

FAQs on family reunification for Syrian refugees

The right to family reunification

Who is eligible for family reunification?

Only members of the family unit, that is, *spouses, the spouses' minor children and minor children* for whom the parent living in Germany holds custody (usually sole custody), are eligible for family reunification. This also applies to Syrian refugees in Germany, who can apply for members of their family unit to join them in Germany as soon as they have been recognised as being entitled to asylum or as refugees (and not merely as eligible for subsidiary protection) by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. In the case of unaccompanied minor refugees, their parents are the eligible family unit members.

What about other family members (e.g. children aged 18 or older) or relatives?

Other family members can only apply for family reunification under the narrowly defined conditions of Section 36 (2) of the Residence Act. In accordance with this provision, they may only move to Germany if the rejection of their application would represent an *exceptional hardship* for the applicant or for their relative who lives in Germany. In addition, the applicant must have a secure source of income in Germany, including sufficient health insurance cover.

What constitutes exceptional hardship?

“Exceptional hardship” is interpreted narrowly by the German authorities in accordance with Section 36 (2) of the Residence Act. Flight and displacement resulting a civil war do not constitute exceptional hardship in themselves, as many people are in a similar situation. Exceptional hardship must be based on the specific individual case and, among other things, arise from the separation of the family, e.g. if the relative needs care that can only be provided by their family members in Germany. Severe financial distress does not constitute exceptional hardship, as this can be relieved, e.g. by financial support from family members in Germany.

Can the parents and minor siblings of an unaccompanied minor in Germany who has been recognised as being entitled to asylum or as a refugee move to Germany?

If a parent with custody for the child does not already live in Germany, the parents of minor refugees in Germany have privileged eligibility for family reunification. This means that they are not subject to further conditions, in particular proof of a secure source of income. **Please note** that the parents' eligibility expires permanently on the child's 18th birthday.

Siblings do not have privileged eligibility for family reunification if their parents do not already live in Germany and have not been recognised as being entitled to asylum or as refugees themselves.

My child will soon turn 18 and still lives abroad. Is he or she still eligible for family reunification in Germany?

In order for a child to join his or her parents in Germany, timely notification must be submitted to the German Embassy, the competent foreigners authority in Germany or via the Internet portal familyreunion-syria.diplo.de *before* the child's 18th birthday. In such cases, the fact that a child has turned 18 during the waiting period for a visa application appointment will not have a

negative impact on the application. However, if a child turns 18 before timely notification is submitted, exceptional hardship must be proved (see above).

If children are minors, but both their parents have already fled to Germany, who can submit an application on their behalf?

The application can only be made by both parents together. However, another adult can accompany the children during their interview, provided that both parents have authorised this person in writing to apply for the visa. This authorisation must be signed by both parents and the signatures must be certified.

My children are from a previous marriage. Who may / must sign the visa application?

If one parent is already living in Germany, the other parent must sign the children's visa applications at the German Embassy, even if he or she is not moving to Germany with them, for example, in cases where the parents are divorced. If it is not possible for the other parent to go to the German Embassy, he or she must give permission in writing for the children to leave the country and live in Germany. This authorisation must be certified by a notary or court and submitted in the original with a translation.

How and where applications are processed

May I send you documents by post, email or fax before my appointment?

The Visa Section cannot file or store any documents received until a visa application has been made. If further documents are requested during or after your appointment, you may send them to the Visa Section. Please quote the six-digit application number in all correspondence.

How can I pay the visa fee?

The visa fee can only be paid in cash (Lebanese pounds) at the German Embassy Beirut. Please note that we are not currently accepting 100,000 notes, as there have been repeated incidents of counterfeit money.

Only euros are accepted at the German missions in Turkey.

May I submit an application to a German mission in another country (e.g. India, Indonesia or Kenya)?

Syrians can only submit a visa application to a German mission other than the one in Beirut or those in Turkey if they have their habitual abode in the country where that mission is located. This is the case if you have been a legal resident of a country for at least six months, for example. The German missions in other countries decide themselves whether they can accept family reunification visa applications for Syrian refugees in Germany. Please consult the website of the Embassy in question before submitting an application.

