

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.

13 February 2014

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Sri Lanka: Requirements and procedures to obtain a passport both inside the country and abroad; whether a minor can obtain his or her own passport; description of passport, including appearance and security features
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Sri Lankan Passports

The Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration is the government authority responsible for issuing travel documents and passports to Sri Lankan citizens (Sri Lanka n.d.l; *ibid.* 12 Feb. 2014) and overseas missions cannot print passports (*ibid.*). The department states on its website that Sri Lanka offers three categories of passports: ordinary passports, diplomatic passports, and official passports (*ibid.* n.d.a). Ordinary passports in the M or N-series have a passport number that begins with the letters M or N (*ibid.* n.d.a; *ibid.* 12 Feb. 2014); all other letter-series passports have expired and are not valid (*ibid.*). Sri Lanka currently issues new N-series passports, which are valid for 10 years (*ibid.* n.d.b; *ibid.* 12 Feb. 2014). In an interview with the Research Directorate, an official from the High Commission of Sri Lanka to Canada in Ottawa stated that the N-series is the only series of new passports being issued, they began being issued in 2007, and they have more security features than the previous M-series passport (*ibid.*). Sources report that the M-series passport is valid for 5 years, but can be "extended up to another 5 years" (*ibid.* n.d.c; *ibid.* 12 Feb. 2014). According to the Sri Lankan official, the M-series passport is no longer issued new; however, those that are still valid are in circulation and most will expire by 2017 (*ibid.*). According to Keesing Reference Systems, the passport number has seven digits preceded by a letter, and Sri Lankan passports may be 5 or 10 years in validity; 5-year passports may receive one 5-year extension (n.d.a).

2. Procedure for Obtaining a Passport Within Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration states on its website that an ordinary passport is valid for all countries (Sri Lanka n.d.a). The official at the High Commission of Sri Lanka in Ottawa indicated that the procedures and requirements listed on the department's website regarding passports are up to date (*ibid.* 12 Feb. 2014).

In order to acquire an ordinary passport from within Sri Lanka, applicants must submit a completed application form, which is available on the website, as well as the following documents:

- current Sri Lankan passport;
- original birth certificate;
- original national identity card and a photocopy;
- marriage certificate where necessary, to confirm the applicant's name after marriage;
- letter, professional certificate, or license confirming the applicant's profession. (*ibid.* n.d.a)

These documents should be submitted in person to the head office of the Department of Immigration and Emigration in Colombo, or at its regional offices at Kandy, Matara, and Vavuniya (*ibid.*). The processing fee for a passport application on a "normal basis" is 2,500 Sri Lankan rupees (LKR) [approximately C\$21 (XE 14 Jan.

2014a)] and the fee for processing on an "urgent basis" is 7,500 LKR [approximately C\$63 (XE 14 Jan. 2014b)] (Sri Lanka n.d.a).

2.1 Procedure for Obtaining a Passport for a Minor Within Sri Lanka

According to the Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration, a minor is considered to be a person below the age of 16 (ibid.). Its website states that with parental or guardian consent, a minor can either obtain his or her own passport, or the minor can be added to one of their parents' passports (ibid.). The website also indicates that passports for minors are valid for 3 years (ibid. n.d.b).

According to the department, in order to obtain a passport for a minor, the parents or legal guardian of the applicant should accompany the minor when the minor goes to the application-accepting office to submit their application (ibid.n.d.a). The application form, available on the website, should be submitted along with the following documents:

- Birth certificate of the applicant;
- Passport of a parent, with photocopies of the data page and the child page (if parents do not have passports they can submit their national identity cards with an affidavit);
- Consent letter from the parents (ibid.).

The website notes that in the case of the special circumstances listed below, additional documents are required, as noted in each case:

- If the applicant is born outside of Sri Lanka, Consular Birth Certificate and Citizenship Registration Certificate.
- If parent(s) of the applicant do not possess a valid Sri Lankan passport, an affidavit confirming that fact and the National Identity Card.
- If parent(s) of the applicant are dead, Death Certificate(s), Legal Guardian's Identification Document, Guardian's consent letter and a report from Grama Niladhari attested by the Divisional Secretary.
- If one or both parents are abroad, the consent letter and the passport copies of parents should be certified by the relevant Sri Lankan Mission. If both parents are abroad acceptable authorization letter given by the parents to the legal guardian.
- If the parents are divorced, Divorce Certificate and the court order stating the right to the custody of the child/ children.
- If the child has been abandoned by the parents, certified copy of the police report and a confirmation letter from the Grama Niladhari countersigned by the Divisional Secretary. (ibid.)

The Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration states on its website that the processing fee for a passport application for a minor on a "normal basis" is 1,500 LKR [approximately C\$13 (XE 14 Jan. 2014c)] and the fee for processing on an "urgent basis" is 3,500 LKR [approximately C\$29 (XE 14 Jan. 2014d)] (Sri Lanka n.d.a).

According to the Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration, in order to add a minor to a parent's passport, applicants must submit the following documents with their completed application form:

- Passport of the parent applicant;
- Birth certificate of the child (or children). If the child is born outside of Sri Lanka, they must submit a "Consular birth certificate" and "Citizen Registration Certificate;"
- Passport of the applicant's spouse with photocopies of the data page and child page. If they do not have a passport, they can submit their national identity card;
- A letter of consent from the applicant's spouse;
- A divorce certificate if the parents are divorced and custody order for the child or children;
- A death certificate if the spouse is deceased (ibid.).

The Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration states on their website that each parent is allowed to add up to six children to their passport (ibid.).

2.2 Procedure for Passport Renewal in Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration states on its website that passport renewal application forms can be obtained on the website, at the head office of the Department of Immigration and Emigration in Colombo, or at regional offices in Kandy, Matara, and Vavuniya, or at a Divisional Secretariat

office in their area (ibid. n.d.c). Completed applications are also to be submitted at these locations (ibid.).

The website states that to renew a passport, an applicant must submit a completed application form, the original and a copy of their passport, and an application fee of 200 LKR for each year extended (ibid.).

3. Procedures for Obtaining a Sri Lankan Passport from Abroad

According to the Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration, a Sri Lankan citizen can apply for a new passport or passport renewal while he or she is in another country, through the Sri Lankan mission in that country or in the nearest country having a Sri Lankan mission, and these applications are then processed by the "Overseas Missions Branch at Immigration Head Office" in Colombo (Sri Lanka n.d.e). Similarly, the websites of the Sri Lankan High Commission in Ottawa and the Embassy in Washington both state that the Controller of the Department of Immigration and Emigration in Sri Lanka has the sole authority to issue new passports, and that applications for new passports are forwarded to the Controller in Sri Lanka for processing (ibid. n.d.k; ibid. n.d.f). The High Commission website notes that missions are only authorized to amend existing travel documents and issue temporary travel documents (ibid.).

Processing time for new passports is between 8 and 10 weeks, according to the website of the High Commission of Sri Lanka in Ottawa (ibid.), or 10 to 12 weeks according to the website of the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Washington, DC (ibid. n.d.k).

3.1 Procedures for Holders of M and N Series Passports

The Sri Lankan High Commission in Ottawa states on its website that passport applicants abroad that hold M and N series passports must submit the following documents in order to apply for a new passport:

- A K application form and IM35 B form found on the mission website;
- Two colour photographs (3.5cm x 4.5 cm);
- Current travel document;
- Original birth certificate and a photocopy;
- A copy of the the applicant's proof of status in their country of residence abroad ;
- A copy of their Sri Lankan national identity card, if applicant has one;
- A money order to pay a fee of C\$280 and a fee of C\$12 for the cost of registered post or a prepaid envelope (Sri Lanka n.d.g).

3.2 Procedures for Holders of Passports Other than M and N Series

The Sri Lankan High Commission in Ottawa states on their website that first-time passport applicants and those persons holding a passport other than the M or N series Sri Lankan passport abroad must submit the same documents as above, noting the following differences in the items to be submitted:

- Three photographs of 3.5cm x 4.5 cm;
- A money order to pay a fee of C\$380 (C\$280 for first time applicants) and a fee of C\$12 for the cost of registered post or a prepaid envelope;
- A declaration and attestation of the applicant's forms and one applicant photograph signed by the attestor (ibid. n.d.h).

3.3 Procedure for a Minor to Obtain a Passport While Abroad

According to the Sri Lankan Embassy to Germany, passport applications for minors are accepted by the mission and are sent to the Controller of the Immigration and Emigration in Colombo for processing; they are not issued by the mission itself (ibid. n.d.d).

The Sri Lankan High Commission in Ottawa states on its website that a minor under 16 years of age can apply for a separate passport with the following documents:

- K and IM35(B) application forms available on the mission website;
- Three colour photographs (3.5cm x 4.5 cm) taken within three months;
- Original birth certificate;
- Citizenship certificate or payment receipt;
- Copies of the parents' passport data pages containing particulars of children included in the passport, and the original passport of the parent whose passport lists the child, so that the

child's name may be deleted;

- A signed and attested letter from both parents;
- A money order to pay a fee of C\$280 and a fee of C\$12 for the cost of registered postage or a prepaid envelope (ibid. n.d.i).

3.4 Procedure for Passport Renewal Abroad

According to the Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration, passport renewal application forms can be obtained at a Sri Lankan overseas mission or on the department's website (Sri Lanka n.d.c).

