



## The Gambia: Issuance of identity documents

### Introduction

The following note clarifies the issuance procedures related to the Gambian national identity card and the Gambian national passport. It also describes the birth registration procedure in Gambia, and provides an assessment of the prevalence of false and fraudulent documents in The Gambia.

The content within this note is based on open-source information.

### National identity cards

According to the tourist information site Access Gambia and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), adult Gambian citizens over the age of 18 are required by law to carry a national identity card at all times, and can be punished with a fine or prison sentence, if they are in violation of this law.<sup>1</sup>

The Gambian national identity card is issued by the Gambian Immigration Department, and to apply for a national identity card, Gambian citizens must submit a GID-001 application form along with the original and copies of the following supporting documents:

- Birth certificate
- Passport
- Voter's card
- Attestation issued by the district authority chief (*Seyfo*)/village chief (*Al-kalo*)
- Registration/naturalisation certificate
- Police report (if lost or stolen)

In addition, Gambian citizens must pass an interview with an immigration officer to prove their identity, before they are issued with a national identity card.<sup>2</sup>

According to EASO, there were two types of identity card in circulation in 2017; a traditional non-electronic identity card, and an electronic identity card containing

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<sup>1</sup> Access Gambia, N/A; EASO, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Embassy of Republic of Gambia, N/A, EASO, 2017; GAMBIS, N/A.

a chip. The electronic card contains a chip and an 11-digit National Identification Number (NIN) belonging to the Gambia Biometric Identity System (GAMBIS). The GAMBIS system is the body responsible for the issuance of national identity cards, work and residence permits, and driving licenses on behalf of the Gambian government. The first six digits of the NIN are the card holder's date of birth, and the following digits are a series of codes which pertain to the card holder's gender, the place of issuance, and serial numbers.<sup>3</sup>

The Gambian government aimed to extend the GAMBIS system to other central Gambian identity- and travel documents, such as national passports, birth certificates and marriage certificates. However, this did not happen, and by mid-to-late 2015, electronic identity cards were unavailable, and by early 2016 the Gambian government reverted to issuing traditional non-electronic identity cards again.<sup>4</sup>

However, a number of media sources indicate that a new biometric version of the national identity card was made available to the Gambian population by October 2018, but so far the issuance of this card has been restricted to 9602 Gambian citizens.<sup>5</sup>

Gambian citizens are also able to apply for a national identity card through Gambian diplomatic missions abroad, according to the website of the Gambian Embassy in London.<sup>6</sup>

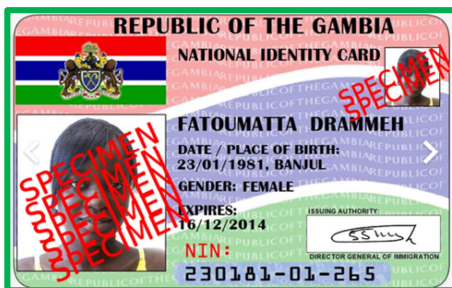


Figure 1.

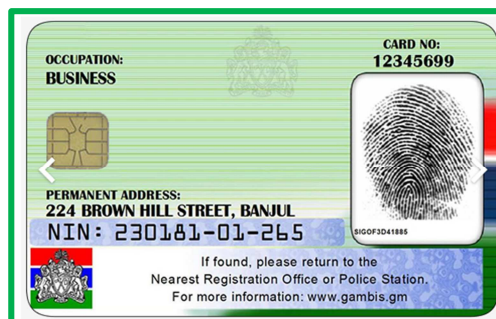


Figure 2.

Figure 1: Verso specimen sample Gambian national identity card taken from GAMBIS website.

Figure 2: Recto specimen sample Gambian national identity card taken from GAMBIS website.

### *Gambian National passport*

According to the consulted source material, Gambian passports are issued by the Gambian Immigration Department, and two series of Gambian passports are currently in circulation. The first series is a machine readable passport containing no biometric chip or electronic information, and the second is an ECOWAS passport containing electronically stored data.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Access Gambia, N/A; EASO, 2017; GAMBIS, N/A.

<sup>4</sup> Access Gambia, N/A; EASO, 2017; GAMBIS, N/A.

<sup>5</sup> Gambia News Online, 23 November 2018; Journal du Cameroun, 22 September 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Embassy of Republic of Gambia, N/A.

<sup>7</sup> Access Gambia, 2012; EASO, 2017; The Daily Observer, 10 December 2015.

Although several sources point to the Immigration Department, as the government authority responsible for passport issuance, the NIDC was unable to corroborate any information concerning the issuance of passports with the Immigration Department, as their website was inactive throughout the duration of this research.

