

Topical note

**Kazakhstan: Passports, ID cards and supporting documents**



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## **SUMMARY**

This topical note deals with travel and ID documents in Kazakhstan, including passports, national ID cards and birth certificates. The report describes the procedures for having these documents issued. It also provides an assessment of the prevalence of corruption and forgery of Kazakh passports.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report deals with the issuance of ordinary passports in Kazakhstan, in addition to information on the supporting documents passport issuance is based on, including ID cards. It also deals with corruption and opportunities to purchase false documents.

The report is primarily based on information obtained during Landinfo's fact finding trip to Kazakhstan during the period 25 October - 5 November 2010. Landinfo had conversations with the Norwegian Embassy in Astana regarding the rules and practices for passport issuance. In addition, issues on document notoriety, amongst other things, were discussed with several sources, including human rights organisations in the country. Some of the organisations wanted to be anonymous and therefore are not mentioned by name.

In addition to information obtained from meetings with various sources in Kazakhstan, Landinfo has obtained information from the Kazakh government's websites and from news articles and reports available online.

## 2. DOCUMENT TYPES AND ISSUANCE PROCEDURES

### 2.1 BIRTH CERTIFICATES

Birth certificates are issued by the local registration offices (Zapis Aktov Grazhdanskogo Sostoyaniya / ZAGS)<sup>1</sup> at the place the child was born or at the place where both parents or one of the parents have their residency registered. Birth certificates can also be obtained via application to the so-called CON (Cent obsluzhivaniya naseleniya),<sup>2</sup> which is a registration office. The office is subject to the Ministry of Justice (Electronic government, n.d.).

The Norwegian Embassy in Astana states that the actual issuance of birth certificates is done by ZAGS, but that individual citizens can also apply to CON to obtain birth certificates there (phone conversation February 2011). CON has offices in all cities and regions in Kazakhstan, including three offices in the Astana region.

Birth certificates are issued to Kazakh citizens, foreigners and stateless persons.

To obtain a birth certificate, a person must submit a copy of the ID cards and marriage certificate of the mother and father of the child. If the mother is not married and does not have a marriage certificate, the child is registered with the information the mother provides. In addition, a medical certificate must be submitted for the child, or evidence from two witnesses that birth took place. The mother must specify the child's first name and last name (Electronic government, n.d.).

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<sup>1</sup> Записи актов гражданского состояния

<sup>2</sup> Cent обслуживания населения. In the English-language source literature, this is referred to as *Center of Services of Population*.

The hospital where the child was born collects and disseminates the documents and sends them to ZAGS. If the child was not born in a hospital, the parents themselves deliver the documents to ZAGS. In addition to the documents mentioned above, which are always required to obtain a birth certificate, the parents must also submit a written explanation as to why the hospital is not submitting the documents. The documents can also be sent to ZAGS via CON (the Norwegian Embassy in Astana, interview October 2010 and e-mail February 2011).

In addition to the holder's first name and last name, a birth certificate also contains the mother and father's names (Electronic government, n.d.).

According to information from the German Embassy in Astana, mothers who do not want to specify the child's father's name on the child's birth certificate may put their own father's name on the child's birth certificate. However, "no father" may also be listed on the child's birth certificate (interview November 2010).

The birth certificate also contains name of the place where the child was born and registration number with ZAGS. The deadline for registering a newborn child with ZAGS is two months after the child's birth, according to the law on marriage and families. In cases where ZAGS receives application papers within the set deadline, the process of obtaining a birth certificate takes two business days (Electronic government, n.d.). According to information from the Norwegian Embassy, the process usually takes three to four days.

It does happen that children are registered after this deadline. In such cases, the parents must explain in writing why the child was not registered within the deadline when applying for a birth certificate. In this type of case, the process will take 30 days (Electronic government, n.d.).

In cases of stillbirth, the child must be registered no later than five days after birth.

Birth certificates have a blue, hard cover. Until 2005, the birth certificates had a green cover.

When needed, birth certificates work as an ID document until the age of 16.

If a birth certificate is lost, a new birth certificate can be obtained from CON (German Embassy, interview November 2010).