The Sri Lankan High Commission in Ottawa states on its website that the total validity period of passports cannot exceed 10 years from the date of issue, and that passports can be renewed before or after expiry (ibid. n.d.j). The mission website indicates that to renew a passport while abroad an applicant must submit:

- A completed O application form (IM 37) available on the mission website;
- A current passport;
- Proof of the applicant's status in their country of residence abroad;
- A money order fee payment of C\$5 for each extended year, and the postage costs of C\$12 (ibid).

4. Procedure for Obtaining a Non-Machine Readable Passport (NMRP) While Abroad

The Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration states on its website that a non-machine readable passport (NMRP) is a passport issued to Sri Lankans whose passports have been lost, stolen, or expired whilst in a foreign country (Sri Lanka n.d.a). The website states that individuals can apply for this document if they intend to come back to Sri Lanka within a short period of time, noting that the NMRP is only "valid for one way travel to Sri Lanka" (ibid.). The website states that the application for an NMRP can be downloaded from the website itself, or obtained from and submitted to a Sri Lankan overseas mission (ibid). The official at the High Commission of Sri Lanka corroborated that NMRPs are issued by overseas missions to Sri Lankans that have lost their passports, noting that they may be valid for up to six months at the discretion of the mission, the document has the appearance of a passport, and that it is only valid for one-way travel to Sri Lanka, after which the bearer should apply for a new passport once they arrive in the country (ibid. 12 Feb. 2014).

5. Passport Appearance and Information Included

The website of the Department of Immigration and Emigration provides an image of the front cover of the ordinary Sri Lankan passport (Sri Lanka n.d.a). In Keesing Reference Systems, the Sri Lankan passport is described as having the following features:

- Page 2 contains the date of expiry.
- Passport booklet measures 125 x 89 mm / 4.9 x 3.5 inches.
- Booklet is 64 pages in length; page 2 is not numbered.
- Page 2 is clear laminate with optically variable effect, sewn in.
- Photograph is integrated, and repeated in microtext on the right side of the same page.
- Numbering is 7 digits preceded by a letter.
- Page 1 is printed, page 2 is machine-written, and pages 3 to 64 are perforated (n.d.a).

Keesing Reference Systems also indicates that the page for the passport bearer's details has fields for the following entries: name, first names, date of birth, place of birth, nationality, bearer's signature, gender, personal number, document number, expiry date, date of issue, issuing country, and issuing authority (n.d.b). Sample copies of the front cover and bearer details page, obtained from Keesing Reference Systems [verified by the Sri Lankan High Commission in Ottawa (12 Feb. 2014)], are attached to this Response.

6. Security Features

Sources report that, in March 2011, the Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration announced its plan to introduce biometric or e-passport systems to increase travel-document security and identity protection (Future Travel Experience 31 Mar. 2011; Futuregov 30 Mar. 2011). On 5 October 2013, the Sri Lankan newspaper the *Island* reported that the Sri Lankan Immigration and Emigration Controller stated

that "in future only registered studios will be permitted to take photographs of applicants for passports." The *Island*, states that "this follows the Government's decision to issue a Machine Readable Passport (MRP) with high quality photographs to meet the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)" (5 Oct. 2013). On 30 August 2013, the Sri Lankan newspaper *Colombo Page* reported that the government received cabinet approval to introduce fingerprint data into Sri Lankan passports to enhance the security features. In a 12 January 2014 article, the Sri Lankan *Sunday Times* newspaper reported that new passport applicants would be fingerprinted beginning in April 2014, and this data would be introduced into the new passports in 2015, as part of the government's efforts to implement ICAO security standards. The official from the High Commission of Sri Lanka in Ottawa indicated that biometric passports are not yet being issued (12 Feb. 2014). The Controller of the Department of Immigration and Emigration was quoted in the *Sunday Times* article as stating that, under the proposed project, only fingerprint data, and not facial or iris scanning, would be recorded (12 Jan. 2014).

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: Asian Human Rights Commission; Centre for Policy Alternatives Sri Lanka; Sri Lanka – Department of Immigration and Emigration.

Internet sites, including: Asian Human Rights Commission; British Broadcasting Corporation; Centre for Policy Alternatives Sri Lanka; *Daily News* [Colombo]; eoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; *The Guardian* [Sri Lanka]; Keesing Reference Systems; Sri Lanka – Consulate General in Toronto, Embassy in Los Angeles; UK – Home Office; US – Department of State; UN – Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld.

Attachments

Keesing Reference Systems. N.d. "Sri Lanka - National Passport: Cover (P5)." <<http://www.documentchecker.com/rdo.dll/id>> [Accessed 7 Feb. 2014]

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