

Report

**Kyrgyzstan: Passports and ID  
documents**



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## **SUMMARY**

The report concerns rules and procedures for issuing passports and ID documents in Kyrgyzstan, as well as other significant conditions for evaluating document notoriety.

Kyrgyzstan has mostly continued the Soviet Union's systems for registering personal information. Births, marriages and deaths are registered by local register offices (ZAGS) or by municipal authorities, while passports and national ID cards are issued by separate passport offices (OVIR/UPVR). Passports and ID documents are required to access to legal employment, public services and social/economic rights. There is estimated to be around 25,000 people, primarily former citizens of the Soviet Union, who have unresolved citizenship and missing passport/ID documents. Kyrgyzstan introduced national ID cards and machine-readable passports/travel documents that meet the international standards for security in 2004-2006. A series of changes have since been made in the passport system in order to increase document security. However, corruption continues to be very widespread. This means that it is both costly and time-consuming for citizens to obtain passports/ID cards, and that fake passports still are a problem.

# CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
1.1 The general documentation situation in kyrgyzstan .....	5
<b>2. Citizenship legislation</b> .....	<b>6</b>
2.1 New citizenship legislation.....	6
2.2 Statelessness .....	7
2.3 Dual citizenship .....	8
<b>3. Civil data: DOCUMENT TYPES AND ISSUANCE PROCEDURES</b> .....	<b>8</b>
3.1 Birth.....	9
3.2 Marriage .....	10
3.3 Death.....	10
3.4 "PIN" – ID numbers .....	11
<b>4. Propiska – Residency registration</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>5. Passport/travel documents</b> .....	<b>12</b>
5.1 Soviet 1974 passports .....	13
5.2 1994 passports .....	13
5.3 ID cards .....	14
5.4 National passports – 2006 passports.....	15
5.5 Registering and checking ID information.....	16
5.5.1 <i>Central database</i> .....	16
5.6 Border control.....	16
<b>6. Corruption</b> .....	<b>17</b>
6.1 Corruption culture .....	17
6.2 Measures to limit corruption in the passport system .....	17
6.3 False documents .....	18
<b>7. References</b> .....	<b>19</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The report concerns rules and procedures for issuing passports and ID documents in Kyrgyzstan. A brief account of the general documentation situation and rules for citizenship is made in the introduction. Then the systems for registering and checking ID information are presented along with other significant conditions for evaluating the notoriety of various documents. The report will mostly deal with documents issued by Kyrgyz authorities, even if some of the country's citizens have identification documents issued by Soviet authorities.

It should be noted that applicable regulations are generally referred to, but that laws, regulations and directives that regulate this field may be in conflict with the constitution, other laws and/or established practice. The report does not seek to provide an exhaustive account of how regulations should be interpreted or what is common practice, and it must be noted that, for various reasons, there will be deviations from the regulations and procedures described here. Amongst other things, corruption and the fact that the passport system has been in a process of change since 2005 allows room for variation in practice.

The procedures for issuance of passports will also change in the future as a result of ongoing regulatory work, measures against corruption and the resource situation. There is major international focus on document security and border control in the region, and the USA, EU and international organisations all contribute resources.

### 1.1 THE GENERAL DOCUMENTATION SITUATION IN KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan declared itself an independent republic on 31 August 1991 when the Soviet Union was dissolved. Kyrgyzstan has a comprehensive public administration, and has mostly continued the Soviet Union's systems for registering personal information. Kyrgyzstan, like most other previous Soviet republics, is a document community. Passports and ID documents are essential for access to legal employment, public services and economic rights. The supply of government-issued personal documents is basically good, and there is a close correlation between various documents such as passports, ID cards, residency registration (*propiska*), birth certificates, etc. One document is a prerequisite for obtaining another document.

However, many Kyrgyz do not have passports that are approved as travel documents, because they do not need to travel abroad (Landinfo 2010). Furthermore Kyrgyz do not need passports to travel to Russia for work. Since 2000, Russia and Kyrgyzstan have had a mutual agreement on visa-free entry and travel using a domestic passport/national ID card (Norwegian Embassy in Moscow 2009).

Kyrgyz citizens generally have a practical need for a domestic passport/national ID card in order to register residence, get access to public services, pay taxes, open bank accounts, participate in elections, etc. It is legally required to identify oneself to the police, but such ID checks are generally uncommon, so people do not necessarily need to carry their ID cards/passports (Kyrgyz source, interview August 2010). People who cannot present a passport when checked can be detained for up to 15 days (Aprodev 2010).