If I have already submitted my application to a German mission in another country, can the documents be sent from there to another mission or can I collect the visa from another mission?

No, this is not possible. The mission that received the application is responsible for processing it.

Appointments

How can I book an appointment?

a. Booking an appointment at the German Embassy Beirut

Appointments at the German Embassy Beirut are arranged online at www.beirut.diplo.de/termine, with the following exceptions:

1. Registration for an appointment to a recognized Syrian refugee (only spouses, minor children and fiancés): this list is for applicants who have not yet requested an appointment for family reunion as a spouse, a child or the fiancé of a person residing in Germany. Starting 28 September 2016, you can apply for an appointment here: https://service2.diplo.de/rktermin/extern/appointment_showForm.do?locationCode=beir&realmId=320&categoryId=1208

All applicants - children included - have to register for an individual appointment. In order to ensure that your family will receive their appointments on the same date, please state **the reference-ID** of the first applicant (sent to you in the registration email) when applying for further family members.

You'll be notified about your appointment via email at a later point. Due to the high demand for appointments, the waiting time is between 10-12 months. Requests will be processed in chronological order.

Please notice:

The former procedure via familiennachzug.syrien@auswaertiges-amt.de has been suspended. In case you have requested an appointment before 28 September 2016 you don't need to take further action. It is ensured that requests, sent previously, are processed prior to new requests.

2. If you would like to make an appointment to apply for a visa to be reunited with a family member who is not a refugee (e.g. a Blue Card holder or German Academic Exchange Service scholar), please send an email with a copy of your passport and your family member's German residence permit to visa@beir.diplo.de.

3. If you need a visa to study in Germany and already have all of the necessary documents, you can arrange an appointment via the Embassy. You will find further information at https://service2.diplo.de/rktermin/extern/choose_category.do?locationCode=beir&realmId=320&categoryId=723. If you do not yet have all the necessary documents, please make an appointment via the online booking system <http://www.beirut.diplo.de/termine>. However, you must be able to present all of the necessary documents at your visa application appointment. If not, your application may be rejected.

Please note that your application will not be accepted if you book an appointment online in the wrong category!

b. Booking an appointment at the German missions in Turkey

Appointments for visa application interviews in Turkey for all types of visas can only be arranged via the external service provider iDATA, the German missions' only partner organisation in Turkey. The website address is <http://idata.com.tr/en/#/de>. You can reach the company by telephone on +90-(0) 850-460-8493 from 8 am to 12.30 pm and from 1.30 to 6 pm from Monday to Friday.

c. International Organization for Migration (IOM) Family Assistance Offices

Please visit an IOM Family Assistance Office before your appointment at the German mission. You will find these offices in Istanbul, Gaziantep and Beirut. After you have made an appointment at a German mission, you will be contacted by the IOM in good time and given an appointment at an IOM Family Assistance Office, which will help you prepare your visa application appointment. Visiting the IOM Family Assistance Office will enable you to speed up the visa application process and to travel to Germany sooner.

I have received confirmation of an appointment in 2017. Is this correct?

Appointments to apply for a visa to be reunited with a family member who is a recognised Syrian refugee in Germany are currently booked out for many months. We are working to reduce the waiting times, but unfortunately long waiting periods for an appointment are unavoidable because of the large number of applications.

Can I be given an earlier appointment than the one I have been allocated?

We understand that your family wants to be reunited in Germany as soon as possible, but because of the situation in Syria we are currently receiving many requests for appointments from families in extremely difficult circumstances. In order to ensure that all applicants are treated equally, we can only allocate appointments in exactly the order in which they are requested.

Can I be given an earlier appointment in a case of a medical emergency?

In order to ensure that all applicants are treated equally, we process all requests for appointments in the order in which we receive them. We can only make exceptions in cases of acute medical emergencies. This is only possible in cases of potentially life-threatening conditions that cannot be treated locally. This must be proved by a medical certificate and other documentation, which will be inspected by the German mission's accredited doctor.

Can I be given an earlier appointment if my child will otherwise turn 18 / be conscripted into the army in Syria?

