

Report

**Afghanistan: Tazkera, passports and
other ID documents**



LANDINFO

Country of Origin Information Centre

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SUMMARY

This report describes the procedures for issuing and registration of Afghan ID-cards (tazkera) and passports, including changes in procedures introduced by the Afghan Embassy in Oslo in June 2016.

The report also presents information about the level of integrity of Afghan documents. The authenticity of Afghan identity documents is low, partly as a result of decades of armed conflict, a weak central government, a widespread corruption culture and incomplete registration procedures and archive systems.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes procedures for the issuing of Afghan passports and the tazkera ID document. The report was originally drawn up in 2010 and has subsequently been updated several times. Changes still take place in the field and information quickly becomes outdated, both with regard to legislation and practice. The last time the report was updated in its entirety was on the 24th of April 2017.

A weak state, extensive corruption and the armed conflict affect the document situation in Afghanistan. In parts of the country the authorities are not present, neither are the authoritative bodies responsible for issuing documents. In other areas the security situation is fluid and can change rapidly. Access to public documents are best in government controlled urban areas.

Updated information in respect to ID documents and the issuing of these in Afghanistan is relatively limited. This account is based on available, relevant information from open, web-based sources. In addition, it is based on conversations and correspondence with the Afghan embassy in Norway, the Norwegian National ID Centre, continuous exchanges with sources in Afghanistan, as well as information obtained during Landinfo's visit to Kabul during the period 2015 to 2018.

2. TAZKERA

The tazkera is the most important ID document for Afghan citizens and serves as a confirmation that a person is an Afghan citizen. The document is normally a necessity in order to gain access to some public services like, for example, the educational system, to acquire and own property and to have different permits granted. Normally, it is also a supporting document for the issuing of other documents from the authorities, such as a passport. Similarly, the tazkera is often necessary for registering information on various matters with the public authorities, like for instance the registration of a marriage. According to the Afghan think tank The Liaison Office (TLO) (2013), a tazkera is needed in order to be employed by a public service.

With reference to the Law on Registration of Population Records (2014, article 9 (2)) it is a requirement for all Afghans to have a tazkera. This provision is not implemented. It is up to the individual Afghan whether they want to apply for a tazkera or not. Nevertheless, all Afghan citizens have the right to a tazkera, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity and place of residence. There is no minimum age for acquiring a tazkera and the document can be issued to newborn children. Afghan citizens residing abroad also have the right to obtain a tazkera.

The tazkera is not issued automatically, but upon application. A well-informed international organisation (meeting in Kabul, November 2015) assumes that about 60 percent of the population are in possession of the document. It is mainly men who represent their family to the authorities, and everything suggests that considerably more men than women are in possession of a tazkera. Figures from NRC and Samuel Hall (2016, p. 23) confirm this. According to their estimates 90 percent of men were in possession of a tazkera, whilst corresponding figures for women were slightly below

40 percent. Amongst internally displaced people and nomads, the percentage of those having a tazkera is below that of the population in general. Likewise, far more people in the cities have a tazkera than those in the countryside. There are marginalised groups in the countryside who cannot read or write and who do not even know what a tazkera is (international organisation, meeting in September 2015). In Landinfo's view, it is not likely that people who apply for residency in Norway do not know what a tazkera is.

A tazkera is not valid for any specified period, and provided that the photograph is intact and the document is legible, Afghan authorities regard the tazkera as valid. Generally, the document's date of issue is of no importance for the Afghan authorities' evaluation of its validity. It is for the holder to decide whether the information in the tazkera should be updated if it is no longer correct, for example, in the case of a change in marital status. The tazkera is updated or renewed when applying for a new tazkera.

Tazkeras issued during the civil war (1992-1996) and during the Taliban period of authority up until 2001, are not regarded as valid (diplomat source in Kabul, meeting in September 2015).

2.1 ISSUING TAZKERA

Tazkeras are issued by the so-called Population Registration Department (PRD), acting under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA). Afghan citizens can apply for a tazkera both in their home district and in Kabul. In addition, Afghan foreign service missions in Iran can issue tazkera to Afghan citizens who live in the country (meeting with Afghan embassy in Tehran, November 2017). At some other foreign service missions, like the one in Oslo, a "tazkera in absence" can be applied for (see chapter 4.2.1).

In March 2017 President Ashraf Ghani approved changes to the Law on Registration of Population Records (2014) articles four and six, which resulted in the establishment of a new independent authoritative body – Afghanistan Central Civil Registration Authority ACCRA (Bjelica & Adili 2018). According to the ACCRA website (n.d.a) they are responsible for issuing official documents such as the tazkera, but also birth certificates and marriage registrations. Application forms for different documents are available on the ACCRA website. According to the website, they also prepare statistical information.

It is unclear to Landinfo how the work is divided between ACCRA and PRD. According to an NGO (e-mail May 2018) PRD is, at national level, replaced by ACCRA, but at provincial level PRD is still the acting authority. PRD/ACCRA have their headquarters in Kabul and should, in principal, have offices in all of the country's provinces and districts. Afghanistan's former ambassador to Norway, Jawed Ludin, indicated (in a meeting 2008) that approximately 95 percent of the country's districts have subdivisions PRD. As a result of the Taliban winning territory and the security situation worsening in parts of the country, there are reasons to believe that this percentage has in recent years been reduced.

According to the Norwegian ID Centre (n.d.), ACCRA is undergoing a reorganisation. The unit within ACCRA, responsible for ID registration, births and deaths, will merge with the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSLA).

PRD stated in 2015 that they received over three thousand tazkera applications daily, and at that time the issuing of a tazkera was free of charge (PRD, meeting September 2015). According to information from the Norwegian ID Centre, it now costs 10 Afghani (equivalent to about 1 NOK) to have a tazkera issued, and the price is printed on the document.

2.1.1 The application process

According to TLO the application process is in three steps:

The process of obtaining a tazkera constitutes three steps: entering personal details, identity verification, and document issuance (TLO 2013, p. 2).