It is unknown whether it is difficult for individual groups of Kyrgyz citizens to obtain passports (Landinfo 2008). UNHCR estimates that over 17,000 people in Kyrgyzstan have unresolved citizenship, and that a lack of passports and other ID documents mainly is a problem for this group (UNHCR 2011b). (See chapter 2 on citizenship legislation).

During the introduction of new passports and ID cards in 2004-2006 there was a shortage of passports. Subsequently Kyrgyz with expired passports experienced problems renewing their passports (IRIN 2006). However, it should generally no longer be a problem that people must wait to obtain passports and ID cards and thus lack valid identification or travel documents (FIDH 2009, p. 48). (See chapter 5 on passports/travel documents).

Violent clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan in May 2010 led to many passports and ID documents being destroyed. In April 2011, the lack of documents was still a problem for a large number of people (UNHCR 2011a). Still, lack of documents was not mentioned by OSCE (2011) as a problem preventing people entitled to vote from voting in the presidential election in October 2011.

## **2. CITIZENSHIP LEGISLATION**

### **2.1 NEW CITIZENSHIP LEGISLATION**

Kyrgyz citizenship is the prerequisite for obtaining a Kyrgyz passport. Kyrgyz legislation is designed with the idea of solving problems connected to an unknown number of stateless people and citizens who lack valid passports.

Citizenship is regulated by *Law on Citizenship of the Kyrgyz republic*, which came into effect on 1 June 2007, and *Regulation on the procedure for consideration of Citizenship issues* of 25 October 2007 (UNHCR 2009, p. 11). This legislation replaces Kyrgyzstan's first citizenship legislation applicable since 18 February 1994.

An important amendment relates to previous Soviet citizens who became stateless after the fall of the Soviet Union. People who had residency registered in Kyrgyz territory when Kyrgyzstan became an independent republic<sup>1</sup> automatically became Kyrgyz citizens unless they had applied for citizenship in another state (UNHCR 2009). Soviet citizens who did not have residency registered had to do so before they could apply for citizenship. (See chapter 4 on propiska.)

A significant number of previous Soviet citizens still do not have Kyrgyz citizenship (UNHCR 2009). The new law is supposed to make it easier for stateless people to obtain Kyrgyz citizenship. Unlike previous legislation, there is no absolute requirement on residency registration, and expired Soviet passports can be used to document identity.

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<sup>1</sup> According to UNHCR (2009) it was crucial to the question of citizenship where a person's residency was registered on 15 December 1990 and 18 February 1994 (when the citizenship legislation came into effect). However, this is not crucial according to the citizenship legislation of 2007.

According to article 9 in the Kyrgyz Law on Citizenship (2007), all types of national passports for Kyrgyz citizens, as well as birth certificates and other documents that confirm identity, can be used to document Kyrgyz citizenship. Former citizens of the Soviet Union may, according to the law, be recognized as Kyrgyz citizens if they have been permanently residing in the country for five years and have not applied for, nor have, any other citizenship (UNHCR 2009, p. 11, 13; Law on Citizenship 2007, art. 5). According to UNHCR (2009, p. 14), the law has not worked as intended, because in practice there is still a requirement for a valid passport in order to obtain citizenship and Kyrgyz passports/ID cards. (See chapter 5.3 on ID cards).

Children acquire Kyrgyz citizenship at birth if both parents are Kyrgyz citizens. If only one of the parents is a Kyrgyz citizen and the other has another citizenship, both parents' written consent is required for the child to be granted Kyrgyz citizenship. If one of the parents is stateless and the other one is a Kyrgyz citizen, no such consent is required (Law on Citizenship 2007, art.12). If the child is born in Kyrgyzstan and both parents are stateless, according to article 12 (4) in the Law on Citizenship (2007), the child is a Kyrgyz citizen if the parents are permanent residents<sup>2</sup> in Kyrgyzstan.

## **2.2 STATELESSNESS**

Article 3 in the Law on Citizenship (2007) defines a stateless person as a person who is not a citizen of Kyrgyzstan and who cannot document citizenship in another state. This means that people who do not have passports or cannot document their citizenship are considered stateless (UNHCR 2011, p. 7).

