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# LANDINFO

Country of Origin Information Centre

**Report**

**Sudan**

## **Civil Registration, Identity Documents and Passports**

3 March 2023



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## Summary

Sudan introduced a new electronic and centralised civil registry in 2011, which required all citizens to apply in person for a unique national identity number. The national identity number, which is tied to biometric data, is needed when applying for civil, identity and travel documents. According to the Sudanese authorities, a vast majority of Sudanese citizens are registered in the new civil registry and have been assigned a national identity number. The consulted sources agree that the overall percentage registered in the civil registry is lower in the peripheries, especially among IDPs and the population in remote areas, than in central parts of Sudan.

The introduction of a modern civil registry, ID card and passport enhances the ability of the Sudanese authorities to keep control of its citizens and makes it generally harder to obtain fraudulent documents.

## Sammendrag

Sudan introduserte et nytt elektronisk og sentralisert sivilregister i 2011, som påkrevde alle sudanere om å møte i person for å søke om et unikt nasjonalt nummer. Å ha et nasjonalt nummer er nødvendig ved søknad om sivilattester, ID-kort og reisedokumenter. Ifølge sudanske myndigheter har det store flertallet av sudanere registrert seg i det nye sivilregisteret, og blitt tildelt nasjonalt nummer. Kildene vi har snakket med er enige om at andelen registrerte er lavere i periferien, særlig blant internt fordrevne og befolkningen i avsidesliggende områder, enn hva den er i de sentrale delene av Sudan.

Introduksjonen av et moderne sivilregister, ID-kort og pass gir sudanske myndigheter større mulighet til å føre kontroll med landets innbyggere, og gjør det vanskeligere å fremskaffe forfalskede dokumenter.

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# 1 Introduction

This report concerns civil registration and identity, travel and civil status documents in Sudan. It is especially concerned with the centralised electronic civil registration system that was introduced in 2011, where each registered Sudanese citizen is assigned a unique national identity number. This number has become a cornerstone in the Sudanese ID system and is a prerequisite for obtaining the documents described in this report: civil registration certificate, birth certificate, marriage certificate, ID card and passport.

The report describes the procedures for issuing these documents and what information they contain. Registration and issuing procedures abroad, for relevant documents, are also described.

Finally, the report describes factors relevant for assessing the reliability of Sudanese documents, including issuance and control procedures, corruption and what we know about the availability of forged documents and documents with manipulated content.

## 1.1 Sources

The information is mainly collected from Sudanese governmental websites:

- The Ministry of Interior describes application procedures for civil documents and ID cards on their online service portal – [The public guide to simplify public services](#).
- The [General Directorate for Passports and Migration](#) describes application procedures for passports.
- [The Sudanese Embassy in London](#) describes application procedures for Sudanese citizens abroad for national identity number, birth certificate and renewal of passport.

Landinfo and CEDOCA<sup>1</sup> conducted a joint fact-finding-mission to Sudan from 30 October to 10 November 2022. We talked with several sources about civil registration and issuance of identity documents. Unfortunately, we were unable to schedule a meeting with the General Directorate for Civil Registration and the General Directorate for Passports and Migration<sup>2</sup> the two governmental bodies responsible for civil registration and issuance of civil, identity and travel documents in Sudan. However, the report draws on information from meetings

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<sup>1</sup> CEDOCA is part of the office of Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) and is an independent federal administration in Belgium.

<sup>2</sup> The General Directorate for Civil Registration in Arabic is *al-Idara al-ʿamma lis-sijill al-madani*, while The General Directorate for Passports and Migration is *al-Idara al-ʿamma lil-jawazat wal-hijra*.

with the two directorates conducted by the Norwegian Embassy in September 2021, by Landinfo in November 2017 and November 2015 and the Norwegian ID Centre in May 2016.

It is generally difficult to obtain information on the practice of document issuing from non-governmental sources. It is an understudied topic, and information often relies on people's overall impression and anecdotal evidence from their own experiences. Landinfo has interviewed an employee in an international organization (Source B 2023) who works with registration and identity documents among internally displaced persons (IDPs). The source has provided valuable supplementary information regarding formal requirements and how these may be handled in practice.