During the initial application, verification of identity is the most thorough step. Initially, it is a requirement that the applicant has a birth certificate, but it is still a fact that the majority of people do not have one. If the applicant does not have a birth certificate, it is a requirement that the tazkera of a male family member on the father's side (father, brother, uncle or male cousin) should be presented (ACCRA n.d.b). A married woman may submit her husband's tazkera, or possibly one of her husband's close male relatives. In addition, two testimonies are required, for example from a civil servant, recognised local leaders or religious dignitaries. In principal, all civil servants can confirm identity, but the higher the status of the witness, the greater is the importance ascribed to the testimony (TLO 2013, p.18).

If an applicant, who is not a resident of Kabul, submits an application in the capital city without being able to prove his identity, the person in question must return to his home area, or to where relatives or forefathers come from. The local village chief (*malik*) may verify the applicant's identity, his father or grandfather etc. The village chief's confirmation is then submitted to the local authority leaders who can issue the tazkera based on this confirmation (TLO 2013, p.18).

A family tree is an important tool when issuing a tazkera and there are registration books showing tazkeras issued. This is systemised in line with the family network. In order to obtain a tazkera, the applicant must identify and verify his or her place in the family network (TLO 2013, p.16).

Children under the age of seven are exempt from the requirement to turn up in person to have a tazkera issued (ACCRA n.d.b). A birth certificate is accepted as supporting document. If the child does not have a birth certificate, two witnesses are required. Until the child is 18 years old, the father's consent is needed to have the tazkera issued (DISCS n.d.). Tazkeras for children under the age of six do not have a photograph. At a later stage, a new process is therefore needed for PRD to insert a photograph in the tazkera, or that a new tazkera is issued.

Normally it only takes a few days to obtain a tazkera, provided that any investigations into identity are deemed unnecessary. TLO claim that the majority of people have the document issued within five days (TLO 2013, p.19). According to the head of PRD (meeting in September 2015) it takes about 30 minutes to issue a new tazkera, if the tazkera of a male family member is enclosed with the application and PRD finds this information in the registration books. A diplomat source stated in March 2019 (e-mail) that it takes 2-3 days to obtain a new tazkera.

2.2 WHAT INFORMATION IS SHOWN IN A TAZKERA?

The first tazkera was issued almost 100 years ago, during the rule of Amanullah Khan (1919-1929) (Ali 2013). The design and content of the document have varied under different regimes. Until 2001 the tazkera was a 16-page booklet, whilst since 2001 the format has been an A4 sheet of paper.

E-tazkera	Credit card format	Since 2018
New "one paged" paper tazkera	A 4	Since 2018
"One paged" paper tazkera or "tazkera certificate"	A 4	Since 2001
Tazkera from the Taliban period	Booklet	1996-2001
Tazkera from the civil war period	Booklet	1992-1996
Tazkera from the communist regime	Booklet	1978-1992

Source: US Embassy Kabul, as reported by the Danish National ID Centre (2019, p. 2).

Common to all paper tazkeras after 2001 is that they are issued in A4 format – generally in a standard format – but there are different versions in circulation. There are local variations and various printing methods have also been used (Norwegian ID Centre n.d.).

The tazkera must have a header with Afghanistan’s national emblem and a stamped photograph of the holder. Date and year must be stated in line with the Persian calendar (diplomat source, meeting in September 2015).

The image shows a sample of an Afghan Tazkera (National ID Card) from 2013. The document is in Persian and includes the national emblem of Afghanistan at the top right. The form contains the following fields and information:

- Header:** د افغانستان اسلامي جمهوریت (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan), د کورنیو چارو وزارت (Ministry of Interior), د نفوسو د احوال د ثبتو لوی ریاست (National Directorate of Population and Civil Registration), (لوی بند پریټ) (Official Seal)
- Identification:** د ولسوالۍ نوم (District Name), د ولسوالۍ کد (District Code), د ولسوالۍ نوم (District Name), د ولسوالۍ کد (District Code), د ولسوالۍ نوم (District Name), د ولسوالۍ کد (District Code)
- Personal Information:** نوم او تخلص (Name and Surname), د پلار نوم (Father's Name), د لیکه نوم (Holder's Name), د زیږونځای (Place of Birth), د زیږونځای او عمر (Place of Birth and Age), جنس (Gender), د پلار نوم (Father's Name), د پلار کد (Father's Code), د پلار نوم (Father's Name), د پلار کد (Father's Code)
- Official Information:** د ولسوالۍ نوم (District Name), د ولسوالۍ کد (District Code), د ولسوالۍ نوم (District Name), د ولسوالۍ کد (District Code), د ولسوالۍ نوم (District Name), د ولسوالۍ کد (District Code)
- Signature and Stamp:** د ولسوالۍ نوم (District Name), د ولسوالۍ کد (District Code), د ولسوالۍ نوم (District Name), د ولسوالۍ کد (District Code)

Example of a tazkera (TLO 2013).

In addition to the name of the holder, the document also contains the name of the father and paternal grandfather. In addition, information is given on place of birth, civil status, gender, mother tongue, occupation and physical characteristics (eye colour, visible scars, disabilities, etc.) as well as information on address and place of residence. For Kuchis it is shown whether the place of issue is a summer or winter residence, as well as the name of the clan and the name of the clan chief (Norwegian ID Centre, e-mail May 2019).

The tazkera also contains the registration number shown in PRD's registration books (TLO 2013, p. 36). There is conflicting information whether the tazkera also gives the holder's religion. The report from The Liaison Office, referred to above, does not give information on this. However, a diplomat source (e-mail 17th February 2019) states that tazkeras issued after 2001 contain information on religion. This is also confirmed by the Afghan embassy in Oslo (e-mail 1st March 2019).

Relevant sources give partly conflicting information on how information regarding age is given in the tazkera. According to TLO the document states the year of birth (TLO 2013, p.6). A diplomat source consulted by Landinfo, thinks that the tazkera give an estimated age on the date of issue (diplomat source, e-mail March 2017). The Norwegian ID Centre confirms that they share the opinion that the tazkera gives an approximate age at the time when the tazkera was issued (e-mail March 2017).