Earlier appointments cannot be allocated in such cases. In order for a child to join his or her parents in Germany, timely notification must be submitted to the German Embassy, the competent foreigners authority in Germany or via the Internet portal familyreunion-syria.diplo.de before the child's 18th birthday. In such cases, the fact that a child has turned 18 during the waiting period for a visa application appointment will not have a negative impact on the application. Imminent conscription is not regarded as a special case leading to a shorter waiting period.

Once I have booked an appointment, can I swap with it another person or change it?

Appointments are issued strictly on a personal basis and therefore cannot be swapped. This is also the case if the person who has an appointment is a relative or friend of yours. We cannot make any exceptions to this rule, which serves to prevent abuse of the system.

I cannot attend the appointment I have been allocated. May I receive a special appointment instead?

Unfortunately, we cannot grant you a special appointment if you are unable to attend the appointment you have booked. In such cases, you must apply for a new appointment.

Does everyone need an appointment?

Yes, everyone needs an appointment. The only exception is for German citizens' spouses and children who are resident in Syria. Please enquire at the German Embassy Beirut.

Applicants who were unable to attend their allocated appointment at a German mission in Turkey because of Turkish visa requirements also do not need to apply for a new appointment. Please enquire at the German missions in Turkey.

I often hear rumours that appointments are sold by the Embassy or third parties. Is this true?

Appointments are allocated in line with strict rules. The process is closely reviewed and monitored. It is not possible to sell booked appointments. However, third parties may make an appointment on your behalf. We expressly warn against using the services offered by untrustworthy visa agencies. Earlier appointments are only allocated in exceptional justified and proven medical cases. False rumours about the sale of appointments (for dates in the near future) are often spread by criminals, whose aim is to make money unlawfully.

Crossing the border between Syria and Lebanon for a visa appointment

As a Syrian national, may I enter Lebanon in order to apply for a visa at the German Embassy Beirut?

Entry requirements for Lebanon fall under the country's sovereignty. This means that you can only enter Lebanon if you meet its entry requirements. In the Embassy's experience, the automatic email confirming your appointment at our Embassy is accepted as proof of the reason for your journey when you cross the border to Lebanon. Please take a copy of this email with you. You do not need further confirmation from the Embassy at the border. Please note that the Embassy will not provide such confirmation should you request it. The Embassy is also unable to "register" you at the border.

Does this also apply to Palestinians living in Syria?

If you have ticked the box "I am Palestinian" or "Ich bin Palästinenser" in the electronic appointment management system, your name will automatically be added to a list that the Embassy forwards to the Lebanese authorities each week shortly before the appointment.

The Lebanese border police will not let me enter the country although I have confirmation of my appointment. Can the German Embassy help?

We cannot influence decisions by the Lebanese authorities on who they allow to enter the country.

Crossing the border between Syria and Turkey for a visa appointment

I have an appointment with a German mission in Turkey, but am no longer able to enter the country because of the visa requirement. Can I attend the appointment in Beirut instead?

All booked appointments are only valid for the German mission at which you requested them. This means that you cannot attend the appointment at another mission or transfer it to another mission. If you are unable to attend your appointment because your visa application for Turkey has been rejected or has not been processed in time, you can be allocated a new appointment at short notice. In such cases, you can apply directly for a new appointment at the relevant German mission in Turkey. You must show that you have already been allocated an appointment.

For further information, please contact the German mission in Turkey at which you had your interview appointment.

Syrian passports

Which Syrian passports are accepted?

In order to apply for a visa, all applicants must hold a Syrian passport that is recognised by the German authorities. Only passports issued by the official Syrian passport authorities are accepted, that is, those issued by the official passport authorities in the Syrian provincial capitals (with the exception of Hasaka, Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa – please see below for further information) or, outside Syria, by the embassies and consulates of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Passports issued by other organisations, even if they look like official passports at first glance, cannot be accepted. All applicants are obliged to ensure that their passport was issued by one of the official passport authorities listed above. Third parties who offer to procure passports are not to be trusted.

What about passports from Hasaka, Deir ez-Zor or Raqqa?