## **2.2 ID CARDS**

All Kazakh citizens are issued ID cards (udostovereniye lichnosti) at the age of 16. The card is renewed at ages 25 and 45. After renewal at age 45, the ID card is valid for life.

In order to obtain an ID card, the applicant must submit their own birth certificate and one of their parents' birth certificates, in addition to a copy of permanent residency registration.

The fee for obtaining an ID card is KZT 282 (equivalent to about NOK 15).

The ID cards are issued by CON (Norwegian Embassy in Astana, interview October 2010).

ID cards are not issued by Kazakh embassies abroad. If a Kazakh citizen abroad needs a new ID card, they must submit the necessary documentation to the Kazakh embassy in the area. The embassy will then forward the application to the government in Kazakhstan. Normal processing time is three to six months, but the process may also take longer. The price of this service is USD 15 (Landinfo 2009).

### **2.2.1 ID numbers**

ID cards contain a 12-figure number. From 2009, the cards have an electronic chip code. The plan is for the ID cards to eventually contain a number that will be stored in a database. This number will be one common number instead of the three different numbers that are currently registered for Kazakh citizens; social security number, tax payer number and ID number.

Information on residency registration is also stamped on the card. When moving, the residency registration is changed and a new ID card with a new address can be issued. However, it is not a requirement that new ID cards be issued in connection with moving (Norwegian Embassy in Astana, interview October 2010).

### **2.2.2 ID card features**

ID cards are used in all contexts in which a person must identify themselves, including all communications with government offices, post offices and banks. ID cards must also be presented when purchasing train tickets. It is also stated that ID cards must be shown if a person is stopped by the police and asked to identify themselves. Several Kazakh sources have stated that Kazakh citizens always carry ID cards. People who live in rural areas where conditions are poor also carry ID cards. Alternatively, they carry a copy of the ID card (Norwegian Embassy in Astana, interview October 2010 and e-mail February 2011).

ID cards can also be used as travel documents to neighbouring countries Russia and Kyrgyzstan. The Norwegian Embassy in Moscow (2009) confirm that Kazakh citizens can travel to Russia using their national ID card and Russian citizens can travel to Kazakhstan with their Russian domestic passport and there is also an agreement between Russia and Kazakhstan that regulates this relationship.

Kazakh citizens who travel to Russia must register with the police within three days. They can then legally stay in the country without any further permission for 90 days before they leave or possibly obtain a form of residency (Norwegian Embassy in Astana, e-mail February 2011).

Both passports and ID cards can thus be used to travel to neighbouring countries. However, it is stated that in practice, it is mainly people who live in border areas of Kyrgyzstan and Russia who use ID cards to travel to neighbouring countries. If a Kazakh passport is used, the passport is stamped when exiting. ID cards are not stamped (Norwegian Embassy in Astana, e-mail February 2011). A representative of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee also states that passports are primarily used when going on longer trips and that ID cards are usually used as travel documents when travelling to Russia or Kyrgyzstan (e-mail, February 2011).

## 2.3 RESIDENCY REGISTRATION

Residency registration is performed by the Kazakh registration office, CON. The residency registration itself is entered in a so-called home book (*domovaya kniga*)<sup>3</sup> - which also goes by the name "blue book". The book, which in reality is a booklet, contains several pages of residency registrations. When moving to a new place, the individual home book is transferred to a new landlord/tenant. The homebook follows the apartment/house and not the person, and thus contains the names of both current and former residents. Former tenant/landlord's names are marked with a stamp that shows that they no longer live at the residence, and new residents are marked with another stamp that shows that they live in the residence.

Name and address of each family member is listed in the home book. This book is usually kept at home with the family.

Rights such as access to medical treatment and schooling are connected to the residency registration (Norwegian Embassy in Astana, interview and e-mail correspondence). However, IOM states that even if claims to health services are formally connected to residency registration, this is not strictly practiced. Even without a residency registration, a person can expect to get access to health services (interview, October 2010).

## 2.4 PASSPORTS

In the first years after Kazakhstan declared itself an independent state in 1990, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, citizens used their old red Soviet passports. The procedures for obtaining new national passports for Kazakh citizens started in 1994.

The first passports that were issued were used as both domestic passports and foreign passports. To be used as a foreign passport, an exit visa was added (Danish Immigration Service & Norwegian Directorate of Immigration 2001).