On the basis of this information, the majority of tazkeras seem to give an estimated age at the time of issue. Landinfo find reasons to believe that there can be variations between the many districts on how they practice the giving of age.

The tazkera does not normally give information on date of birth. One exception is for children who have a birth certificate, in such cases both the date of birth and year are given in the tazkera (diplomat source, e-mail March 2017). If a tazkera applicant does not have information on year of birth, the age is determined by "specialists" within the PRD. The determination of age is estimated on the basis of physical characteristics, eyes, facial features and wrinkles, combined with a short interview. The director of PRD (meeting, September 2015) claimed that the specialists operate with a margin of error of six months.

Many Afghans have either little awareness of their own date of birth or are unsure of exactly when they were born, and it is also relatively simple for Afghans to manipulate information on date of birth. Faizullah Moradi, who worked as an interpreter for the Norwegian forces in Afghanistan, has explained that he entered into a contract with the Norwegian Armed Forces before he turned 18:

My story is probably a bit unusual as I lied about my age. I needed the job and I needed the money in order to provide for my family. Therefore, I showed a forged ID card which stated that I was 21 (VG 2014).

There is a separate box for information on father's and paternal grandfather's first name. There is no tradition of using surnames in Afghanistan and information on possible surnames does not normally appear in the tazkera. A local employee in a western embassy (meeting in Kabul, September 2015) claimed that PRD had refused to include his surname in the tazkera. The Norwegian ID Centre (n.d.) states that some versions of the tazkera have a separate box for surname and it does happen that the box is filled in. Information on the mother is not shown.

There is a separate standard form for translation of the tazkera into English, this has boxes for both date of birth and surname. It is when they encounter western administrative culture that it is necessary for Afghans to choose a surname, for example when the tazkera is translated to English. There are guidelines for who can translate a tazkera and Canadian immigration authorities (IRB 2011) write the following:

The English version can be produced "by a translating company in the private sector, or by government offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Afghanistan proper and Embassies/Consulates outside the country".

Place of birth is not necessarily the place where the holder was born, but where their spouse or ancestors were born. The Norwegian embassy in Islamabad (e-mail January 2016) states that this information is transferred to a prospective passport and refers to experience from specific cases where children, who are born abroad and have never been to Afghanistan, have Afghan passports where the father's place of birth is given as the place of origin in Afghanistan. It may also be that the place where the tazkera was issued, has been given as place of birth (diplomat source, e-mail March 2017).

The tazkera must contain information on date and place of issue plus a registration number, which is a reference number to the registration book where the tazkera is entered. The tazkera is signed by the district manager or provincial governor of the area where it is issued (TLO 2013, p. 5). According to a well-informed diplomat source (meeting in Kabul, September 2015) a tazkera must have three signatures. However, there is conflicting information on the number of signatures and stamps. This probably reflects a discrepancy in practice and illustrates that Afghan administration is not uniform. The fact remains that each district and province issues tazkeras with their own stamp and signature (TLO 2013). Tazkeras issued after 2001 are handwritten.

2.2.1 New paper tazkera

In 2018 Afghan authorities introduced a new version of the paper tazkera. This version has changed design, but like the previous version it contains no security elements. According to the Norwegian ID Centre (n.d.) the intention was for ACCRA to add a number of security elements to the paper tazkera, but this was not implemented. The reason being that issuance of the e-Tazkera should be prioritised. The introduction of the new version was intended as a temporary measure.

The new version has a multicoloured background which is printed with a colour printer. The document contains what appears to be an imitation watermark, but this is only a design on the paper.¹ The information which appears on the document is handwritten. In the main, it contains the same information as the paper tazkera used in recent years. The cost to have a new paper tazkera issued is ten Afghani, the same cost as for the old version.

The Norwegian ID Centre (n.d.) states that the new version has been distributed to all ACCRA/PRD's offices in Afghanistan, but many district offices still use the old version. In other words, old and new paper tazkeras are issued in tandem. As Landinfo

¹ See details covering the physical design on the ID database of the Norwegian ID Centre, which also shows a picture of the new paper tazkera.

understands the situation, it is arbitrary which province or office use which form. There are no figures for how many copies of the new paper tazkera have been issued.

2.3 REGISTRATION

The filling in and handling of the application and the actual issuing and registration of the tazkera is done manually. No information is processed or stored electronically. Core data about the holder's position in a family is registered manually and given a registration number which, among other things, refers to a particular branch of the family. All tazkeras issued to members of the same family branch should have a joint reference number.

The registration books where the tazkeras are entered, have one hundred pages with ten rows on each page, therefore a tazkera cannot have a registration number higher than one thousand. Information on the number of the book, page and row appear on the tazkera. An international organisation and a diplomat source (meeting in September 2015) thought that the system functions well; if a tazkera is registered, experienced civil servants can find the information they require in the books in a matter of a few minutes.

The local PRD authority at district or province level, must keep a record of all registration books and a copy of the registration books must also be kept at PRD's headquarter in Kabul. Every six months the local registration books must be sent to the headquarter in Kabul for synchronisation, so that information at both local and central level is the same. It is possible to verify a tazkera in PRD's register in Kabul, which has registration books going back several decades.

However, the archive is not complete. It has been damaged by acts of war, natural catastrophes and fires, but it is nevertheless the best (and only) overview that the Afghan authorities have of the country's population. A project is underway to scan all the registration books, so that all information covering the paper tazkeras are electronically searchable. Landinfo does not know when the digitalisation work is planned to be completed, but the Afghan embassy in Oslo stated in September 2016 that, at that time, digitalisation was completed in three or four provinces (conversation September 2016).

2.4 E-TAZKERA

Introduction of the e-Tazkera, a digital tazkera, has long been on the political agenda. The main purpose of the introduction has been to gain a better overview of the population, to introduce identity documents which will be harder to forge, and, in addition, to increase the reliability of democratic electoral processes (Lifos 2018, p. 11).