UNHCR has recently drawn attention to statelessness in Central Asia, and identifies five groups who have problems obtaining Kyrgyz citizenship and/or obtaining Kyrgyz passports/ID cards (UNHCR 2009, p. 15-18):

- 1) Former Uzbek citizens who, according to Uzbek law, are no longer considered Uzbek citizens because they have spent more than five years in Kyrgyzstan without registering at the Uzbek Embassy in Bishkek, and no longer have a valid Uzbek passport. About 80 % of this group are women who originally come from Uzbekistan and who have married Kyrgyz (UNHCR 2009, p. 25).
- 2) Former Soviet citizens who came to Kyrgyzstan after the first citizenship legislation came into effect in February 1994. According to the new law, this group of stateless people qualifies for Kyrgyz citizenship if they have been residents in Kyrgyzstan for at least five years.
- 3) Former Soviet citizens who had their residence registered in Kyrgyzstan before February 1994. This group was considered Kyrgyz citizens even according to the old citizenship legislation, but they never replaced their Soviet passports.
- 4) Children of stateless people who are unable to provide documents for both

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<sup>2</sup> The law in English translation uses the concept "permanently residing".

parents.

5) Children of migrants with changed citizenship. This especially applies to children of Kyrgyz labour migrants to Russia who have obtained Russian citizenship without having applied for a change in citizenship for their child. Therefore, Russia will not automatically recognize children as Russian citizens. Even if the children are Kyrgyz citizens according to Kyrgyz legislation, they will probably have problems obtaining passports when they turn 16 years old, because they cannot provide documentation that the parents are Kyrgyz at the time of application.

### **2.3 DUAL CITIZENSHIP**

Kyrgyzstan does not recognize dual citizenship with any of the neighbouring countries (China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan) (UNHCR 2011, p. 13). Otherwise, dual citizenship is dependent on whether there is an intergovernmental agreement. Kyrgyz can obtain Russian citizenship under a simplified procedure<sup>3</sup>, but dual citizenship is not allowed (Norwegian Embassy in Moscow, e-mail correspondence September-October 2011). However, many Kyrgyz have obtained Russian citizenship without being released from their Kyrgyz citizenship (Abdrakhmanova & Kachiev 2009). Kyrgyz authorities assume that about half of the Kyrgyz who live in Russia have obtained Russian citizenship (Norwegian Embassy in Moscow, e-mail correspondence September 2011). There is a large number of Kyrgyz labour migrants in Russia. Kyrgyz authorities estimate that between 300,000 and 700,000 Kyrgyz are working in Russia at any given time (Kabar 2011).

## **3. CIVIL DATA: DOCUMENT TYPES AND ISSUANCE PROCEDURES**

According to article 82 in the Law on civil registration (1996), the following civil data must be registered in Kyrgyzstan:

- birth
- marriage
- divorce
- adoption
- paternity
- name change
- death
- change in citizenship

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<sup>3</sup> Note that since 24 October 2011, Kyrgyz citizens can no longer apply for Russian citizenship under simplified procedures.



Administratively, Kyrgyzstan is divided into seven regions or *oblast*: Batken, Chuy, Jalal- Abad, Naryn, Osh, Talas and Issik-Kul. In addition, the capital Bishkek has an administratively independent status equivalent to that of an oblast. Each oblast is further divided into *rayons*, which constitute the next level of administration. Cities and towns have their own administration (Alymkulatov & Kulatov 2001).

Local registration offices, or ZAGS<sup>4</sup>, are responsible for registering civil data and issuing certificates. Municipal authorities (*aiyul okmutu*) perform these tasks in rural areas that do not have ZAGS (Alymkulatov & Kulatov 2001, p. 538).

Kyrgyz authorities retain two numbered copies of certificates for births, marriages/divorces and deaths. One copy will be archived in ZAGS, while one copy is forwarded for statistical purposes (HMN 2009, p. 43). When a certificate is lost, you either inquire with the local ZAGS or the central population register in Bishkek (Kyrgyz source, interview August 2011).

### 3.1 BIRTH

Births are registered by local ZAGS or municipal authorities/*aiyul okmutu* at the child's place of birth or (one of) the parents' place of residence (HMN 2009). Birth certificates are issued based on the certificate from the hospital detailing time and circumstances of the birth (form 103/y), and a statement from one or both parents (HMN 2009). Home births are confirmed by the midwife, authorized birth assistant or two witnesses (UNHCR 2011). Births are registered free of charge and registrations must be made no later than two months after the birth. However, according to UNHCR (2011), late birth registration is possible.

According to article 171 in Kyrgyz Family Code (2005), the following information must be registered:

- birthplace
- time of birth
- gender
- first name, family/last name and patronym (father's first name and suffix)
- the parents' first name and patronym (father's first name and suffix)
- the parents' place of residence and nationality

Paternity is automatically established if the child is born to a marriage. If the parents are not married, paternity is normally established on the basis that the parents jointly forward a request to ZAGS. Paternity can be established at court if the father does not acknowledge paternity (Family Code 2005, art. 49). If the mother is unmarried and the paternity is not established, the child will get the mother's family/last name and a name and patronym determined by the mother. The child's patronym normally consists of the father's name and a suffix, but the parents are free to choose a

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<sup>4</sup> Russian acronym for Zapis Aktov Grazhdanskogo Sostoyaniya (Записи актов гражданского состояния / Civil Registry)

patronym. According to Russian/Soviet naming tradition, the suffix is typically "-ov/ova" (son/daughter of), while the same in Kyrgyz is "uulu" or "kyzy" (Dalbaeva 2011).