According to OSCE (2001), the exit visa was abolished in 2001. The U.S. Department of State (2009) states that the exit visa is required for those who want to settle permanently abroad.

Today, there are three types of passports in Kazakhstan: ordinary passports, diplomatic passports and official passports. Ordinary passports have a blue cover. Official passports have black covers and diplomatic passports have green covers. The rest of the information in this chapter deals with ordinary passports.

Issuance of passports is regulated in accordance with the Kazakh government's decree "Concerning Approval of the Rules for Documentation and Registration of the Citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan" dated 12 July 2000 (Electronic government, n.d.).

The Ministry of the Interior was formerly responsible for passport issuance (The International Bureau of Human Rights and Rule of Law, interview in Almaty,

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<sup>3</sup> ДОМОВАЯ КНИГА



November 2010).<sup>4</sup> Today, passports are issued by CON, which is subject to the Ministry of Justice.

#### **2.4.1 Passport application and issuance**

Passport applicants must go in person to the CON at the place or region they have their residency registered. For example, Astana is divided into three regions and has three CON offices. In order to obtain a passport, a person must present a copy of their home book, birth certificate, and marriage certificate if any. If they are in possession of their old passport, this should also be submitted. Passport photos can be taken at any CON office. CON checks the supporting documents for issuing the passport and keeps copies of all supporting documents.

Children must also come in person to obtain a passport. This is basically so that children will also have their own passports, but the Norwegian Embassy states that they still see examples of children entered on their parents' passports even if more and more children now have their own passports. Children who do not apply for their own passport can be entered on their parents' passports at CON.

The process of obtaining a new passport takes two months, but it is possible to accelerate the process in emergencies.

The passports are light blue. New passports are issued for 10 years. However, the old passports can have different durations. The Norwegian Embassy in Astana states that they have seen old passports with various durations.

The price of obtaining a passport is KZT 5652 (about NOK 250). The fee is paid at the CON office.

Kazakhstan is in the process of issuing biometric passports to their citizens. The first passports were issued 5 January 2009 (Kanagutuly 2009). It was previously announced by the Kazakh government that the entire population would have new biometric passports by 12 August 2010. However, the deadline was postponed, according to the Norwegian Embassy. After January 2009, only biometric passports are issued.

#### **2.4.2 Issuance of passports abroad**

The Kazakh Embassy in Norway states that the embassy does not issue passports, but they can help contact the responsible authorities in their home country (Landinfo 2009).

#### **2.4.3 Information on ethnicity in biometric passports**

Ethnicity was formerly listed on Kazakh passports. Information on ethnicity was initially omitted from the new biometric passports that have been issued since 5 January 2009. However, the Kazakh government decided in a decree on 13 February 2009 to once again include information on ethnicity in the passports, but that it is

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<sup>4</sup> The organisation was formed in 1993 and was registered as an organisation in Kazakhstan in 1995. The organisation conducts human rights work in Kazakhstan and cooperates with UNHCR, amongst others, and conducts interviews of asylum seekers who come to Kazakhstan and apply for refugee status with UNHCR.

optional whether or not an individual citizen wishes to indicate their ethnic affiliation. From the beginning of the issuance of biometric passports on 5 January 2009 until the government decided on freedom of choice with regards to listing ethnicity, 2,700 new biometric passports were issued.

The issue of registration of ethnicity on passports has created a major debate in Kazakhstan. Many believe that indicating ethnicity creates a rift in the population and generally do not understand why the government gave in to the opposition, who wanted to list ethnicity on passports. It appears that Kazakhstan had to introduce biometric passports as a condition of membership in the International Civil Aviation Organisation, which they applied for in 2008. However, information on ethnicity on passports was not a requirement for membership in this organisation (Kanagatuly 2009).

The Norwegian Embassy in Astana states that ethnicity is now listed on almost all of the passports they see in connection with visa issuance (phone conversation February 2011).

### **3. LOCAL AND CENTRAL REGISTERS**

Kazakhstan is divided into 14 so-called *oblast*, which can be translated as regions. Kazakhstan has local registration offices (ZAGS) spread around the different regions. The central population register in Astana stores all data from the local registration offices.