Originally, the plan was for the first e-tazkeras to be issued in March 2013. The question whether ethnicity should be included in the tazkera was a subject causing great opposition and disagreement, which contributed to repeated postponements of the implementation (Bjelica & van Biljert 2016; Biljert & Adili 2018).

On 3rd of May 2018 President Ghani and his spouse were issued with the first e-tazkeras in the country, marking the launch of the new e-tazkeras (TOLO News 2018). When Landinfo visited Afghanistan in December 2018, 30 000 Afghans had been issued with an e-tazkera. Demand was said to be high. The waiting time to have an e-

tazkera issued was at least one month (conversation with international organisation, December 2018). In the Norwegian ID Centre's ID database (n.d.) it appeared, as of May 2019, that such documents were being issued in some larger cities, but primarily in Kabul.

The plan is that the e-tazkera and the paper tazkera will be issued in tandem until everyone has received an e-tazkera. The long-term goal is that the e-tazkera will replace the different versions of the paper tazkera, now in circulation, and that the e-tazkera will be issued throughout the country. The e-tazkera will be issued based on the paper tazkera, but additional investigations and verification will also be carried out.

The same documentation demands apply for the e-tazkera as for the paper one. Personal attendance is required and applicants over the age of 18 must give biometric data. It costs 100 Afghani, equivalent to about 11 NOK to have an e-tazkera issued (Norwegian ID Centre, n.d.).

2.4.1 The e-tazkera's content and design

The e-tazkera is a standard plastic card (credit card format 86 x 54 mm) with an electronic chip (Danish National ID Centre 2019, p. 6). The card contains a number of security details, such as optically variable elements and tactile security features (Norwegian ID Centre n.d.). The e-tazkera has an unlimited period of validity.

The card mainly contains the same information as the paper tazkeras in circulation, with the exception that the e-tazkera provides information on surname and date of birth. The document gives basic information on name, as well as father and paternal grandfather's name (Norwegian ID Centre). According to an international organisation (December 2018), it also contains information on the holder's religion and ethnicity.

Afghanistan's national emblem is placed centrally at the top of the front page of the card, with the ID number directly below. A picture of the holder is imprinted on the left side of the card's front page (Norwegian ID Centre n.d.). On the back of the card appears, in addition to the wording "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan/National Identity Card", the following information in English translation: ID number, full name (first name and surname), date and place of birth, gender, date of issue, nationality and signature.

To the left on the back page is the chip that contains biometric information, such as fingerprints of ten fingers and an image of the iris. Allegedly, the chip also contains information on blood group (Norwegian ID Centre n.d.). A specimen of the card can be seen in a report prepared by the Danish National ID Centre (2019, p. 7).

3. PASSPORT

Afghanistan has introduced machine readable passports (MRP). The issuing of MRP began in 2012 in Kabul and has gradually been extended to the whole country and its missions abroad. The Afghan embassy in Norway stated in a conversation with Landinfo (December 2015) that it has stopped issuing handwritten passports as from November 2015. Manually handwritten passports have not been issued after the 1st of

November 2017 and they are no longer valid as a travel document (diplomat source e-mail 2018).

Handwritten passports serve as a supporting document for a machine-readable passport. According to an international organisation (meeting in September 2015) the holder gets to keep both the passports, but the handwritten passport will, as a rule, be stamped as no longer being valid (cancelled).

Machine readable passports are valid for five years and it is not possible to extend the period of validity. A new passport must be applied for when the period of validity has expired. Handwritten Afghan passport had the same design as the communist passports. The passport's first page and country name were "Republic of Afghanistan". The passports had the same design since the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) ruled Afghanistan in the 1980s; only signature and a stamp differentiated a passport issued during the communist period from a handwritten passport issued in more recent times (diplomat source, e-mail November 2015).

The design of the passport issued during the Taliban regime was in line with the movement's strict religious foundation. Men had a beard and cap on their heads and women's passports did not include a picture (diplomat source, meeting in September 2015). The Taliban regime was only recognised by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. Therefore, passports were of limited value as a travel document.

3.1 GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE ISSUING OF PASSPORTS

According to the latest Passport Act (2015),² four different types of Afghan passport have been issued: ordinary passports, diplomatic passports, service passports and special passports (IRB 2018). Previously, both student and business passports were issued, but these have now been phased out. There may still be some such passports in circulation.



Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.

² Landinfo is not aware of that there is an English translation of the Passport Act.

The Ministry of Interior, Central Passport Department, its local offices and provincial police chiefs are responsible for issuing passports in Afghanistan (diplomat source, e-mail April 2012). The passport must either be issued in Kabul, or in the province from where the applicant or the applicant's family originate. An exception can be made in cases when an applicant has been resident for more than 10 years somewhere else than at the registered place of birth. A person from Ghazni, for instance, who has lived for 10 years or more in Herat, may also apply for a passport in Herat (diplomat source, meeting September 2015). According to Afghan news media, it may be possible to apply for an Afghan passport online (TOLO News 2016).

The passport is issued based on the information in the tazkera or a previous passport. A person who applies for a passport without a tazkera, is referred to PRD/ACCRA to have a tazkera issued. An already issued tazkera must be verified in order for it to be approved as a supporting document when issuing a passport. Such an investigation/verification is carried out by PRD/ACCRA and takes, according to a diplomat source (e-mail March 2019), one to two days.

There may be different reasons why a tazkera cannot be found in the registers:

- The document may be a forgery.
- The registers are incomplete. As previously mentioned, some registration books have been destroyed by acts of war, natural catastrophes or other reasons.
- Due to the fact that the systems are manual, incorrect registrations can occur.

According to a well-informed diplomat source (meeting in September 2015), when the machine-readable passports were introduced, it took up to two months to have a passport issued in Afghanistan. A diplomat source (e-mail March 2019) has stated that changes have been introduced to the routines of issuing passports, and it should now be possible to have a passport issued within five days. According to the source, if urgent, it may be possible to have a passport issued within a couple of days.