Kyrgyzstan has incomplete birth records (U.S. Department of State 2011). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended in 2004 that authorities take measures to ensure that children in rural areas are registered at birth, including through awareness-raising campaigns for families and traditional birth assistants, and establishing mobile registration units, etc. (CRC 2004, p. 7). Birth registration has not been an issue in state reports or committee recommendation after 2004. According to UNHCR (2009), stateless people and children of parents who are both stateless often lack birth certificates.

### **3.2 MARRIAGE**

Marriages are entered at local ZAGS where both parties have to appear in person. The parties must notify ZAGS in advance that they want to enter marriage and present passports, birth certificates and documentation that there is no basis for denying marriage. According to article 14 in the Family Code (2005), it is an obstacle to marriage if one of the parties is already married, is a minor or is legally incompetent. The parties cannot be closely related either (parent/child or siblings). Marriage certificates are issued for a fee.

A marriage must be registered by ZAGS to be valid and grant rights under the law. Religious leaders do not have the authority to marry. The extent of unregistered marriages is unknown. Especially in rural districts, there are many couples who do not register their marriage, but only conduct a religious marriage ceremony (BBC News 2010). Polygamy occurs, although it is illegal, and it is believed that polygamy is especially prevalent in the southern part of the country (Toursunof 2007). In order to prevent polygamy, amongst other things, Kyrgyz authorities have forbidden mullahs from performing religious marriage ceremonies for couples who cannot provide a marriage certificate (RFE/RL 2011). According to Landinfo's information, there is not any further detailed information on how this prohibition works in practice.

UNHCR points out that stateless people and people who do not have valid passports have problems registering marriages (UNHCR 2009).

Divorce is granted by ZAGS if the parties agree and do not have common children. In other cases, divorces are granted by courts (Family Code 2005, art. 21).

### **3.3 DEATH**

Death certificates are issued free of charge by ZAGS where the death occurred or at the deceased's place of residence. This is done on the basis of a medical certificate from a doctor or hospital (HMN 2009).

Name, birth date, marital status and date of death and cause of death are registered. According to UNHCR (2009), it is also a requirement that the deceased's birth certificate be provided, and in some cases this can lead to the death not being registered. This mostly applies to stateless people and their children.

### 3.4 "PIN" – ID NUMBERS

An ID number is needed to obtain a passport. The ID number is referred to by English-language sources as "Personal Identification Number (PIN)" or "Social Security Number". According to information posted on the website of the Kyrgyz Embassy in Washington D.C., PINs are issued by the Kyrgyz Social Security Office, and Kyrgyz who lack a PIN can get it by inquiring at the Social Security Office on the Internet<sup>5</sup> (The Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to the USA and Canada n.d.).

The ID number was originally connected to employment. The Kyrgyz Ministry of Labour assigns employees an ID number when they enter legal employment for the first time. This ID number was necessary to pay taxes and deductions for pension (Kyrgyz source, interview August 2011). Upon receiving health services, you used another ID number, but now the same ID number will be linked to all public services (Kyrgyz source, interview August 2011).

## 4. PROPISKA – RESIDENCY REGISTRATION

All Kyrgyz citizens must have *propiska*, i.e. have their residence registered at the address at which they permanently reside or are temporarily staying (more than 45 days) (Aprodev 2010). In practice, *propiska* regulates access to a range of social rights and welfare benefits, such as health services, education and social security. *Propiska* is also a prerequisite for self-employment, taking out loans, gaining access to travel, civil proceedings and being registered with the tax authorities (Aprodev 2010).

In accordance with the Law on Internal Migration, only a passport must be submitted to be temporarily registered, but underlying directorates also have their own provisions that establish requirements on additional documentation. Such provisions are not in accordance with the law, nor are they publicly announced, but are still binding for local OVIR (passport departments/departments for visa and registration) that register residency (Aprodev 2010).