## Machine readable passport

The Gambian machine readable passport is valid for a period of 5 years, and comes in three versions; a green standard citizen's passport, a blue service passport and a red diplomatic passport. The price of a standard citizen passport is 1000 GMD (approximately 20 USD). To apply for a passport, Gambian citizens must prove their Gambian nationality and identity by submitting the following documents in connection with their application:

- Proof of parents' identity
- Birth certificate or a statement signed by the *Alkalo/Seyfo*, certifying that the passport applicant was born in their village/district<sup>8</sup>

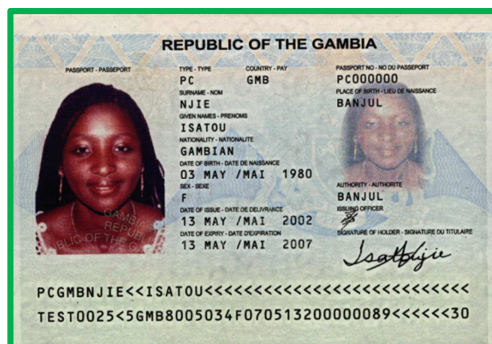
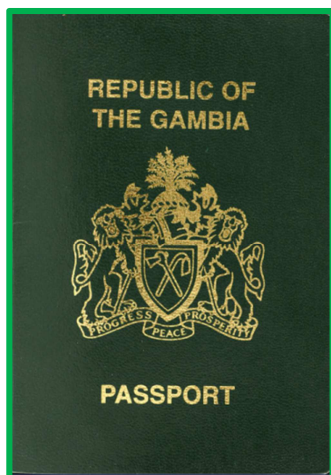


Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Figure 3: Front cover Gambian machine readable passport from Edison TD.

Figure 4: Bio-data page Gambian machine readable passport from Edison TD.

*Biometric ECOWAS passport*

According to the Daily Observer, an English-speaking, Banjul based newspaper, the Gambian biometric ECOWAS passport was launched on 22 September 2014, and the Gambian Ministry of Interior urged all Gambian citizens to apply for a new biometric passport, as they would not be allowed to depart from Banjul International Airport with a machine readable passport from January 2016.<sup>9</sup>

However, according to the media site Jollofnews, the Gambian government suspended the production of the biometric ECOWAS passport and national identity cards until further notice, as they were initiating a comprehensive review of the

<sup>8</sup> EASO, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> EASO, 2017; The Daily Observer, 10 December 2018.

issuance procedures related to central Gambian identity documents. The suspension lasted for a period of two months, and in July 2017, the Gambian Minister of Interior stated that there were no further restrictions on the issuance of biometric passports.<sup>10</sup>

The price of a Biometric ECOWAS passport is 3000 GMD (approximately 60 USD), and Gambian citizens applying for a biometric passport must appear in person to have their biometric features registered. The passport application must be submitted at the Immigration Department's enrolment office in Banjul with the following supporting documents:

- Payment confirmation
- National Biometric ID Card
- Voters card
- Copy of birth certificate, or certificate signed by *Alkalo/Seyfo*
- Parents' supporting documents
- Old passport (in renewal cases)<sup>11</sup>

According to the website of the Gambian Consulate General in the Netherlands, Gambian diplomatic missions do not have the necessary equipment to issue biometric passports, and Gambian citizens living abroad are therefore required to travel to Gambia, if they wish to apply for a new passport. Gambian diplomatic missions are able to issue emergency passports, if a Gambian citizen's passport expires while the citizen is travelling abroad.<sup>12</sup>

No specimen samples of the Gambian biometric ECOWAS passport have been uploaded to the international document databases DISCS, Edison TD or IFADO.

#### *Birth registration*

According to UNICEF, birth registration in Gambia is regulated by the Births, Deaths and marriages Registration Act (1990), and the registration process falls under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. The actual registration of births and deaths is conducted by local registrars, who interview applicants or family members, hereby checking the plausibility of statements and documents. Birth registration in Gambia requires the following documents:

- Documents from clinic of birth
- Written confirmation of birth from *Alkalo/Seyfo*
- Completion of a legally prescribed form<sup>13</sup>

According to UNICEF, the timeframe for birth registration is different for the mother and father of the child, depending on which parent registers the child's birth. Fathers must register the birth within 14 days of the event, and mothers

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<sup>10</sup> EASO, 2017; The Point, 10 July 2017.

<sup>11</sup> EASO, 2017; Jollofnews, 23 March 2017; The Point, 23 September 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Consulate General of Gambia, N/A.

<sup>13</sup> EASO, 2017; UNICEF, N/A.

must register the birth within 30 days of the event. The fee for birth registration is waived, if the child is between 0-5 years of age at the time of registration, and official birth certificates are issued at the time of registration at the central level, whereas they are issued on a monthly basis at the regional level.<sup>14</sup>

The document database, DISCS, contains the technical specifications of 3 similar versions of the Gambian birth certificate issued by the Registrar in Banjul, and any questions concerning the technical specifications of the birth certificates can be forwarded to the NIDC.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 3: Sample birth registration fom taken from UNICEF.

