

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.

9 April 2014

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Cameroon: The national identity card, including the agency that issues this card, the conditions and documents required to obtain the card, and a detailed description of the card and its use; whether a Cameroonian citizen living abroad can obtain a national identity card; whether the former paper cards are still valid (2013-March 2014)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Legislation

Sources indicate that the legislation regulating Cameroon's national identity cards is Decree No. 2007/254 of 4 September 2007 (*Decret No 2007/254 du 04 septembre 2007*), which defines the characteristics of and method of preparing and issuing the national identity card (Nico Halle Law Firm 19 Mar. 2014; Abeng Law Firm 19 Mar. 2014). The decree, which is attached to this Response, prescribes the following:

- the physical characteristics of the card (Cameroon 2007, Art. 1-2);
- the documents required to obtain a card, for citizens who are obtaining their first card, replacing a lost, stolen, damaged or expired card, changing their name or family status, resumption [of citizenship (Abeng Law Firm 8 Apr. 2014)], or becoming naturalized citizens (Cameroon 2007, Art. 4)
- the procedure to be followed if the applicant lacks the necessary ID documents (ibid., Art. 5)
- the issuance of temporary ID while the applicant is waiting for their application to be processed (ibid., Art. 6).

The decree also stipulates the following:

- The Delegate General of National Security (Délégué général de la sûreté nationale) is responsible for issuing the national ID card (ibid., Art. 3).

- All Cameroonian citizens who are of age are required to have their own ID (ibid.).
- Card holders are required to present them upon request to authorized officials (ibid., Art. 2).
- Identity cards are valid for ten years (ibid.).
- Those cards issued prior to the decree remain valid and will gradually be replaced [by cards in the new format] (ibid., Art. 9).

A sample national identity card, issued in 1997, is also attached to this Response.

2. Physical Characteristics

Cameroon's Decree No. 2007/254 states that the national identity card is digitized (ibid., Art. 1). A representative of the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) National Document Centre stated in correspondence to the Research Directorate that the national ID card contains "standard biometrics, photo and fingerprint, but does not contain a chip" (Canada 19 Mar. 2014).

3. Validity of Non-digitized ID Cards

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Nico Halle Law Firm, a general-practice law firm founded in 1986 and based in Douala (n.d.), stated that non-digitized ID cards are no longer valid (19 Mar. 2014). Similarly, a representative of Muna,, a Yaoundé-based general-practice legal firm (n.d.), stated in correspondence with the Research Directorate that non-digitized identity cards are no longer valid and are no longer issued or in use (21 Mar. 2014). In contrast, a representative of the Abeng Law Firm, a Douala-based law firm that specializes in trade and investment law (n.d.), stated in correspondence with the Research Directorate that, as per the Decree, old ID cards continue to be valid and are to be gradually replaced (19 Mar. 2014).

4. Procedures for Obtaining a National Identity Card

The representative of the Nico Halle Law Firm stated that, in practice, applicants are rarely requested to present a marriage certificate or a document establishing their profession when applying for a national ID card, but that birth records and a certificate of nationality are always required (Nico Halle Law Firm 19 Mar. 2014). The representative indicated that the authentication of a birth certificate must be done by a divisional or sub-divisional officer or by a mayor (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Three sources consulted by the Research Directorate indicate that citizens can apply for a national ID card at police stations in the country (ibid.; Abeng Law Firm 19 Mar. 2014; Muna, 21 Mar. 2014). The representative of the Abeng Law Firm explained that there are hundreds of police stations across the country, which are administered by the [General] Delegation of National Security (19 Mar. 2014). A 2011 statement issued by the Ministry of Communication specifies that there are 350 offices across the country that are responsible for identity documents, as well as mobile teams that travel to remote areas of the country (Cameroon [2011]).

The representative of the Nico Halle Law Firm provided the following description of the application process at a police station:

Where the applicant is in possession of all the required documents, he shall take them to the nearest police station for the application process. The police authorities shall take his snapshot and print his passport size photographs in four copies. Fingerprints of the ten fingers of the applicant shall be taken as well as all his personal information like his name in full, date and place of birth, filiations, sex, address, profession, and his signature. Once all of this information has been filled into the form by the police officer in charge and signed by the commissioner of the police station, the applicant is given a receipt which serves as a provisional NIC pending the issuance of the NIC

proper. (19 Mar. 2014)