Requirements on presenting documentation that you own or rent a residence prevent many people from registering their residence. As a rule, landlords do not want to disclose that they have tenants, because it means increased taxes and fees, and therefore many people rent illegally (SRC 2009). The provisions generally allow a lot of room for discretion and the requirements vary. In order to be temporarily registered in Bishkek, for example, OVIR employees are actually free to impose conditions, because the local regulations provide for requirements on "any other document providing grounds for issuing temporary *propiska*". This contributes both to corruption and to people not registering their residency (Aprodev 2010).

The residency registration was previously stamped on the national passport (1994 passports). Since residency registration is now shown on the ID card, a new ID card must be issued when changing residency registration (Adilet, e-mail correspondence

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<sup>5</sup> Социальный Фонд Кыргызской Республики [www.sf.kg](http://www.sf.kg).

July 2011). The residency registration is also a prerequisite for obtaining an ID card/passport, and it is required to present a passport to register residency (Aprodev 2010). (See chapter 3.3 on ID cards). An ID card/passport must also be presented to be unregistered at a previous address (Kyrgyz source, interview August 2011).

Missing residency registration leads to criminal liability. People who do not have their residency registered, but who can present passports, risk a fine of KGS 50 (NOK 6). People who cannot present a passport can be detained for up to 15 days (Aprodev 2010). Also, police officers who are responsible for enforcing the law risk fines for allowing someone to not have their residency registered. The same applies to employers who employ people without residency registration. However, the sources Landinfo has consulted portray it as normal that Kyrgyz do not change their residency registration when they move (Kyrgyz source, interview August 2011; Representative for international organisation, interview November 2011). In a survey from 2009, the American University in Central Asia found that 19 % of inhabitants in Bishkek did not have their residency registered (Aprodev 2010).

## 5. PASSPORT/TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

The first Kyrgyz national passports were issued in 1994 and were combined domestic and foreign passports. During the period 2004-2006, this passport was replaced with a separate passport for foreign travel and an ID card for domestic use (Landinfo 2010). In order to increase document security, the Kyrgyz authorities simultaneously implemented multiple changes in the system for issuing passports, with assistance from IOM.

According to IOM (n.d.), passports are issued by twelve regional passport departments or OVIR<sup>6</sup>. Local passport departments can no longer issue passports, but must send applications for passports to regional OVIR, who check and approve the application. The name of the OVIR employee that has approved the passport application must be stated in the application form. All passport information is posted in a central database that was created when the new passports were introduced in 2005 (see chapter 5.5.1).

Since the passport system in Kyrgyzstan has been changing even after 2005, it is somewhat unclear whether passports are currently issued by OVIR at a regional or local level. Many local passport departments lack the necessary computer equipment required to get direct access to the central database that makes it possible to enter passport information and issue passports (Representative for international organisation, interview November 2011). OVIR was formerly a civil department within the police and subject to the Ministry of the Interior, but responsibility for these passport offices have now been transferred to "State Registry Service", which is a government agency at the ministry level (Kharimdzhanov & Rakhmadvov 2011).

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<sup>6</sup> OVIR (Otdel Viz i Registratsii ) is a Russian acronym that is still used in the former Soviet republics. ОВИР (отдел визы и регистрации). OVIR can be translated as the department for visa and registration. The passport departments are also called UPVR in Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan issues national passports, diplomatic passports and service passports, which are all approved as travel documents. Laminated ID cards (2004 passports) are valid as domestic identification. A portion of the country's citizens are still in possession of old combination domestic and foreign passports (1994 passports) and old passports from the former Soviet Union (1974 passports). These passports currently have limited validity. (See chapter 5.1 and 5.2)

Kyrgyzstan does not have a separate law on passport issuance. Instead, there are regulations that leave a lot of room for discretion. This fact as well as a high level of corruption makes it time-consuming and costly to obtain passports. An instruction issued by the government on 20 June 2011 establishes the conditions for obtaining national passports and ID cards, and will ensure a more effective and uniform practice. Even if the instructions specify which documents may be required, local passport departments still sometimes require additional documentation (Adilet, e-mail correspondence July 2011).

One reason that it is both costly and time-consuming to obtain passports is that OVIR requires applicants to obtain a lot of documentation that is redundant (Adilet, e-mail correspondence July 2011). For many people, the fees and travel costs for local ZAGS and passport departments, with consequential loss of income, means a significant financial burden. The costs can vary. A Kyrgyz/stateless person who had lost his Soviet 1974 passport, told the UNHCR that he expected that it would cost about USD 70 (about NOK 400) in fees to get new documents issued (UNHCR 2011b).