An application for a passport must contain four passport photographs. In connection with the issuing of machine-readable passports, fingerprints must be obtained from the holder and this is the reason why the applicant must apply in person. An exception is made for children under the age of three (IRB 2017). Whilst in the Passport Act of 1939, there was a requirement that women must have a consent from "legal relatives" in order to apply for a passport, this provision has been removed in the Act of 2015 (diplomat source, February 2019). However, it is a requirement for women to have a tazkera in order to get a passport. In order for a woman to have a tazkera issued, she must present the tazkera to a male relative. If she is married it will be natural for her to submit her husband's tazkera, whilst an unmarried woman presents the tazkera of a biological relative such as a father, brother or paternal uncle.

In Afghanistan it costs 5000 Afghani to have a passport issued, equivalent to about 550 NOK. For children the price is about 300 NOK (Norwegian ID Centre).

3.2 WHAT INFORMATION DOES THE PASSPORT CONTAIN?

A machine-readable passport has 48 pages. According to the Norwegian ID Centre there is also a version with 50 pages. The passport contains a picture of the holder, personal information (on the personal data page and on page 3) and a machine-readable zone (Norwegian ID Centre n.d.). Currently, the date of birth is based on the holder's own statement. Up until 2006/2007 the authorities estimated the date of birth. The surname must also appear in the passport, as well as the holder's height.

All passports contain a photograph and for MRP there are specified standards for this photograph. The Afghan embassy in Norway (meeting in December 2015) takes the picture of the applicant themselves.

3.3 REGISTER

Up until 2012 there were no digital archives of issued passports and the register for the handwritten passports was only manual. After the issuing of machine-readable passports started, information about these is gathered in a central database. The register is managed by PRD (international organisation, meeting in September 2015).

The embassy in Norway has had a separate manual archive of the handwritten passports issued by the embassy.

4. APPLICATION FOR A PASSPORT AT THE EMBASSY IN OSLO

Information on the procedure for applying for a passport is presented on the website of Afghan Embassy in Norway (see Afghanistan's embassy in Norway n.d.a).

Until the summer of 2016, the embassy issued passports without presentation of a tazkera or any other documents. A team of three persons from different parts of Afghanistan interviewed those applicants who were unable to verify their identity. In the interview, questions were asked about the applicant's connection to Afghanistan and about their knowledge of the area in Afghanistan where the person stated they came from. The purpose of the interview was to verify their Afghan nationality. Applicants without identity papers had to account for why they had neither a tazkera nor any other ID document. Previously there were additional demands requesting a written declaration from two witnesses confirming identity and nationality. The embassy stated in December 2015 that it attached limited importance to authentication from witnesses. In September 2016 the embassy made it clear that it had discontinued the arrangement with witnesses (meeting, September 2016).

Afghanistan's embassy in Norway stated (conversation December 2015) that the majority of those who applied for a passport, documented their own identity by presenting the tazkera. This is seen as being contrary to the experience of Norwegian authorities, where asylum seekers from Afghanistan seldom are in possession of Afghan ID documents, or documents from any other country where they have stayed.

The machine-readable passports do not contain information on religious or ethnic affiliation, and no one has to provide information on this when applying for a passport at the embassy in Norway.

4.1 COST

The embassy states on its website that as of April 2019, an Afghan passport costs 1200 NOK. The passport can be sent by post to the recipient after it has been issued, which incurs an additional cost of 220 NOK (Afghanistan's embassy, n.d.a). It takes at least eight weeks to have a machine-readable passport issued.³ The passport is valid for five years. According to the embassy, those who apply for a passport but do not fulfil the conditions, receive a written rejection. The amount paid is not refunded even though the passport application has been rejected. Reasons for the rejection are not given, it is therefore not possible to know the reason for such rejection.

4.2 REQUIREMENT REGARDING PRESENTATION OF TAZKERA WHEN APPLYING FOR A PASSPORT

In the summer of 2016 the Afghan embassy announced on its website that it had changed its practice. People applying for a passport must prove their identity and nationality with an legalised⁴ tazkera.⁵ The embassy (meeting September 2016) confirmed in a meeting with Landinfo that it is only people who present an authorised tazkera who will be issued with a passport and explained that the reason for this is the strengthening of the new Passport Act.⁶ This also applies to other Afghan embassies, such as the embassy in Sweden and the United Kingdom (Afghanistan's embassy in Sweden, n.d; Afghanistan's embassy in the United Kingdom, n.d.).

According to the embassy, this strengthening also applies to the renewal of passports; the embassy then investigates on what basis the expired passport was issued, so as to ensure that renewal is in line with applicable routines.

Passport applicants are in addition urged to present supporting documents, such as marriage licences, documents giving residential status in Norway, confirmation from employer, certificates from educational institutions and military certificate of service. These documents are presented to support the applicant's identity but are not sufficient in themselves. There is no requirement for such documentation to be presented (see Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, n.d.a).

³ The embassy issues machine readable passports, but it is the general consulate in Bonn in Germany that personalises (produces) the passports based on the information from the embassy in Norway (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, n.d.a). Bonn will serve as issuing authority with the wording "Consulate General of Afghanistan Bonn" (Norwegian ID Centre, n.d.).

⁴ Legalisation is a formality in order for a document to be legally valid abroad. It confirms that the signature and stamp are genuine and that it is signed by a civil servant authorised to do so. However, legalisation is not a confirmation that the content of the document is genuine (Regjeringen.no).

⁵ Legalisation goes through three ministries: first to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoI), Central Census Independent Organisation who maintains registration books for tazkeras issued, then to the Ministry of Justice and finally to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to Ahmad Khalid Akbar, the embassy in Oslo receives weekly reviews showing legalised tazkeras from the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (conversation September 2016). The Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs has its own register of legalisations, which contains information on registration numbers and date authorised. Legalised translated tazkeras are registered in a searchable database. Norwegian authorities can verify documents via the register, according to the consular section in the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA, meeting in Kabul, September 2015). It is also possible to check whether a tazkera is registered in the manual archives at PRD in Kabul, or locally.

