

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

[Home](#)

> [Research Program](#)

> Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests

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5 June 2014

TUR104875.E

Turkey: Biometric passports, including requirements and procedures within the country as well as abroad; availability of fraudulent passports and other identity documents
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Features of Biometric Passports

Sources indicate that biometric passports [also known as e-passports (Professor 20 May 2014; *Today's Zaman* 26 Nov. 2012)] began being issued on 1 June 2010 (Professor 20 May 2014; *Hurriyet Daily News* 1 June 2010; *Today's Zaman* 26 Nov. 2012). According to the Istanbul-based newspaper *Today's Zaman*, over 6.5 million people have been issued biometric passports as of November 2012 (ibid.).

Academic and media sources note that non-biometric passports stopped being issued as of 1 June 2010, but non-biometric passports issued before that time will remain valid and in circulation until 24 November 2015 (ibid.; Professor 20 May 2014). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, an official at the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Ottawa corroborated that non-biometric passports are no longer being issued either within Turkey or by embassies abroad (Turkey 20 May 2014). According to a January 2011 article in *Today's Zaman*, people whose non-biometric passports expired were able to extend the validity term until 31 January 2011 (*Today's Zaman* 5 Jan. 2011).

Today's Zaman explains that a biometric passport is "a combined paper and electronic passport that uses biometrics to authenticate the identity of the traveller. It uses contactless smart card technology, including a microprocessor chip (computer chip) and antenna (both to power the chip and for communication)," which is embedded in the passport (ibid. 26 Feb. 2011). Keesing Reference Systems indicates that the passports contain a "contactless chip" in the back cover (Keesing n.d.a). In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, an assistant professor of International Relations at Bilkent University in Ankara who specializes in border security and mobility noted that Turkey's biometric passports are "second generation MRTD [machine-readable travel document] passports with photographic biometric capabilities" (Professor 20 May 2014). The Professor and Keesing both indicate that the biometric passports meet ICAO [International Civil Aviation Authority] regulations (Professor 20 May 2014; Keesing n.d.a). *Hurriyet Daily News*, a Turkish media source, notes that Turkey's biometric passport meets "international and EU standards" (1 June 2010).

According to the official at the Turkish embassy, the biometric information contained in the passport includes the holder's photograph and personal data, but does not include fingerprints (Turkey 26 May 2014). Similarly, *Today's Zaman* reports that the chip inside the passport contains information about the passport holder's face (such as the distance between the eyes, nose, mouth and ears), as well as the information contained on the personal details page of the passport (5 Jan. 2011).

Sources indicate that there are four different types of biometric passports:

- Individual passports have red covers (Professor 20 May 2014; *Today's Zaman* 5 Jan. 2011; Turkey 21 May 2014) [or maroon covers (*Hurriyet Daily News* 1 June 2010)].
- Special passports have green covers (Professor 20 May 2014; *Today's Zaman* 5 Jan. 2011; Turkey 21 May 2014).
- Diplomatic passports have black covers (*Today's Zaman* 5 Jan. 2011; Turkey 21 May 2014) [or navy blue covers (Professor 20 May 2014)]

- Service passports have grey covers (*Today's Zaman* 5 Jan. 2011; Professor 20 May 2014; Turkey 21 May 2014)

The Professor explained that special passports are given to civil servants and their families and to former members of parliament (MPs), and that service passports are given to civil servants who need to travel for business (20 May 2014).

According to Keesing, the following information is included in the passport: surname, name, date of birth, place of birth, nationality, holder's signature, sex, personal number, document number, date of issue, expiry date, issuing country and issuing authority (Keesing n.d.b). The dimensions of the passport are 88x125 mm (*Today's Zaman* 5 Jan. 2011; Keesing n.d.a). According to Keesing, the passport number consists of a letter followed by an eight-digit number (ibid.). A sample copy of a Turkish biometric passport is attached to this Response. The sample was found on the Electronic Document Information System on Network (EDISON TD), which an official at the National Document Centre of the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) describes as "an advanced, fully computerized image and data storage retrieval system, owned by the Netherlands" with the purpose of "assist[ing] law enforcement agencies to check the authenticity of travel documents" (Canada 20 May 2014).

2. Issuance Procedures

2.1 Issuance Procedures within Turkey

Sources indicate that the issuance of biometric passports is under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry (*Today's Zaman* 26 Nov. 2012; Professor 20 May 2014). Sources note that there are 447 passport application centres throughout Turkey (ibid.; *Today's Zaman* 26 Nov. 2012). According to the Professor, the passport application centres are within police stations, which are also part of the Interior Ministry (Professor 20 May 2014).

Sources indicate that passport applicants must apply in person at the passport office (ibid. 20 May 2014; Canada 26 May 2014). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an official at the Canadian Embassy in Ankara said that the procedures to obtain a passport include: paying the fees at a recognized bank, obtaining an appointment online, and then appearing in person to get fingerprinted and possibly answer a few questions (ibid.). Both the Professor and the Canadian official said that passport applicants are required to bring:

- 2 passport photographs
- Turkish ID/citizenship card
- Proof of payment
- Original copy of previous passport, if applicable
- Applicants are required to submit fingerprints at the time of application (Professor 20 May 2014; Canada 26 May 2014).

In contrast, the official at the embassy of Turkey in Ottawa said that fingerprinting is not part of the passport application process (Turkey 26 May 2014).

