "tamper-proof documents" that meet European Union standards (*ibid.*).

## **Procedure**

According to information posted on an Albanian government website, people apply for biometric identity cards at the application centres of "local government units" (Albania n.d.a). Media sources report that the first application centres opened in Tirana in December 2008 (ATA 17 Dec. 2008), and that on 12 January 2009, 400 centres opened nationwide (*SE Times* 20 Jan. 2009). As of July 2009, there were reportedly 470 application centres (ATA 24 July 2009). According to the *SETimes*, the centres are managed by Sagem Security, a French company that won the tender to process the identity cards (20 Jan. 2009). Albanians applying for identity cards are required to submit a valid identity document containing a photograph, such as a passport, a personal certificate, a patent, or an old identity card (Albania n.d.a). They are also required to submit an "application coupon," a type of payment coupon (*ibid.*) that can be purchased at an Albanian post office (*ibid.*; ATA 24 July 2009). When issued, the identity card can only be picked up by the applicant in person at the application office (Albania n.d.a).

## **Procedure for applying from abroad**

The Albanian embassy official indicated that Albanian embassies in Greece and Italy can process applications for biometric identity cards to Albanian citizens living in those two countries (Albania 29 Aug. 2011). The official indicated that the process to obtain a biometric identity card at the embassies in Greece and Italy followed the "same general procedure" as that in Albania (*ibid.*). Details on the procedure could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. The official noted that Albanians residing in other countries, such as Canada, can apply for biometric identity cards only by returning to Albania, since they must be fingerprinted and photographed on site (*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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### **Additional Sources Consulted**

**Internet sites, including:** European Country of Origin Information Network, Factiva, Legislationline, United Nations Refworld, United States Department of State.

### **Attachment**

Albania. N.d. Ministry of Interior. "Letërnjoftimi."  
<<http://dpgjc.moi.al/media/shart/aID/135/gj/gj1/title/Letërnjoftimi>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

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