Visas cannot be granted to the holders of Syrian passports issued after 1 January 2015 in the provinces of Hasaka, Deir ez-Zor or Raqqa, as the German authorities currently do not have sufficient information about the passport issuers or the documents issued in these provinces. We do not recognise Syrian passports issued in the territories occupied by the terrorist organisation IS or in areas governed by other non-official Syrian organisations. We ask applicants who hold such a passport to present a passport from another issuing authority (e.g. from Damascus or a Syrian embassy or consulate-general).

My passport is not signed. What should I do?

If a Syrian passport holder is aged ten or above, they must sign their name in the space provided for their signature. If you have not signed your passport, you can go to the authority that issued it, sign it there on the last page and have this signature certified. Only then can you apply to the German Embassy for a visa.

I do not have a passport and would like to apply for a visa. Can the German Embassy issue me a passport?

Visas can only be issued if you hold a valid passport with room for a visa. Exceptions to this rule can only be made in very rare cases if you can prove that you do not hold a passport and that it would be too difficult for you to obtain one. The fact that a passport has expired while

its holder is outside Syria, that a young man is subject to conscription or that a fee is charged for passports cannot be used as reasons for not presenting a passport.

A travel document can only be issued to foreigners for their visa application in particularly complex cases. In such cases, you must present detailed proof of why you are unable to obtain a passport. Further details can only be clarified when you apply for the visa.

I do not have a passport. How can I arrange an appointment?

If you can prove that you are unable to obtain a passport, you can arrange an appointment although you do not have a passport.

I cannot return to Syria and I do not have a valid passport. What can I do?

You can apply for a passport from the local Syrian mission in the country where you now live.

What happens once I have applied for a visa?

How long will it take to process my application?

It can currently take a long time to process visa applications for reunification with a family member entitled to protection in Germany. And please note that the processing only starts once you have presented all of the necessary documents. You should therefore present all documents in full when you submit your application.

The foreigners authority has already agreed to our family reunification. Why does it still take so long?

In many cases, we have already received global or individual provisional approval from the German foreigners authorities, but in order to ensure that all applicants are treated equally, we must process the applications in the order in which they were received.

How long does it take to process a student visa?

It currently takes three to five months to process student visa applications. Please note that it may take longer in some cases.

Can I find out about the status of my application?

Once there is new information on your application, the Embassy will inform you immediately. We kindly request that you refrain from enquiring about the status of your application, as such enquires increase the processing time for all applications. Please note that for data protection reasons, information on visa matters can only be given to the applicant or to the person he or she has authorised in writing. Please ensure that we can reach you by telephone or email. If your contact details change, please inform the Visa Section by email, quoting your six-digit case number.

Is my application complete?

Please consult the information sheets and additional information on the website familyreunion-syria.diplo.de to find out what documents you must present in order for you application to be complete. We will check that the documents are complete when you hand in your application at the counter. If something is missing, you can submit further documents afterwards. However, please note that this will delay the processing of your application, as only complete applications can be processed. During the processing, the Visa Section will

contact you and request the necessary documents should any be missing or be additionally required.

In order to ensure that you bring all of the necessary documents to your visa application interview, please visit [an IOM Family Assistance Office before your appointment](#). IOM will help you prepare a complete application.

I cannot return to my home town and do not have all of the documents listed in the information sheet. What can I do?

All types of documents concerning civil status (e.g. marriage certificates and birth certificates) can still be obtained in Syria. They can be issued by the competent authorities in the town where you were registered or by the Central Registry in Damascus. You can apply for the documents yourself or have a first-degree relative do so for you. (He or she will not require further authorisation from you.) You can also request a third party to obtain the documents on your behalf. If a document is missing and you are unable to procure it (e.g. a marriage contract), you must be able to prove why not when you apply for the visa.

Legalisation

What does “legalisation” mean?

Authorities and courts in Germany are free to recognise foreign documents as genuine. However, if every document were checked individually by different courts and authorities all over Germany, this could lead to delays in many areas (such as family reunification and marriages) and to inconsistent decisions. Authorities and courts in Germany therefore use the legalisation process to allow them to recognise a foreign document (e.g. a birth certificate) as genuine. The advantage is that legalised documents can be used rapidly and without a need for further inspection in the German legal system.