In former Soviet republics, there is generally a distinction between domestic passports (valid domestic identification) and foreign passports (travel documents). The terminology is not directly transferable to the Kyrgyzstan passport system, even if the concepts are still used to a certain extent. In the following, there will be reference to 1994 passports (combination domestic/foreign passports), national ID cards (domestic passports, also referred to as 2004 passports in Russian-language sources), and 2006 passports (foreign passports, only valid as international travel documents).

## **5.1 SOVIET 1974 PASSPORTS**

The deadline for exchanging Soviet 1974 passports has been extended several times, and it appears to be somewhat unclear the degree to which Soviet 1974 passports are still in circulation. In July 2004, the government decided to introduce new passports, and the Soviet passports were given validity until 31 December 2005 (UNHCR 2009). However, the citizenship legislation that was adopted on 21 May 2007 did not give a deadline for when the passports must be exchanged (UNHCR 2009). It is also stated in the government instructions issued on 20 June 2011 that Soviet 1974 passports can provide the basis for issuing a Kyrgyz ID card (see chapter 3.3 on ID cards). 1974 passports are generally not valid as identification. UNHCR (2009) considers people who still only have Soviet 1974 passports as stateless.

## **5.2 1994 PASSPORTS**

Kyrgyz national passports were first issued in 1994 and functioned both as national identification documents (domestic passports) and as international travel documents (foreign passports). The national passports from 1994 were valid as international

travel documents if the international page of the passport was validated, i.e. Kyrgyz citizens had to apply specifically to travel abroad. The system with the separate foreign visa for travellers abroad was abolished in 1999, but Kyrgyz authorities often required travellers to present a letter of invitation for first travel abroad before the passport was validated (U.S. Department of State 2000). Kyrgyz citizens could travel to several countries in the former Soviet Union without the international page in the passport being validated, including Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus (IRB Canada 2006).

1994 passports are not machine-readable and do not meet the requirements of the UN Civil Aviation Organisation, International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) in terms of security. Personal data is filled in by hand, the picture of the holder is glued in and the pages do not have their own passport numbers, which makes it relatively easy to insert pages from another passport (Saralaeva 2005). 1994 passports have been invalid as international travel documents since 2010<sup>7</sup>, and the USA has placed requirements on machine-readable passports for entry since 2004. 1994 passports are still used as identification documents in Kyrgyzstan (AKIpress News Agency 2009), and can form the basis for issuing new passports and ID cards (see chapter 5.3 and 5.4). Due to a lack of passports, the 1994 passports were still issued for a period after the new passports were introduced in 2004-2005, but it is unclear when the authorities stopped issuing the 1994 passports (IRB Canada 2006).

### **5.3 ID CARDS**

Kyrgyzstan has issued national ID cards since 2005 (Keesing Documentchecker). ID cards are issued for Kyrgyz who are over 16 years old and are valid as domestic identification. ID cards are also sufficient documentation<sup>8</sup> for travellers to Russia (Ferghana.news 2007).

In order to obtain an ID card for the first time when you turn 16 years old, you must present a birth certificate, the parents' passports/documentation of citizenship and PIN/ID number (Passport instructions 2011).

Kyrgyz citizens generally obtain ID cards based on 1994 passports, Soviet 1974 passports, or citizenship certificate from the so-called Conflict Commissions on Citizenship Issues. These are regional committees that decide whether former Soviet citizens meet the conditions for Kyrgyz citizenship (UNHCR 2009). According to UNHCR (2009), as a rule, the OVIR offices that receive applications for passports send applications from former Soviet citizens to these regional committees in order to clarify the issue of citizenship. Former citizens of the Soviet Union have a somewhat unclear status, since they can apply for Kyrgyz citizenship if they are permanent residents in Kyrgyzstan, while at the same time, they are already Kyrgyz citizens according to citizenship legislation. In principle, OVIR is authorised to issue ID cards on the basis of Soviet 1974 passports, but does not do so in practice.

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<sup>7</sup> Deadline for introducing machine-readable passports established by ICAO.

<sup>8</sup> Note that in the period after the violent clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan in May 2010, there was a requirement that Uzbeks, when travelling to Russia, in addition to a passport/national ID card, present a criminal record check and certificates that confirm that they did not participate in the clashes nor were prosecuted for any criminal offense (Azamatova 2010).

There is also a requirement to present PIN/ID number and any birth certificate<sup>9</sup> to obtain an ID card. Documentation of parental responsibility, name change, divorce or documentation that you have been released from prison must also be presented in appropriate cases.

ID cards are laminated. They are valid for ten years and contain, amongst other things, information on residency registration. Therefore, in practice it is also required to present an updated confirmation of residence from the housing association when you apply for an ID card (Kyrgyz source, interview August 2011).