The representatives of all three law firms indicated that the application must be made in person by the applicant and cannot be made by a citizen outside of the country (Nico Halle Law Firm 19 Mar. 2014; Muna, 21 Mar. 2014; Abeng Law Firm 19 Mar. 2014). The cost of obtaining a national identification card is 3,000 Central African francs (XAF) [C\$7 (XE 20 Mar. 2014)], which includes the fees for the card (1,000 XAF) and the photographs (2,000 XAF) (Abeng Law Firm 19 Mar. 2014; Nico Halle Law Firm 19 Mar. 2014). Sources also indicate that a stamp duty *frais de timbre* is charged for certificates of nationality and civil status documents (ibid.; Cameroon [2011]). According to the Nico Halle Law Firm representative, the stamp duty regulated by law is around 1,000 XAF; however, in practice, "it tends to be much more expensive than the provisions of the law" (19 Mar. 2014). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The representative of the Nico Halle Law Firm indicated that, in accordance with the law, the receipt issued to the applicant is valid for three months as provisional identification until the card is received (19 Mar. 2014). He noted, however, that in practice, the waiting period for a national ID card is often longer than three months and that, in such cases, police officers at the issuing office can extend the validity of the temporary ID (ibid.). An article published by the Cameroonian newspaper *Le Messager* similarly reports on citizens in Douala who have had the validity of their temporary ID extended at police stations because their national identity card had not yet been received (21 June 2013). The representative of Muna, Muna & Associates indicated that because there is only one printing centre for the ID cards in the country, "it is difficult to obtain the cards within 3 months" (21 Mar. 2014).

The representative of the Abeng Law Firm indicated that, although there are "no barriers whatsoever in obtaining the ID card ... the process may be hindered by administrative red tape and [the] slow pace of government processing the document" (Abeng Law Firm 19 Mar. 2014). He also indicated that poverty is a "big hindrance" to citizens obtaining a card (ibid.). Similarly, the representative of the Nico Halle Law Firm indicated that the obstacles that citizens may face include the following: financial difficulties, especially for rural residents; long distances from issuing offices for rural residents; delays in issuing the card due to inadequate facilities and personnel; and "extortion and intimidation" by police officers (19 Mar. 2014). In November 2012, Inter Press Service reported that women in the predominantly Muslim northern region of the country faced barriers to obtaining national identity cards because their husbands did not permit them to remove their veils to have their photographs taken for the card (7 Nov. 2012). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that the government of Cameroon has taken various measures to increase citizens' ability to obtain a national identity card, including

- waiving the stamp duty between January 2011 and April 2011 (Cameroon [2011]; *Journal du Cameroun* 28 Apr. 2011), and
- issuing the card for free between May 2011 and August 2011 (*Cameroon Tribune* 23 May 2011), in 2012 (ibid. 7 Jan. 2013), and in 2013 (ibid. 6 Feb. 2013; Camer.be 28 Feb. 2013; UN 31 Jan. 2014, para. 24).

However, a 2009 article from the Cameroon newspaper *Le Jour* reports that police officers in Yaoundé were charging citizens between 50,000 and 200,000 XAF to receive an identity card within 24 hours as an "express" service but failed to deliver the documents as promised ([2009]). The newspaper states that, according to an [translation] "internal source" at the Delegation General of National Security, there are official documents or regulations providing for an "express" identity card service (*Le Jour* [2009]). Additionally, in February 2013, the Brussels-based Cameroon news site Camer.be reported that identification officials were accepting cash bribes from applicants and that one official was witnessed demanding two beers in exchange for a shorter processing time for an application (28 Feb. 2013). A report to the UN Human Rights Council on the mission of the Independent Expert on minority issues to Cameroon in September 2013 states that, according to local civil society organizations, "despite the instructions from the President that identity cards be free, local

officials often demand bribes and other fees that effectively defeat the purpose of the policy" (UN 31 Jan. 2014, para. 24).

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

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XE. 20 March 2014. "XE Currency Converter." <<http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=3000&From=XAF&To=CAD>> [Accessed 20 Mar. 2014]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: The High Commission of Cameroon in Ottawa and a representative of a law firm in Yaounde did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response. Attempts to contact the Embassy of Cameroon in Washington, DC, were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: Australia — Refugee Review Tribunal; Avocats sans frontières-Cameroun; Cameroon – Embassy of Cameroon in Washington, DC, High Commission of Cameroon in Ottawa, Portail du gouvernement, Présidence de la République; Camerounradio.com; eoi.net; Factiva; Interpol; Stratfor; United Nations – Refworld; United States – Department of State; Voice of America.

Attachments

1. Cameroon. 2007. *Decret No 2007/254 du 04 septembre 2007 fixant les caractéristiques et les modalités d'établissement et de délivrance de la carte nationale d'identité*. <<http://opencamer.blogspot.ca/2013/09/decret-n-2007254-du-04-septembre-2007.html>> [Accessed 19 Mar. 2014]

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