The legalisation process is thus not an obligatory procedure required by the German missions abroad. However, organisations based in Germany (e.g. the foreigners authority or the register office), the German Embassy Beirut and many holders of Syrian documents find it beneficial to have their documents certified as genuine in advance. This makes dealings with the authorities in Germany faster and more straightforward.

What types of documents can be legalised?

German missions abroad can only legalise documents concerning civil status, that is, birth certificates, marriage certificates, marriage contracts and similar documents. Please note that your family register booklet is not a document concerning civil status and can therefore not be legalised. Documents that do not concern civil status can no longer be legalised. The German interior and judicial authorities have been informed accordingly. This means that diplomas, certificates and other documents from Syria can no longer be legalised.

How can I have my documents legalised?

Syrian documents concerning civil status can be handed in to the Embassy or sent by post for legalisation. **Please note that the documents must be pre-certified. Further information on the legalisation process is available on the websites of German missions abroad.**

Must I have my documents legalised?

Most authorities in Germany only recognise documents if they have been legalised. As a result, the Embassy always requires legalised documents for the visa or passport application process.

If I have decided to have my documents legalised, when is the best time to do so?

You can submit the documents you need for your visa application for reunification with a family member who is entitled to protection (that is, entitled to asylum or a refugee) to the German Embassy Beirut along with your visa application.

Can I also have my documents legalised in Germany?

Syrian documents for use in Germany can only be legalised by German missions abroad. They cannot be legalised in Germany.

Must I submit my documents in person in order to have them legalised?

Documents can also be submitted by a third party, e.g. a relative or a lawyer. You do not have to submit them in person.

Can the documents to be legalised be sent to the Embassy by post or courier?

You can also send your documents from Germany by post or courier. If you send them from Germany, you will receive an invoice from the Federal Cash Office (Bundeskasse) after the process has been completed. Please note that you will be charged for the costs of sending your documents back to Germany by post.

How can I pay for the legalisation of my documents?

If the documents are handed in to the Embassy, the fee must be paid in cash. If they are sent from Germany by post, you will receive an invoice when the documents are returned to you. You must pay this invoice in Germany.

Do the documents have to be translated in order to be legalised? If so, can translations into English or French be used?

The documents must be translated into German or English. Please check what you will need the document for and find out whether a translation into English will be accepted by the authority in Germany. The translation must be firmly attached to the original document. A copy of the document with the translation will not be accepted.

How long will it take for the documents to be sent back?

After the documents have been received, it usually takes around three weeks, and occasionally longer, for them to be processed. It then takes about two more weeks for them to be sent back. In our experience, it takes several weeks for post to arrive from Germany. We therefore ask you to kindly refrain from enquiring about your documents during the first two months after they were sent. Unnecessary enquiries delay the processing of all requests.

I have documents, but they do not have a pre-certification stamp from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Can the documents still be legalised? Can the Syrian Embassy pre-certify the documents?

Documents that do not have a pre-certification stamp from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs cannot be legalised. This pre-certification cannot be carried out by other authorities.

Documents can also be presented to the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs by third parties. The document holder does not have to do so in person.

Returning to Syria via Lebanon

As a Syrian, can I return from Germany to Syria via Lebanon?

We are receiving an increasing number of reports that Syrian nationals arriving in Lebanon from Germany by aeroplane are being denied entry to the country at its only international airport, Rafic Hariri Airport in Beirut, in certain cases. According to information received by the German Embassy Beirut from the Lebanese border police, this applies to holders of Syrian passports who only have an entry or exit stamp for Turkey rather than an entry and exit stamp. If a passport only contains one of these stamps, the Lebanese border police assume that the passport holder has crossed a border illegally in the past and refuse entry to Lebanon, even if the passport holder has a residence permit as a refugee in Germany.

Syrians who are denied entry or transit must return to Germany. This is why the airlines that fly this route are increasingly insisting that passengers purchase a return ticket to Germany. People who remain in the airport transit area are not affected by this regulation.

The German Embassy Beirut is discussing this matter with the Lebanese authorities, but cannot exert any influence on the decision by the local border authorities in individual cases. We therefore recommend that you contact the Lebanese Embassy in Berlin and the airline in good time before your flight.