The ID card is issued for a fee that covers the production costs (somewhere between KGS 175 and 190 or NOK 21-24), but the real costs are much higher as a rule (Representative for international organisation, interview November 2011). (See chapter 6 on corruption).

#### **5.4 NATIONAL PASSPORTS – 2006 PASSPORTS**

New passports that meet the international security standards established by the UN Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO 9303) were introduced in 2004-2005, but the passports were first correctly produced and issued to some extent in 2006. The first passports that were produced were issued in a limited edition, with limited duration and with reduced fees, because the passports did not have the right colour and design. The eagle in the national emblem was missing tail feathers, and the colour was too light of a blue. However, the passports still met the adopted security standards (Saralaeva 2005).

As mentioned, the Kyrgyz government issued instructions that specify the conditions for issuing passports on 20 June 2011. According to the instructions, passports can in principle be issued on the basis of ID cards or 1994 passports and ID number/PIN. Expired passports must be exchanged. Applicants may also be required to present other documentation, in case of for instance loss of passport, name changes, etc. (Passport instructions 2011). It is required to appear in person to obtain passports (Landinfo 2008).

Kyrgyz 2006 passports have a blue cover and the text is in Kyrgyz, Russian and English. They consist of 32 pages and are machine-readable (MRZ) (Keesing Documentchecker). The passport has a number of other security elements such as digital photo, perforated numbering, optically variable print, kinegram, watermark and invisible/fluorescent print.

Both the passport and the procedures for obtaining passports are designed with the aim of being able to include other biometric features than the digital photo (IOM n.d.).

During the period of 2004-2006, passports were issued with a validity of 1-5 years, while passports that were issued in 2006 and later have a validity of 10 years (Keesing Documentchecker). Children under 16 years old are given passports with a validity of 3 years or until they turn 16 years old. Children aged 15 years who are staying abroad when they turn 16 can obtain passports with validity until they turn

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<sup>9</sup> The passport instructions provide an exemption for the requirement for birth certificates for people who, for various reasons, have no such certificate.

18.

Article 46 in the Kyrgyz migration law (Law on External Migration 2000) regulates when Kyrgyz citizens may be denied exit. Passports may be temporarily denied or be seized if, amongst other things, a person has knowledge of state secrets, has been charged/prosecuted or sentenced in a criminal case, has civil proceedings brought against them, has unresolved legal obligations or has evaded such obligations (for example, alimony), is considered a danger by the court or has provided incorrect information. New passports are not issued to people who are called to military service, but the authorities do not confiscate passports that are already issued on the basis of military service (IRB Canada 2006).

Passports are issued for a fee of about KGS 500-550 (NOK 60-70), which covers the production costs, but the amount is in fact much higher (Representative for international organisation, interview November 2011). (See chapter 6 on corruption).

## **5.5 REGISTERING AND CHECKING ID INFORMATION**

### **5.5.1 Central database**

Until 2004, passports and personal information were registered by hand and archived locally. Kyrgyzstan is still working to get more complete, centralised and electronically readable registers, and the system for registering and checking ID information is under constant development.

Since new passports were introduced in 2004, a central database was established, sorting under the "Government Agency for Information Resources and Technology" (GAIRT) (IOM, n.d). The passport photo is digital and stored in the database. The passport can be checked against the database at border crossings (IRIN 2004).

In 2009, GAIRT created a separate centre (The Scanning Centre), which was responsible for scanning ID documents and passports. This centre has equipment to process one million documents in a month, and GAIRT has the goal of creating electronic copies of all registers (AKIpress News Agency 2009).

## **5.6 BORDER CONTROL**

A number of international border crossings have automated border control through IAMIS (Interagency Migration Information System), a centralised database that all relevant government agencies and departments have access to (IOM, n.d.). IAMIS has software with a blacklist feature in order to prevent "entry of unauthorised travellers". IAMIS is installed at Bishkek and Osh airport, at Irkeshtam and Torugart, at the border between Kyrgyzstan and China, at Karmyk at the border to Tajikistan and Kaindy at the border crossing to Kazakhstan, amongst other places. In time, other border stations will also be given access to Interpol's database (AKIpress News Agency 2011). A total of 15 border crossings will be automated (Ibraimov 2011). Increased border control in central Asia is an important theme, both internationally and regionally. Since 2004, EU and UNDP have contributed with training, equipment and infrastructure through the project Border Management Central Asia (BOMCA), and installed, amongst other things, passport readers at 16 border crossings in Ferghana in 2010 (BOMCA 2011).



