

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.

7 May 2014

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India: Issuance procedures for passports, both within the country and abroad
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Description of Passports

According to the website of the Consular, Passport, and Visa (CPV) Division, a branch of India's Ministry of External Affairs, there are three types of passports issued in India, ordinary passports, diplomatic passports, and official passports [which are given to persons specifically authorized to travel on government business] (India n.d.e). The ordinary passport, which is issued to Indian citizens for the purpose of personal or business travel, has a blue cover and consists of 36 or 60 pages (ibid.). It is valid for 10 years and can be renewed for another 10 years (ibid.). Diplomatic passports have a maroon cover, while official passports have a grey cover (ibid.).

As of May 2013, new passports issued contain a "ghost image" (*Deccan Chronicle* 13 Apr. 2013; *The Indian Express* 15 June 2013; *The Times of India* 30 Apr. 2013). Personal data, such as name, address, date of birth and passport registration number is imbedded in the ghost image in tiny print, with security characteristics that cannot be manipulated (*Deccan Chronicle* 13 Apr. 2013; *The Times of India* 30 Apr. 2013). The security characteristics are hidden and can only be read by scanners at the airports (*The Indian Express* 15 June 2013). In addition, other formatting changes were introduced, such as moving the personal details of the holder from the front inner cover to page one and the family particulars from the back inner cover to the second-to-last page (*The Hindu* 13 Apr. 2013). According to the *Hindu*, passports issued prior to these changes continue to be valid until their expiry date (ibid.).

According to the *New Indian Express*, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has set a deadline of 24 November 2015 to phase out all non-machine readable passports, which include Indian passports with a 20-year validity issued before 2001 (17 Dec. 2013).

2. Application Procedures within India

Passport applications in India are processed through a network of Passport Offices and Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) (India 6 Sept. 2013). PSKs are defined by the government of India as "extended arms of the Passport Offices [that] render front-end services related to passport issuance" (ibid. n.d.a). There are 37 Passport Offices throughout the country (India 6 Sept. 2013; India Public Sector News 12 Feb. 2014), and 77 PSKs (ibid.; India 6 Sept. 2013; *Business Standard* 30 Sept. 2012).

Applicants requesting a passport for the first time apply for a "fresh passport" (India n.d.e). Applicants can apply for a "reissue" of the passport for the following reasons:

- change in personal data;
- passport is due to expire or expired within three years;
- need more pages;
- passport is damaged;
- passport was lost (ibid.).

India also offers "Tatkaal" passport services, "a premium service that expedites the passport processing" (*Kashmir Observer* 9 Sept. 2012). Passport applicants applying under the Tatkaal procedures are required to submit an affidavit attesting to the good character of the applicant and signed by a prescribed official, in addition to other documentary evidence (India n.d.d, 15)

India has an online application system, involving the following steps when applying for a passport: online registration; filling out and submitting an online application form (or down loading the form, filling it out, and uploading the form); scheduling an appointment; and visiting a PSK (ibid. 6 Sept. 2013; India Public Sector News 6 July 2012). Applicants can apply for a passport online, on their own, at an Internet café, through a travel agent, or with the assistance of any other person who is able to apply online (ibid.). The online application system, referred to as the "e-passport programme" by *Business Standard* (30 Sept. 2012), is part of the National e-Governance Plan and seeks to make the process more transparent (*Business Standard* 30 Sept. 2012; India Public Sector News 6 July 2012). Another goal is to reduce fraud (ibid.).

According to India Public Sector News, a private company, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), is working in cooperation with the government to issue passports; the private-sector personnel check the demographic data, scan and upload supporting documents, take the photograph and biometric data, and accept the fees on behalf of the government (India Public Sector News 6 July 2012). Government officials carry out verification, and grant and issue the passports (ibid.).

Exact documentary requirements for applying for a passport vary, depending on several factors, including, among others, the type of application (regular or Tatkaal), whether the applicant falls into the ECR [Emigration Check Required (India n.d.d, 4] or non-ECR category, whether the applicant is a minor, and whether it is a "fresh passport" or a "reissue" (India n.d.d, 6). A guide for filling in the passport application form and supplementary form, which is attached to this Response, provides detailed lists of the requirements.

Applicants are required to provide supporting documents with their applications, including the following:

- proof of date of birth (such as a birth certificate);
- identity proof with photograph;
- proof of residence [address];
- proof of nationality (India 6 Sept. 2013).

Online payment is mandatory for booking the appointment at a PSK and remains valid for one year from the first appointment date, if the applicant requires additional appointments (ibid.).

Applicants are required to go to the PSK for authorities "to obtain applicants' photographs, biometrics and [grant] decision in their presence" (ibid.). The thumb print of the applicant is taken on site (*The Statesman* 1 Jan. 2014; India n.d.d, 2) and scanned and printed in the passport (ibid.). Applicants must present their "Application Print receipt[s]" and original documents (ibid. n.d.a).

PSKs allow Tatkaal applicants, senior citizens, minors, and disabled applicants to have access to PSK services on a "walk-in" basis, without previously arranging an appointment (India 6 Sept. 2013). However, applicants are still required to submit their applications online (ibid.).