A pdf. version of the Gambian birth attestation form is also available from the UNICEF website, using the following link: <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/BIRTH'S-ATTESTATION.pdf>.<sup>16</sup>

### *Late birth registration*

According to Landinfo and NIDC's recent experience, late birth registration is a prevailing trend in several African countries, including many West African states. This is because parents often have little or no incentive to register the birth of their children until they reach a situation that requires a birth certificate. Examples of this type of situation may include school enrolment, access to health services or acquisition of documentation required for international travel. As many children in several African countries receive no formal education, it is not uncommon for citizens in these countries to register their birth as adults, especially in remote, rural areas.<sup>17</sup>

This trend is also evident in Gambia. According to UNICEF and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the level of birth registration for children under the age of five was 55 percent in 2006, and that late birth registration

<sup>14</sup> UNICEF, N/A.

<sup>15</sup> DISCS, N/A; .

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF N/A.

<sup>17</sup> Landinfo, 2007.

in connection with school enrolment was still the most common form of birth registration in 2012.<sup>18</sup>

*Corruption, the legitimacy of Gambian birth registration, and fake documents*

According to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index from 2017, Gambia is ranked as number 130 out of 180 possible countries, with a score of 30 points out of a possible 100 points. This placement is indicative of a high level of corruption within Gambian society, and according to Landinfo, corruption in the form of bribery, is part of everyday life for people living in several African countries, including countries in the West African Region, such as Gambia. Bribery is very common among the lower levels of government, and other public institutions. This is partly due to low salaries, which make it impossible for public officials to survive without garnishing their official wages.<sup>19</sup>

While it is difficult to determine the exact effect of this corruption on the issuance of Gambian identity documents, it is evident that high levels of corruption may facilitate the issuance of documents containing false personal information. This risk is further exacerbated by the lack of a central database for the registration of vital statistics, such as births, deaths and marriage. In Gambia, all forms of vital statistics, including birth registrations, are entered by hand in records that are archived locally in analogue form.<sup>20</sup>

The combination of low levels of birth registration and the lack of a central electronic database containing records of vital statistics, theoretically makes it possible to obtain genuine birth certificates containing fraudulent personal information, due to the lack of possible verification routines. In addition, late birth registration procedures often contain approximate, rather than accurate information. This can either be due to an applicant's genuine inability to recall the event, or because it may be in the applicant's interest to provide incorrect information.<sup>21</sup>

The provision of inaccurate or incorrect personal information in connection with birth registration is demonstrated by the 'age-cheating' or 'age fraud' phenomenon in professional football, where several African national squads, including the Gambian under 20 national squad, have been, or are under investigation for falsifying the ages of their players. In addition, the Registrar of Births and Deaths of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in Gambia, has warned the general public against reducing their age in connection with their birth registration.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, a number of media sources indicate that foreign citizens have been able to obtain Gambian passports containing fraudulent information. In 2013, 54

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<sup>18</sup> UNECA, September 2012; UNICEF, January 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Landinfo, July 2007; Transparency International, 21 February 2018.

<sup>20</sup> EASO, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Landinfo, July 2007.

<sup>22</sup> BBC, 13 February 2014; CNN, February 4 2013; Gambian Talents Promotion, 13 May 2013; Goal.com, N/A; The Point, 4 October 2018; The Daily Observer, 18 July 2013; The Standard, 31 October 2014.

Tunisian Hajj pilgrims in possession of fake Gambian passports were intercepted, and a photocopy of one of the passports demonstrated that it was issued in Banjul, Gambia, under the name of a Tunisian woman born in 1950.<sup>23</sup>

A number of Gambian media sources also report that the Gambian government announced an immediate suspension on the production of both passports and national identity cards in April 2017. According to the Gambian Minister of Interior the reason for this, was that the Gambian government wanted to avoid the fraudulent acquisition of the document and forgery.<sup>24</sup>

In connection with the launch of the new identity cards in 2018, the Gambian president urged security agencies and local authorities to desist from issuing Gambian identity documents to foreign citizens. This was followed up by statements from the Gambian Vice President, who called on village authorities to cease from attesting non-Gambian citizens just because they had resided in Gambia for a prolonged period of time, and the Director General of the Immigration Department, who stated that previously a lot of Gambian identity cards had been issued to non-Gambians, and that this mistake was not to be replicated.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Morocco World News, 4 October 2013; Saudi Gazette, 5 October 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Foroyaa Newspaper, 11 July 2017; Jollofnews, 23 March 2017; Journal du Cameroun, 22 September 2018;

<sup>25</sup> Gambia News Online, 23 November 2018; Journal du Cameroun, 22 September 2018.

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