Sources indicate that Turkish biometric passports have a maximum validity of 10 years (Keesing n.d.a; Professor 20 May 2014). According to Keesing, the maximum validity of a passport is 5 years for holders under the age of 18 years (n.d.a). Passport validity dates vary from 6 months to 10 years and depend on the fee the applicant is willing to pay at the time of purchase (Professor 20 May 2014; Canada 26 May 2014). The Professor and the Canadian official provided the following passport fees for different validity periods:

- 6 months validity for 171 TL (Turkish Lira) [C\$89 (XE 22 May 2014a)];
- 12 months validity for 215 TL [C\$112 (XE 22 May 2014b)];
- 2 years for 304 TL [C\$159 (XE 22 May 2014c)];
- 3 years for 400 TL [C\$209 (XE 22 May 2014d)];
- 4-10 years for 533 TL [C\$279 (XE 22 May 2014e)] (Professor 20 May 2014; Canada 26 May 2014).

Within Turkey, passports are delivered to the applicant's home (Professor 20 May 2014; *Today's Zaman* 26 Nov. 2012). The delivery time for applicants to receive their passports varied, according to sources, ranging from "a couple of days" (Turkey 20 May 2014), 2-4 days (*Today's Zaman* 26 Nov. 2012), to 5-7 days (Professor 20 May 2014), or "up to maximum of 10 days" (Canada 26 May 2014).

2.2 Issuance Procedures from Abroad

The Professor said that the procedures and requirements to obtain a Turkish passport from abroad are generally the same as applying within Turkey, except that applicants apply in person at the Turkish embassy and that payment is made in local currency (20 May 2014). The official at the Turkish embassy in Ottawa provided the following information about their procedures to apply for a biometric passport:

Applicants must apply in person at the embassy. They must provide colour passport photos (50 x 50 dimension) and their Turkish ID (which acts as proof of Turkish citizenship). There is an application form that can be completed at the embassy. (Turkey 20 May 2014)

The Turkish official said that passport applications made at the embassy are sent and processed in Turkey and that it takes approximately two weeks to receive the completed document (ibid.). According to the official, applicants are not fingerprinted at the embassy (ibid.).

The official noted that they recommend that applicants get a passport with 10 years validity, which costs C\$309 if the previous passport expired recently (ibid.). If the person's previous passport expired a long time ago, such as 10 years, then there is a higher charge for the passport (approximately C\$500) (ibid.).

According to the Professor, persons applying from abroad must pick their passports up at the embassy (20 May 2014).

3. Fraudulent Passports and Other Identity Documents

Information about fraudulent passports and other identity documents was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Canadian official, fraudulent Turkish passports are "[n]ot very prevalent at all, particularly since the introduction of biometric passports" (Canada 26 May 2014). The Turkish embassy official said that Turkey "does not have any problems with fraudulent passports or other identity documents" (Turkey 20 May 2014). Without providing details, the Professor said that he has personally heard of cases of fraudulent non-biometric passports, but was not aware of any cases of fraudulent biometric passports (20 May 2014). According to *Today's Zaman*, one of the reasons for the introduction of biometric passports was to prevent identity fraud and increase the efficiency of airport security procedures (*Today's Zaman* 26 Nov. 2012).

The Canadian official said that incidents of fraud with Turkish national identity documents are more common than cases of passport fraud (Canada 26 May 2014). He stated that Turkish identity documents are quite dated and many are still filled in by hand, the photos are glued on and easily removable. The cards lack common security features such as watermarks. These IDs can be used in lieu of a passport when crossing the Georgian-Turkish border, and this is when fraud becomes a greater concern. (ibid.)

While the Canadian official said that biometric identity cards were slated to be released in 2015 (ibid.), *Today's Zaman* reported in 2012 that biometric identity cards were beginning to be released at that time and that the Interior Ministry planned to renew all ID cards between 2013 and 2017 (*Today's Zaman* 19 Nov. 2012).

Media sources report cases in which suspected terrorists were found to be in possession of fake Turkish identity documents (*Aksam* 4 Feb. 2013; ANA-MPA 2 Aug. 2013; *Today's Zaman* 23 Sept. 2013). For example, *Today's Zaman* reports that two suspects in a terrorist attack targeting two buildings of the Security General Directorate in Ankara, who were members of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C), which the source describes as a far-left "terrorist organization," had fake identity cards under assumed identities (ibid.). The same source reports that the terrorist suspects obtained their Turkish identity cards from Turkish officials in Vienna by saying that they had lost their ID cards and supplying "real" details of other people (ibid.).

The Athens News Agency-Macedonian Press Agency (ANA-MPA) reports that a suspected member of the DHKP/C, which it described as a "Kurdish militant group," had entered Greece using fake identity documents and was later arrested for illegal arms trafficking, along with five other men who were allegedly taking weapons to Turkey by boat from Greece (ANA-MPA 2 Aug. 2013). The same source reports another incident in which four suspected DHKP/C terrorists, who were arrested and charged with "terrorist acts involving explosive materials and weapon possession, forgery and being in the country illegally," were in possession of fake identity cards (ibid. 13 Feb. 2014).

The Turkish daily newspaper *Aksam* reports that the DHKP/C claimed that they used identity cards from participants in a soccer tournament that they organized to obtain fake identity cards for their members (*Aksam* 4 Feb. 2014). The fake ID card found on a man who allegedly carried out a suicide attack against the US embassy in Ankara was believed to have been traced to this tournament, in which the ID cards were collected under the ruse that the participants might be awarded prizes (ibid.). Corroborating information about these events could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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: Bianet; European Union - European Commission; - Interpol; Jamestown Foundation; Turkey - Turkish Embassy in Washington, Ministry of Interior; United Nations - Refworld.

Attachment

Electronic Document Information System on Network (EDISON TD). N.d. "Turkey. National Passport." <<http://www.edisontd.net>> [Accessed 20 May 2014]

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[Top of Page](#)

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