The time limits fixed by the government for the issue of passports are 30 days for the issue of a "fresh" passport, 15 days for the re-issue of a passport, and 1-7 days for Tatkaal applications (India Public Sector News 17 Aug. 2012; *Kashmir Observer* 9 Sept. 2012; *Times of India* 21 Aug. 2012). However, in August 2012, the government acknowledged that there were delays in the system, for reasons including high demand, staff shortages, and delays in the police verification step (India Public Sector News 17 Aug. 2012). In a 14 April 2014 telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) said that, in practice, passport applications take approximately one month to process, but the time may vary depending on the location (AHRC 14 Apr. 2014). He said that, in Kolkata, it takes from four to five months (ibid.).

According to a 2012 article by the *Times of India*, passport officers sometimes demand from applicants additional documents beyond what is stated in the guidelines, and claim that they have the right to demand documents not mentioned online (19 June 2012). In February 2013, the business and news website Moneylife reported on difficulties experienced by applicants in securing online appointments at the Pune PSK and allegations of a passport official seeking bribes to secure an appointment (28 Feb. 2013).

According to a 2012 *Kashmir Observer* article, Kashmiris are subject to "a lot of procedures," and India has an inadequate infrastructure to process passport applications, which results in delays ranging from months to years for Kashmiris (*Kashmir Observer* 9 Sept. 2012). The article describes the process of applying for a passport in Kashmir as an "ordeal" (ibid.). According to the Passport Office's instruction booklet, citizens residing in Jammu and Kashmir are not allowed to apply for "fresh" passports under the Tatkaal procedures (India n.d.d, 8).

2.1 Police Verification

According to the Passport Office's instruction booklet, the Passport Office determines whether police verification is required prior to the issuance of the passport (ibid., 1). The same source states that, in most cases of applications for fresh passports, "pre-police verification" would be required, with the exception of "government servants" who submit an identity certificate, or minors whose parents have a valid passport (ibid.). The instructions booklet indicates that, in most cases of re-issue of passports, police verification is not required or would be completed after the issue of

the passport, although there are some exceptions, such as in cases of lost passports or a complete change of name (ibid.).

According to an article by the *Times of India*, police verification involves the police officer visiting the applicant's address for verification as well as verifying that the applicant does not have a criminal record (20 Dec. 2013). As of 1 January 2014, according to the *Times of India*, the police receive the applications online and submit their follow-up reports online (*The Times of India* 20 Dec. 2013). The same source indicates that the new procedures were being implemented across the country (ibid.). According to the article, the Ministry of External Affairs has mandated a maximum time of 21 days for police verification (ibid.).

Submitting false information to obtain a passport is punishable by a fine of up to 5,000 Indian rupees (INR) [about C\$90 (XE 5 May 2014)] and/or imprisonment for a term of up to two years (India 6 Sept. 2013).

3. Issuance Procedures Abroad

According to the website of the High Commission of India in Ottawa, the following documents are required for the re-issue of a passport:

- the completed application form;
- existing passport with photocopy of the first and last page;
- three photographs taken within the six months prior to the application;
- if the person is a landed immigrant, a copy of the Record of Landing or Permanent Resident Card;
- if the applicant is not a permanent resident of Canada, the immigration documents, such as work permit or student identity card, along with details of employer or educational institution (ibid. n.d.c).

The High Commission in Ottawa states that its passport services have been outsourced to the company BLS International (ibid.). According to BLS's website, passport applicants are required to complete the application form online and submit the following documents:

- current passport (original and photocopy);
- photographs as per specifications;
- valid permanent resident card (original and photocopy) or valid student visa, work permit or visitor visa along with photocopy;
- Canadian proof of address, such as photocopy of driver's licence, bank statement or utility bill;
- additional documents, as may be required in specific cases, such as to show changes in personal data (n.d.).

According to the High Commission, passport applications from Canada require 6-8 weeks for processing and are printed at the central printing facility in New Delhi (India n.d.c). If the applicant's passport expired more than three years prior to the application, the applicant is required to apply for a "fresh" passport, which involves police verification from India (ibid.). In addition, the applicant is required to submit a "search letter" from Canadian authorities stating that the applicant has not acquired Canadian citizenship (ibid.; BLS International n.d.). The processing time for applications from abroad for "fresh" passports, according to the High Commission, is a minimum of three or four months (India n.d.c).

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 representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Centre for Public Affairs; Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Asian Centre for Human Rights; ecoi.net; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; India – Ministry of Justice, National Crime Records Bureau; Interpol; Tata Consultancy Services; United Nations – Refworld, UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC); US – Department of State.

Attachment

India. N.d. Ministry of External Affairs, Consular, Passport, and Visa (CPV) Division. "Instructions for Filling of Passport Application Form and Supplementary Form." <<http://www.passportindia.gov.in/AppOnlineProject/pdf/ApplicationformInstructionBooklet-V3.0.pdf>> [Accessed 30 Apr. 2014]

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