The local registration offices register all information about a person's civil status; birth, death, marriage, adoption, paternity and name changes. This information is also found in the central population register in Astana (Norwegian Embassy, interview October 2010).

The human rights organisation Kazakhstan Bureau on Human Rights and Rule of Law in Almaty states that there are strict procedures for entering information on birth certificates. The requirements for documentation are followed in accordance with laws and regulations (interview November 2011).

### **4. CORRUPTION**

Corruption is not a new problem in Central Asia. Central Asia also had a reputation for major corruption problems in Soviet times. Bowers et al. (2009) from Liberty University points out an explanation that Central Asia was considered to be appealing to party leaders and pensioned officers in Soviet times, and that corruption flourished as a result. However, the transition to a market economy after the dissolution of the Soviet Union led to radical upheavals in the entire state structure in the Central Asian countries – similar to the other former Soviet republics – and the

collapse of trade, increase in poverty and the rising degree of corruption is a common problem for these countries (Jensen 2010).

Kazakhstan stands out by being in a far more favourable economic position than the other Central Asian countries. It is the most developed and promising country. The country has major income from exports of oil and gas, and has a gross domestic product of almost USD 8,000 per capita, almost on par with Russia (Jensen 2010).

The level of corruption in Kazakhstan is more modest than many of the other republics. Kazakhstan is in 120th place out of 180 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2009 (TI 2009), where 180th place is ranked as the most corrupt. As a comparison, it could be mentioned that Russia is in 146th place and neighbouring countries Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are in 158th place, 162nd place, 168th place and 174th place, respectively.

The major changes after the Soviet Union's collapse led to the creation of a separate agency within the state administration in 1994 which would ensure that individuals would not enrich themselves unjustly. The agency (currently called Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on fighting with Economic and Corruption Crimes (Financial Police)) has the task of exposing and investigating economic crime and corruption. The agency reports directly to the president (Financial Police, n.d.).

According to a report from the Danish Immigration Service & Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (2001), Kazakhstan was the first former Soviet republic to have its own law against corruption. The law is from 1998 (Law on Corruption 1998).

## **5. FALSE DOCUMENTS**

While false documents seem to be a major problem in the other Central Asian countries, the problem could be said to be less in Kazakhstan. In any case, few of the sources Landinfo spoke with thought it was easy to buy a false passport or create passports in other illegitimate ways.

The Norwegian Embassy states that since they opened the embassy in 2008, they have not seen cases of false passports when issuing visas. However, the embassy states that they have seen cases of passports without signatures, but that this does not necessarily mean that the passport is false. The embassy also states that it is difficult to obtain exact information on this topic, but believes that it may be possible to obtain genuine documents with false content. It is also possible to buy false documents. According to the embassy, there are many examples of the cases just mentioned. For example, it is not uncommon to see advertisements in newspapers about the sale of residency registration and home books (interview in Astana, October 2010).

The International Organization of Migration (IOM) also states that false passports do not pose any problem in Kazakhstan. There are middlemen who organise this type of task, but this is very unusual. IOM argues that it is difficult to purchase false

passports in Kazakhstan, and that if a person wanted to buy a false passport, they would have to pay a very high amount of money (interview in Astana, October 2010). IOM stated the same thing to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration on a fact finding trip to Kazakhstan in 2003. IOM said that Kazakhstan has a good passport system and that it is unlikely that the system is abused (UDI 2003).

The human rights organisation Kazakhstan International Bureau on Human Rights and Rule of Law in Almaty also states that they rarely come across false Kazakh passports. The organisation has seen cases of false passports, and refers to Chechnyans who have come to Kazakhstan and who have submitted Kazakh passports. These passports were acquired on the basis of false supporting documents, so that the passports themselves were genuine, but based on false information. It is stated that there are middlemen who can organise and fix most things, but this is not a simple process and not common. The organisation points out that there is strict control of the information in the birth certificates. The procedures for obtaining passports are also strict and supporting documents such as ID cards and home books are checked carefully (interview, November 2010). A representative of the German Embassy in Astana stated that they have only seen one case of a false passport through their work at the embassy. The passport was a false Russian domestic passport and belonged to a Chechnyan (interview in Astana, November 2010).

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