## **6. CORRUPTION**

### **6.1 CORRUPTION CULTURE**

Corruption is an integrated part of public administration, the police/judiciary and the political and economic system in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan was ranked no. 164 of 178 countries on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index for 2010, with a score of 2.0, where 0 is "highly corrupt" and 10 is "very clean" (TI 2010). It is known that positions in the police are filled based on a combination of bribes and connections (ICG 2002). The costs of buying a position or promotion are recovered by receiving bribes later. OVIR is known to be corrupt, both when the department was part of the police/Ministry of the Interior and later when it has sorted under the government agency State Registry Service. A position in the passport department costs, according to a source cited by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH 2009, p. 48), around USD 10,000 (about NOK 57,000), a significant amount in a Kyrgyz context<sup>10</sup>.

Corruption in the passport departments (OVIR) and population registers (ZAGS) occurs openly, and means that Kyrgyz must pay bribes to obtain documents they need and are entitled to. According to FIDH (2009, p. 48), it costs around USD 150-200 (around NOK 840-1100) to obtain a passport. Furthermore bribes are paid to ZAGS employees in order to obtain necessary supporting documents. Bribes are often disguised as fees for quick procedures, and how much you have to pay in bribes varies based on a series of individual circumstances. A Kyrgyz source (interview August 2011) points out that ability to pay is an important factor, and that people with good incomes may therefore be forced to pay more in bribes. The cost of obtaining a single document can be about KGS 300-500 (about NOK 40-60) (Azamatova 2010; Kyrgyz source, interview August 2011).

### **6.2 MEASURES TO LIMIT CORRUPTION IN THE PASSPORT SYSTEM**

Measures to limit corruption were an important part of an IOM project connected to the introduction of new passports in 2004-2005. A government agency was created with responsibility for passports and the central database, and only twelve regional passport offices were given direct access to the database (IOM, n.d.). While glossy 1994 passports were stored in 72 different passport offices, new passports and ID cards would be stored centrally in Bishkek with limited access for employees. Authority over the local passport departments would be transferred from the police to the regional passport departments (IOM, n.d.). In addition to structural changes, training and awareness raising programs for employees, a 24-hour hotline was created for notifying of corruption. Furthermore procedures were developed to prevent a single employee from carrying out a complete transaction without some form of control. IOM also believed there was a need for restricting the employee's decision-making authority and codifying practice (IOM, n.d.). IOM's project was

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<sup>10</sup> Average salary per month in Kyrgyzstan is around USD 140 (about NOK 800) in 2008 (Ferghananews 2008, 29 July), but a monthly income can also be well below this level. For example, a teacher's salary may be USD 30-40 (about NOK 170-230) a month (RFE/RL 2010). According to the U.S. Department of State (2011, p. 29), employers generally pay more than KGS 340, or USD 7.20 (a little over NOK 40), which is the nominal monthly minimum amount the authorities start at for determining fines, etc. About 40 % of the population lived below the poverty line in 2004.

completed in 2005, and there is no further information about the measures that were implemented.

### 6.3 FALSE DOCUMENTS

There seems to be a wide consensus that corruption is still widespread at all levels. It is still possible to pay bribes to obtain passports without appearing in person, and without the information being checked (AKIpress News Agency 2011). However, Erica Marat<sup>11</sup> (e-mail correspondence October 2011) believes that it has become more difficult to circumvent the regulations; in order to do so you probably need connections at a higher level than before. It will be especially difficult to obtain passports without having a PIN/ID number, because these are issued by another agency (the Ministry of Labor) and with the presentation of a valid passport. Still, an employee in customs characterises fake 2006 passports as "a very common thing" (Marat, e-mail correspondence October 2011). According to the same source, on average, such fake passports cost about USD 1000. The passports are forged from empty 2006 passport forms, or are obtained by paying bribes to corrupt OVIR employees.

Kyrgyz 1994 passports were widely known to be very easy to forge, and were connected to both organised crime and terrorism. However, most people who were arrested with fake 1994 passports at the border were Kyrgyz citizens who had manipulated their own passport with fake stamps or visas, or used someone else's passport with the photo replaced (Saralaeva 2005).

1994 passports are now only valid as domestic identification, but as recently as July 2011, production of fake 1994 passports was discovered in Bishkek (AKIpress News Agency 2011). It is also clear that the Ministry of the Interior cannot account for about 100,000 forms for 1994 passports, and it is believed that these are used for manufacturing fake passports (Karimdzhanov & Rakhmanov 2011).

The extent of corruption at all levels means that it can be a costly, time-consuming and frustrating process for Kyrgyz citizens to obtain passports. Corruption also provides opportunities to relax the conditions and circumvent regulations, and contributes to the occurrence of fake passports.

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