Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada   Commission de l'immigration et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Canada

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.

14 June 2013

SOM104445.E

Somalia: Identification documents, including passports and driver's licenses; whether driver's licenses are/have been issued, including language of documents (2007-June 2013)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Accessibility of Official Documentation in Somalia

The US Department of State's *Country Reciprocity Schedule* for Somalia states that "there are no circumstances under which immigrant visa applicants can reasonably be expected to recover original documents held by the former Government of Somalia" due to a lack of "competent civil authority" and the destruction of most records during the civil war (n.d.). The Norwegian government's country of origin information centre states that Somalia has not had a functioning government since 1991 and since large sections of Somalia are not subject to any centralized administration, Somali people have been "unable to obtain official documents such as ID cards, passports, or various certificates" (Norway 5 Jan. 2009, 7).

2. Passports

In written communication sent to the Research Directorate on 9 June 2013, a representative of the UNHCR stated that the steps to apply for a Somali passport in Mogadishu are as follows:

- Payment of US$ 85 to the Ministry of the Interior and National Security's "Dahabshiil" account.
- With the receipt for that payment, applicants must apply in person at the Immigration Office in Mogadishu, where a form must be filled out and photographs and fingerprints taken.
- Payment of US$ 20 is made to the Immigration Office, where a receipt will be issued.
- Applicants must return approximately seven days later with this receipt to collect the passport from the Immigration Office.
- Passports are valid for five years.

Corroborating information on the steps to apply for a passport and on the validity of a Somali passport could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The US Department of State indicates in their *Country Reciprocity Schedule* for Somalia that "Somali passports are no longer valid for visa-issuance purposes" (n.d.). With regard to the eligibility of Somalis to enter Canada as tourists, Citizenship and Immigration Canada notes on their website that, among other travel documents, any passport claiming to have been issued by Somalia is considered unreliable and is "not acceptable" for entry into Canada (Canada n.d.). A circular published in 2010 by the Managed Migration Department of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) to chiefs of police and foreign service missions states that

Somali passports that were issued or renewed after 31 January 1991 do not meet the conditions for approval as travel documents ... because Somalia has not had a functioning central government since January 1991.

Somali passports are therefore not valid for entry into Norway. (Norway 2010)

Xinhua, the Chinese government's news agency (Xinhua n.d.), reports that Somalia launched a new computer-readable e-passport in February 2007 and that the old Somali passports would become invalid six months later (9 Feb. 2007). A 17 September 2011 article by Somali Report, a privately funded and non-partisan news site where Western editors collaborate with Somali journalists, states that the old Somali passport (known as the "green passport") was banned by the Transitional Federal Government and was supposed to be replaced with a new electronic passport. Further information on Somali biometric passports could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Coordinator of Settlement and Integration at the Somali Centre for Family Services in Ottawa stated in written correspondence sent to the Research Directorate on 4 June 2013 that before the civil war, obtaining a passport required a birth certificate, police record check and an ID (such as a municipal ID or a registration document). The Coordinator further stated that after 1991, there were no official passports issued due to a lack of government, but that some individuals obtained passports from their region of origin (Coordinator of Settlement and Integration 4 June 2013). Corroborating and further information on the procedures and requirements for obtaining a passport in Somalia could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Driver's Licenses

The information in the following paragraph was provided by a representative of the UNHCR in written correspondence sent to the Research Directorate on 9 June 2013. Applicants for driver's licenses must apply in person to the "Fisha traffic" office under the Ministry of Public Transport in Mogadishu. Applicants must provide personal information including their full name, their mother's name, and the date and place of birth. Applicants must also provide four passport photos and pay the US$ 70 fee. There are two types of licenses: the orange "Grade 2" license and the red "Grade 3" license, which is for more advanced drivers. Driver's licenses are written in Somali and Arabic and are valid for up to seven years, but must be renewed annually. Corroborating information on the procedures for applying for a driver's license could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Further information on driver's licenses in Somalia could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. However, the following information on driver's licenses in self-governing regions of Somalia may be useful.

An article published by the UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) states that, in the "self-declared republic of Somaliland," police are beginning to fine drivers without driver's licenses (UN 9 Oct. 2012). Corroborating and further information on the existence of driver's licenses in Somaliland could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Garowe Online, an independent news site affiliated with Radio Garowe in Puntland, a "self-governing region in northern Somalia" (Garowe Online n.d.), states that in February 2012, the Puntland highway authority announced that it would begin issuing driver's licenses the following month (Garowe Online 29 Feb. 2012). The same article states that the requirements for a driver's license announced by the Director of Vehicle Licenses for Puntland include "health, experience, and age," and that those who did not meet the requirements could attend a driving school (ibid.). Corroborating and further information on the existence of driver's licenses in Puntland could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Language of Documents

The *Political Handbook of the World* states that the United Republic of Somalia was formed in 1960 when the formerly British-administered Somaliland in the north and the formerly Italian-administered Trust Territory in the South merged after achieving independence (2012, 1300). The *Transitional Federal Charter for the Somali Republic* lists Somali and Arabic as the official languages, with English and Italian as "second languages" (Somalia Feb. 2004, Art. 7). Further information on the current use of Italian in Somalia could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. A report produced by the US Library of Congress states that between independence and 1973, "[a]ll government documents" had been published in Italian and English, but that after 1973, a Latin script for the Somali language was used (US 1992). The Coordinator of Settlement and Integration indicated that some Somali documents, especially those issued before 1991, are in Italian due to its status as an official language

prior to the introduction of the Somali language (Coordinator of Settlement and Integration 4 June 2013). A representative of the UNHCR stated in written communication sent to the Research Directorate on 9 June 2013 that under Mohamed Siad Barre, who ruled Somalia until 1991 (*PHW* 2012, 1300), driver's licenses were also issued in Italian.

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 Canadian Embassy in Nairobi were unsuccessful. Representatives of the

Permanent Mission of Somalia to the United Nations and the Canada Border Services Agency could not provide information. Representatives of the Somali Canadian Association of Etobicoke were unable to provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sources, including: Afrol.com; AllAfrica.com; ecoi.net; EdisonTD; Factiva; Keesing Reference Systems; Somalia – Ministry of the Interior and National Security; United Nations – Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld.

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