⁶ Given that the Act has not been translated into English, Landinfo has translated articles 14 and 19 which, according to information from the Afghan embassy in Oslo, is of particular relevance to the issuing of passports at consulates abroad.

Personal attendance is an absolute requirement, as the applicant's fingerprints are to be taken. The embassy states on its website that an appointment must be made in advance. This is done electronically on the embassy's website.

Very few exceptions are made to the requirement for personal attendance, but on one occasion, a very ill man was interviewed via Skype, after which he had a passport issued without appearing in person (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, meeting September 2016).

The embassy states on its website, that any person losing a passport, must report this to the police (n.d.a). The embassy writes in an e-mail to Landinfo (June 2018), that providing the applicant fulfils the requirements in the Passport Act and they have a police certificate, a duplicate passport may be issued.

In a conversation with Landinfo (December 2015), the embassy stated that the Norwegian immigration authorities' practice of confiscating asylum seekers' documents, makes the embassy's work more difficult when Afghan citizens apply for a passport and travel document.

4.2.1 Opportunity to obtain a tazkera from Norway

As a result of the tightening of routines at the embassy, a practice has developed which provides an opportunity to apply for a tazkera from abroad. The application form used is referred to as *Tazkera in Absence*, this is to be completed with the applicant's name, date and place of birth, place of residence as well as eye colour. Previously, the practice was that the digits in a male relative's tazkera was sufficient for the embassy in Norway, but in Afghanistan the relative's physical tazkera must be enclosed with the application. This is altered and the embassy now requires the original, or a copy of the relative's tazkera, to be enclosed with the application (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, e-mail 4th March 2019).

One question is which relatives can be accepted; how close the kinship has to be. On their website the embassy mentions "[...] father, brother, sister, uncle or cousin". The embassy stated to Landinfo that children of a male cousin are not accepted (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, e-mail 1st March 2019). As Landinfo understands the information, the distinction goes between the male cousin and his children; the cousin is accepted, but not his children.

The Afghan embassy stated in 2016 that the mother's tazkera is accepted as supporting documentation, but not the mother's relatives' tazkeras (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, meeting September 2016). In January 2018 Landinfo asked the embassy whether this was still correct. In an e-mail of 25th January 2018, the embassy stated that it is only relatives on the father's side who are accepted. On the embassy's website, reference is made to a sister's tazkera being accepted (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, n.d.b). In an e-mail of 16th February 2018, the embassy explained that the reason why the sister is accepted and not the mother is because the sister is registered under her father in the registration book. Her tazkera can thus be used to trace the father's family network, something which is not necessarily the case with the mother's tazkera.

Landinfo understood the embassy to say that they assist individuals in obtaining a legalised tazkera. Generally, the embassy has set aside just 15 minutes for each

applicant, but it does happen that staff use several hours to assist a person (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, meeting September 2016).

The application for tazkera in absence is sent to Afghanistan with a stamp from the embassy and eight passport photographs of the applicant. The embassy keeps a copy of the completed form. The tazkera is issued in Afghanistan and is then sent to Norway (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, e-mail 18th March 2019). There are no restrictions on who can assist the applicants by visiting relevant offices in Afghanistan; this can be done by a family member, a relative or an acquaintance. There are also professional operators who charge for the task and who, with an authorisation, can represent the applicant. Private practice lawyers can also accept such tasks. The embassy (meeting, September 2016) estimated the fee for such a task to be 2-300 USD, and the fee is, according to the embassy, set by the Ministry of Justice.

It is difficult to estimate how much time the process to obtain a tazkera in absence takes, but the embassy knew a case where it had only taken a week (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, meeting September 2016).

For Afghans who live abroad and who have previously been in possession of a tazkera, it is possible to obtain a duplicate by following the application procedures for a tazkera in absence at the relevant consulate or mission (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, e-mail 11th June 2018).

4.3 PASSPORTS FOR MINORS

Provided that a male relative gives consent (i.e. a father, brother, paternal uncle), newborn children can obtain their own passport (UNICEF 2018, p.34). Previously it was not necessary to apply for a separate passport for children, as the child could be included on the parent's passports (IRB 2013). This has now changed, and it is evident from the website of the Afghan embassy that MRP are issued "[...] individually to each applicant, including infants" (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, n.d.a).

The age of majority in Afghanistan is 18 (Civil Code 1977, § 39). According to a diplomat source in Kabul (e-mail February 2019) passport applicants who are not of legal age, need consent from their father (who is their legal guardian). At the embassy in Oslo there is no longer a requirement for minors to present a Power of Attorney from a legal guardian, neither is there a requirement that minors attend the embassy together with an adult or legal guardian. This is independent of the adolescent's age and whether they are above or below the age of 15. According to the embassy (e-mail January 2019) the only exception are infants. However, it is a mandatory requirement that minors, like adults, present a legalised tazkera. Previously, a signature from the legal guardian was required in order for a minor asylum seeker under the age of 14 to apply for a passport, while those who were present with their family needed their parent's signature. (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, meeting September 2016).

The Afghan embassy in Norway (meeting in December 2015) issues passports to children born to Afghan parents in Norway, provided that the parents have passports and present the child's birth certificate.

5. IDENTITY CERTIFICATE

The Afghan embassy in Norway can issue a so-called *Identity Certificate* to people who do not are not in possession of a tazkera and who therefore cannot be issued with a passport. The identity certificate is issued after an interview with three people at the embassy. It is a condition that the applicant attends the interview in person and, according to the embassy, no exceptions have been made to this rule. In addition to the interviews, the embassy tries to double check information from the applicant from a number of different sources; such as with representatives from mosques, cultural centres, Afghan consulates or offices in non-EU countries, environments in Iran and Pakistan and others. This is done both formally and informally. Sometimes it takes weeks, whilst at other times, it takes months before they have sufficient information for the document to be issued (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, meeting September 2016).

