



## Query response

### **Somalia: Passport application at the Somali Embassy in Brussels**

- What are the application procedures at the embassy?
- What do applicants have to bring with them when applying for a passport at the embassy?
- How much does it cost to apply for a passport at the embassy?
- How long does it take to get a passport?
- Do applicants have to appear in person both when submitting the application and when retrieving the passport?
- What about minor applicants, with or without parents in Norway?
- Is it possible to book an appointment in advance?

#### **Introduction**

This query response attempts to answer a number of practical questions relating to passport application at the Somali Embassy in Brussels. The procedures for passport application at Somali embassies appear to be fairly similar (IND 2019). When Landinfo began investigating this subject in January 2019, the embassy in Brussels was the nearest Somali embassy with authority to accept passport applications. Since 15 April 2019, it has also been possible to apply for a passport at the Somali Embassy in Berlin (Norwegian Embassy in Nairobi, email 2019).

The embassies' services are not limited to Somalis residing in the countries for which the embassies have consular responsibility, i.e. Somalis in Norway can choose the embassy they want to apply at (IND 2019).<sup>1</sup> All passport applications are sent to the main office of the Somali Immigration and Naturalization Directorate (IND) for checking, approval and issuance.

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<sup>1</sup> The third Somali embassy in Europe with authority to accept passport applications is the embassy in Rome (National ID Centre 2019). There are plans to grant the same authority to the Somali Embassy in Paris (Norwegian Embassy in Nairobi, email 2019).

## Sources and limitations

The query response is based on several sources, both written and oral (see the reference list). The Somali Embassy in Brussels gives some information on its website (Somali Embassy in Belgium, n.d.). The embassy has not responded to Landinfo's inquiries directly, but IND has obtained information from the embassy on our behalf (IND, email 2019). The information IND provides is fairly sparse and somewhat unclear. Our Swedish sister organisation, Lifos (2019, p. 21-23), has succeeded in obtaining some information from the embassy by phone, but there are uncertainties attached to this information, too. Therefore, Landinfo is not able to fully respond to all the questions this response addresses. This particularly applies to questions relating to minor passport applicants. Matters that seem unclear are remarked in the text.<sup>2</sup>

## Booking of appointment for passport application

Somalis who want to apply for a passport at the embassy in Brussels can book an appointment in advance. The embassy specifies various ways to contact them on their website (Somali Embassy in Belgium, n.d.).

## Application procedures and what applicants have to bring with them

The following is required to apply for a passport at the Somali Embassy in Brussels (special requirements for minor applicants are discussed in a separate section below):

✓ *Application form*

Applicants must fill out an application form. The form can be downloaded from the embassy's website (Somali Embassy in Belgium, n.d.).

✓ *Biometric data*

The embassy will take a passport photo of the applicant and register the applicant's fingerprints and signature (IND 2019).

✓ *Supporting documents*

The embassy (email 2019) notes that Somalis who come to the embassy from Norway to apply for a passport must submit "legal documents from Norway". The embassy does not specify this further, but according to Lifos (2019, p. 22) this refers to documentation of residence status and personal information submitted in Norway. According to Lifos, a refusal decision can "sometimes" be sufficient.

- ✓ According to the embassy's website (Somali Embassy in Belgium, n.d.), applicants must submit a Somali birth certificate, but in the email (2019), the embassy states that this is not essential, as applicants can be issued a "Declaration of Nationality" from the embassy. This is in line with information we have received from IND (meetings in Mogadishu and Kismayo 2019) and other embassies (Somali Embassy in Nairobi, meeting 2019; Somali Embassy in Washington D.C., email 2018), which in this context

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<sup>2</sup> The National ID Centre plans to visit the Somali Embassy in Brussels and will hopefully be able to clarify the remaining ambiguities. This response will then be updated.

highlights that very few applicants have a Somali birth certificate. A “Declaration of Nationality” is normally issued based on an interview (see below).

✓ *Interview*

The sources agree that applicants must complete an interview at the embassy. Information from IND (meetings in Mogadishu and Kismayo 2019) and visits to the Somali Embassy in Nairobi (2019) indicate that the interview is more of a formality unless, for example, the applicant is not an ethnic Somali, does not speak Somali fluently or does not have a Somali name.<sup>3</sup> In an email (2019), the Somali Embassy in Brussels give the impression that it is primarily applicants who do not speak fluent Somali or who are otherwise “suspicious” who are interviewed.

✓ *References*

IND (meetings in Mogadishu and Kismayo 2019) and the Somali Embassy in Nairobi (meeting 2019) notes that applicants are asked to provide a reference, normally an elder representative of the clan or group to which the applicant claims to belong, who can confirm that the applicant has provided the correct identity. However, the reference is usually not contacted unless the applicant is not ethnically Somali, does not speak Somali or does not have a Somali name.<sup>4</sup>

✓ *Fees*

Applicants must pay € 180 in fees to apply for a passport at the embassy (email 2019). A “Declaration of Nationality” costs an additional € 60.