When questioned about what status this document has to Afghan authorities, the embassy answered that it is a recognition that the applicant is seen as an Afghan citizen. The document confirms that the person has substantiated that he or she is an Afghan. This is reflected in the application form on the embassy's website, with the heading "Certificate of Identity – Nationality" (Afghanistan's embassy in Norway, n.d.c).

The identity certificate cannot be used as a supporting document to obtain an Afghan passport. At the same time the embassy states that it attempts to encourage Afghans to start the process of applying for a legalised tazkera, so that they can have a passport issued. Both the individual Afghan and Afghan society benefits from this, according to the embassy's representative (meeting, September 2016).

The embassy informed in a meeting in September 2016, that it issues a certificate of identity to those who do not have a tazkera with the aim that it can be used when dealing with Norwegian authorities. This document is a response to a request from the Norwegian authorities for an ID-document. The embassy expressed concern over all the young men who come to Norway without documents and who for that reason do not gain access to schooling and other rights. The embassy recognised that there are uncertainties attached to these documents.

6. REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS

The registration of births is very important to ensure basic rights to among others social security, health and education. In Afghanistan the registration of births is very inadequate. UNICEF co-operates with the authorities on national birth registration system and initiatives at the local levels which will ensure that children are being registered.

All hospitals in Afghanistan can issue birth certificates, regardless of where the hospital is located and whether it is public or private. Any child born in a hospital is registered and receives a birth certificate. The registration of birth and the certificate are free of charge. According to a representative for an international organisation

(meeting, September 2015), hospitals can also issue birth certificates to children born at home. ACCRA (n.d.c) informed that if the child is born at home or a place other than a hospital, the newborn can have a birth certificate within three months of birth.

In accordance with the Afghanistan Civil Registration Law, article 31, parents are obliged to register their child within six months after birth (MoIA, n.d.a). The forms for such normal registration have been standardised and there should not be variations in practice. The format of the form for retrospective birth registration is different from those issued in connection with a normal registration.

The birth certificate gives the father's name, but not the mother's and it confirms the exact date of birth. If the hospital completes the form in connection with a birth, they do not complete the box stating the child's name, as an Afghan child is never given a name before a period has passed after birth (international source, meeting in September 2015).

Since 2003, hospitals have been responsible for ensuring that a copy of each birth certificate is sent to the department responsible for births (Birth Department) at PRD, who have set up a database of birth registrations from hospitals. In the period from 2010 to November 2015 more than 1.6 million children were registered and issued with a birth certificate. The figures indicate marginally more boys than girls.

In the years after the fall of the Taliban, several living condition surveys have been carried out. The result of the last survey, published in 2018, shows a negative trend in birth registrations; the percentage of children who have had their birth registered is 5.7 percent lower than in 2011/2012. On a national scale about three out of ten children have their birth registered. There are great differences between cities and the countryside; in the cities six out of ten children are registered, whilst in rural communities the percentage is only thirty percent. Only ten percent of children born to Kuchis are registered. There are also considerable differences between the different provinces and in some provinces the percentage of registered births is less than 20 percent (CSO 2018, p. 197-198).

7. ASSESSMENT OF ROUTINES

7.1 ISSUING TAZKERA

A tazkera can be issued by someone – such as a village elder and/or religious leader – confirm that a person is who they say they are. A tazkera can also be issued on the basis of a testimony of identity. Landinfo believes that there is little likelihood of a false testimony being discovered. Information on age is often based on the assessment of the person who has issued the tazkera. These two facts give grounds for questioning the credibility of tazkeras. At the same time poor transcriptions, limited reading and writing skills and inadequate administrative routines, may be the cause of name and location being written differently and explain deviations between different documents.

A tazkera has a logo and stamp of the office having issued the document, but has no state-of-the-art security features. Today's paper tazkera in standard A4 format has no reference to biometric data, and has no security features such as watermark, hologram,

micro text or similar. It is very easy to forge, alter or reproduce on account of few or no security features (Norwegian ID Centre, n.d.).

Landinfo is aware that several western country representatives in Pakistan, such as the Norwegian embassy in Islamabad, previously asked Afghan citizens who submitted applications for residence permit, not to present any documents in connection with their application. This request was based on the assessed credibility of Afghan documents, including tazkeras. The Norwegian embassy in Islamabad stated that as of 2016, Afghan citizens were, like applicants from other countries, requested to present documents in connection with an application for a visa or family reunion. However, the embassy (e-mail January 2016) still considered the credibility of an Afghan tazkera to be very low.

About three million Afghans live in Iran. The Norwegian embassy in Tehran (e-mail February 2016) informs that they have processed many cases from Afghan citizens. Owing to the very low reputation of Afghan ID documents, DNA tests will, as a rule, be taken in cases when residency in Norway is being assessed.

7.2 ISSUING PASSPORTS

The tazkera is the key supporting document in connection with the issuing of passports, both at Afghan consulates and missions as in Afghanistan. Given that Landinfo assesses the reliability of tazkeras to be low, this assessment will consequently also apply to Afghan passports.

Previously, passports were issued by the Afghan embassy in Oslo based on information acquired during interviews and without supporting submitted documents. This practice has now been tightened and it is required that applicants presents a legalised tazkera in order to get a passport issued. This is an improvement on earlier practice, but the problem is nevertheless that the tazkera, as a supporting document, still has low credibility.

Handwritten Afghan passports, including those possibly issued based on false information regarding identity and/or nationality, have routinely and after a written application until recently been given extended validity. Many of these passports are still in circulation and were valid travel documents up to and including November 2017. The control systems for assessment of nationality and identity in connection with the issuing of passports, are presumably not functioning optimally. Irrespective of this, the systems seem to be better at confirming nationality than they do at confirming identity.

8. ADMINISTRATION AND CONFLICT

8.1 BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION

The starting point for the assessment of Afghan documents, is Afghanistan's administrative culture; an administrative culture which is strongly characterised by bribery, corruption, incompetence and nepotism. Nepotism is extensive at all levels of

administration and the majority of people in senior positions are there on account of kinship or acquaintances.

Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) evaluates estimated corruption in the public sector in almost all the countries of the world.⁷ In the index for 2015 Afghanistan came out very poorly and was ranked 166 out of 167 countries (TI 2015). In recent years President Ghani has put the fight against corruption high on the political agenda. Afghanistan has climbed a few places but is still in the lower echelons. In the index for 2018 Afghanistan was ranked 172 out of a total of 180 countries (TI 2019).

Bribery, corruption and illegal production of different types of documentation is widespread in Afghanistan. Bribery can entail having to pay for a privilege which one generally is entitled to free of charge, being treated without waiting one's turn or having documentation issued on false premises, for example, if one has not submitted sufficient supporting documents. Bribery of civil servants is, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), believed to constitute double the country's tax revenue and was, in 2014, estimated to represent a value of around 3.9 billion dollars (Tømte 2015).

Documents issued by the proper authority can contain both correct and incorrect information. It is easy to provide ID documents with incorrect information issued by the proper authority. There is also a large market for fake documents in Afghanistan.

The fight against corruption has, as previously mentioned, been high on Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's political programme. However, the fight against corruption has had unintended consequences; the focus on corruption has resulted in a growing bureaucracy in the form of several controlling elements. The price of bribes has increased because the risk the civil servants run is greater. The head of an international NGO (meeting, September 2015) stated that it took months to get the signatures needed for the organisation to be able to do its job. The director of PRD (meeting in Kabul, September 2015) recognised that corruption was a big problem in PRD, and that PRD was one of the most corrupt departments in Afghan administration. At the same time, he underlined that it was working systematically to reduce the level of corruption.

8.2 ARMED CONFLICT AND ADMINISTRATION

Afghanistan is greatly characterised by the serious conflicts that have taken place in the country from the 1970s. The Afghan state and the relationship between central and local authorities has traditionally been weak. Great areas of the country are now completely without a functioning administrative system and central institutions therefore have a very limited scope to control and monitor the activities of local authorities. In addition, loyalty to central authorities has traditionally been weak or absent. The influence of the state has thus been greatly weakened in large parts of the country. Nepotism is widespread, and weakens efficiency, responsibility and predictability in public administration. Incompetence further contributes to an arbitrary and illegal exercise of authority.

⁷ Transparency International's corruption index is based on perceptions regarding corruption in public authorities, which have been obtained from a wide range of the population in the applicable country.

It is evident that the continual conflict situation has contributed to there not being an established, uniform, regulated and predictable control of identifying information in connection with the issuing of tazkeras and passports, either in Afghanistan or by Afghan representatives abroad.

There has not been a census in the country since 1979 and there are consequently no statistics of the demographic structure or settlement patterns. In 2014 the Act on Registration of Population Records was passed. The aim of this Act, according to article 2, is to get a general view of the size of the country's population, as well as births, deaths, marriages and divorces. Electronic tazkeras are thoroughly regulated in the Act. The legislation and plans are in place, but implementation and execution are absent. This is an assessment of the situation which applies to a number of areas in Afghan society.

Conflict-related situations may seem to contribute to the slow implementation of the legislation. An international source (meeting, September 2015) thought that many people did not want the ethnic and demographic composition to become known, because it may rock the foundation and division of power in the Afghan state. It may explain the strong opposition that the e-Tazkera project still encounters and why its implementation has been postponed several times.

9. COMMENTS REGARDING CREDIBILITY

It is easy to obtain all types of forged documents in Afghanistan and it is also possible to obtain valid documents with incorrect information from all authoritative bodies.

The registration of births is highly inadequate; more than sixty percent of children are not registered at birth. The Afghan population size and composition is not known, and all quantitative descriptions of the population are estimates.

Basic information obtained in connection with the issuing of tazkeras can be manipulated and its control is inadequate. Up until spring 2018 only manual tazkeras were issued and most of those issued are still paper ones. The absence of electronic evidence means that it is relatively easy to manipulate basic information. In addition, it is evident that not all tazkeras issued locally, are registered centrally. PRD's central archive is incomplete, mainly because the registration books have been destroyed on account of acts of war and natural catastrophes.

It is Landinfos opinion that PRD/ACCRA and their possible representation at local level does not differ from other Afghan state administration with regard to corruption. Tazkeras issued by the proper authorities do not necessarily contain correct information on identity. Landinfo believes that the registration and quality assurance of personal data both in connection with passports and supporting documents is inadequate. Afghan passports can contain incorrect information on identity, age and nationality. Landinfo is also aware that people have more than one passport at their disposal containing different identity information.

Afghan authorities have implemented several specific future projects that in the long term may improve the credibility of Afghan documents; entering of birth registrations, the introduction of electronic tazkeras, storage of biometric data, machine readable

passports and various digital registers. For the time being the development of the majority of these actions are only just starting.

According to information from the embassy in Oslo, passports are now only produced on the basis of having submitted a legalised tazkera. Compared with earlier practices, this is a clear improvement and, according to Landinfo's assessment, contributes to passports issued by the embassy in Oslo having a better reputation than previously. At the same time passports reliability have deteriorated due to the fact that they are issued based on documents of doubtful origin. Verification of documents through the consular section of the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs can tell us whether the form is genuine and issued by a competent authority. However, such investigations will not uncover incorrect information resulting from bribery, corruption or inadequate supporting documentation.

In connection with the issuing of identity certificates, the applicant is interviewed by embassy staff in order to discover whether they are Afghans or not. This practice does not inspire confidence. Even though in individual cases it may be possible through such interviews to determine nationality, identity and age will on this basis still be extremely difficult to decide.

Based on Landinfo's experience on problems with identity and nationality in countries suffering from armed conflicts, problems of poverty, weak administration and extensive corruption, it will normally be easier to decide the nationality rather than identity when no documents are available. It is natural to assume that it is also the case concerning Afghanistan.

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