✓ *Passport photos*

On the website, the embassy states that applicants must bring two passport photos. The embassy (email 2019) does not comment on this, but according to IND (meeting in Kismayo 2019), some embassies require a photo to staple to the physical application file.

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<sup>3</sup> The embassy told Lifos (2019, p. 22) that all applicants must go through this in order to establish that they are “one hundred percent Somali”. According to Lifos, the embassy claims that ethnic Somalis cannot get a Somali passport unless they are “from the Federal Republic of Somalia”. In Landinfo’s assessment, this seems to be misleading at best. As already mentioned, it is not the embassies that decide whether or not an applicant gets a Somali passport, but IND in Mogadishu. Landinfo met representatives of IND in Mogadishu and Kismayo most recently in February 2019 and they were clear that ethnic Somalis from Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and other countries can also get Somali passports. This was also confirmed by the Somali Embassy in Nairobi and a Western diplomat who has worked with Somali issues for a number of years (meetings in Nairobi 2019).

IND generally could not point to specific cases where an application for a passport was rejected. Landinfo will give a more detailed account of this topic in a separate report which is currently being drafted.

<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, the embassy says to Lifos (2019) that they do not use reference persons, but on the other hand the embassy says that they expect that applicants who, “for example”, belong to the Bajuni population can provide a contact person within this group. This may seem somewhat unclear, but in Landinfo’s assessment it is in line with the information from IND and the Somali Embassy in Nairobi. The Bajuni population is an ethnic minority that is traditionally native to the coast and islands to the south of Somalia and Kenya (Landinfo 2010).

### **How long does it take to get a passport?**

Submitting the application form and supporting documents and going through the interview is normally done during the same day at the embassy. The application is then sent electronically to IND's main office in Mogadishu for checking, approval and issuance before IND sends the passport to the embassy. According to the embassy (email 2019), it can take up to 60 days from when the application is submitted until the passport is ready for retrieval at the embassy. The embassy will then contact the applicant by phone.

### **Do applicants have to appear at the embassy in person both for the application and when retrieving the passport?**

Everyone must appear in person at the embassy when applying for a passport to get biometric data taken, among other reasons. The embassy (email 2019) does not have mobile equipment that enables applications to be received outside of the embassy.

However, it is not necessary to appear in person when retrieving the passport. According to the embassy (email 2019), a relative, friend, neighbor or "anyone" can retrieve a passport as long as they can show the receipt the applicant got at the time of application and a phone number the applicant can be reached at to verbally confirm that they can retrieve the passport on the applicant's behalf.

IND told the National ID Centre (email 2018) that passports can also be retrieved from IND's main office in Mogadishu by agreement.

### **What about minor applicants, with or without parents in Norway?**

According to the embassy (email 2019), minor applicants must appear at the embassy in person together with a parent or guardian when applying for a passport. According to the embassy, minor applicants are persons under 18 years old. The embassy does not specifically mention minor applicants on the website but distinguishes between applicants who are over and under 15 years old. Here, the embassy suggests that applicants under 15 years old do not need to submit fingerprints. This is in line with information that the National ID Centre (2019) received from IND and other Somali embassies, which indicates that applicants under 15 years old will have photos taken, but do not need to submit fingerprints or a signature.

According to the embassy, it is not necessary for both parents to appear in person. IND (meeting in Mogadishu 2019) and the Somali Embassy in Nairobi (Norwegian Embassy in Nairobi, email 2019) also state this, but emphasize that consent of the other parent must be brought along – either in writing or on a video recording. According to IND and the Somali Embassy in Nairobi, if the other parent is dead, a death certificate must be submitted. The Somali Embassy in Brussels (email 2019) says nothing about this, but on its website indicates that the "father *and* mother's passports" (Landinfo's italization) must be brought along. The embassy has not responded to Landinfo's follow-up questions on this matter.

According to the embassy in Brussels (email 2019), minor applicants who do not have parents in Norway must appear at the embassy in person along with their legal guardian when applying for a passport. The guardian must submit documentation that they have this responsibility. The embassy emphasizes that minor applicants for Somali passports who apply without a parent must go through an interview at the embassy. As Landinfo understands it, the embassy is thus suggesting that minor applicants are not interviewed if they are accompanied by a parent.

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The Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, Landinfo, is an independent body within the Norwegian Immigration Authorities. Landinfo provides country of origin information (COI) to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (Utlendingsdirektoratet – UDI), the Immigration Appeals Board (Utlendingsnemnda – UNE) and the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security.

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Responses provide brief answers to queries from the Directorate or Appeal's Board. They are written within time constraints and do not provide exhaustive overviews of topics or themes.

Country of origin information presented in Landinfo's Query responses does not contain policy recommendations nor does it reflect official Norwegian views.

## References

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