In addition, the report makes use of Sudanese online newspapers, such as Radio Dabanga and Sudan Tribune, which occasionally feature articles on civil registration, identity documents and passports.

The procedures and formal requirements are at times described somewhat differently on the various governmental webpages and by the consulted sources. In this report, written material from a governmental body is used as a starting point and is supplemented with information from other sources.

## 2 The Civil Registry

The responsibility for civil registration lies with the General Directorate for Civil Registration, which sorts under the Ministry of Interior.

A new law concerning civil registration – the Civil Registration Act – was introduced in 2011. In the same year, the government implemented a project to register every citizen in a new centralised electronic civil registry, replacing the old hand-written and decentralised registers (Sudan Tribune 2011).

It is required by law to register in the new civil registry. Furthermore, the Civil Registration Act orders applicants to meet in person at a registration point, where previously issued identity documents are checked and fingerprints recorded. Upon registration, each citizen is assigned a unique national identity number (*ar-raqm al-watani*).<sup>3</sup>

The national identity number is the foundation of the new ID system. It is required to obtain civil documents, an ID card or a passport. Furthermore, to have a national identity number is required for employment in the formal sector, and to

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<sup>3</sup> Several countries issue such unique numbers to its citizens. In Norway, it is called, national identity number, and in Belgium, national register number.

access a range of public and private services, including public health insurance, the right to sit for the final exam at school, a driver's license, setting up a bank account and registering a SIM-card in one's name (IRB 2013; The Norwegian Embassy in Khartoum 2021; Source B 2023).

To facilitate mass registration, the government dispatched more than a thousand mobile registration units (Sudan Tribune 2011; UK Home Office 2018, pp. 74, 167) and made it possible to register at any civil registry office in the country (The Norwegian Embassy in Khartoum 2021).<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, because of the sheer numbers of people involved, registration could be a time-consuming affair. One source mentioned that he queued up at 3 am to be first in line, while latecomers waited the whole day (Source A 2022).

According to the authorities, most Sudanese citizens have been enrolled in the new civil registry. In a meeting between the Norwegian ID Centre (2016) and the General Directorate for Civil Registration in May 2016, a Sudanese official stated that 82 % of the population had been registered. To the Norwegian Embassy in Khartoum (2021), an official stated that by 2021, 35.5 million out of 40 million inhabitants had been registered.

Although mass registration took place nationwide, progress has been generally slower in the peripheries and conflict areas, such as Darfur (Assal 2014, p. 200). In the years following the introduction of the new civil registry, Radio Dabanga (2013a, b, 2014a, b, 2015a, b) published numerous articles where Darfuris accused officials of demanding fees for registration and issuing national identity numbers, a service which is supposed to be free. It is reasonable to believe that the overall number registered in the conflict areas remains lower than in central parts of Sudan and that the share is especially low among IDPs and in very remote areas, where public services are lacking, and poverty is widespread (see section 2.1.3).

## **2.1 National identity number and civil registration certificate**

Upon registration in the new electronic civil registry, the General Directorate of Civil Registration issues each citizen a unique 11-digit national identity number (*ar-raqm al-watani*).

After the registration is completed, the person in question receives an official printout in A4 format from the civil registry, called a civil registration certificate (*shahadat al-qayd al-madani*) (Ministry of Interior n.d.-b). The certificate contains information about the place and time of issuance, the national identity

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<sup>4</sup> In the Civil Registry Act 2011, it is stated that “each citizen shall register himself in the civil registry center in which area of jurisdiction he permanently resides and may not register himself or any of the members of his family in any other center (art. 10.2).” However, according to officials that met with the Norwegian Embassy in 2021, it is possible to register at any office.

number and personalia registered in the civil register, in Arabic writing and western numerals. At the bottom right corner, there is a QR code (DISCS n.d.-b).

### 2.1.1 Issuance

The applicant must prove his/her Sudanese citizenship to obtain a national identity number.

According to the online service portal of the Ministry of Interior (n.d.-b), applicants must meet up in person at a registration point and submit a national certificate, a Sudanese ID card or a passport.<sup>5</sup> The registration officer investigates the document(s), records fingerprints and takes a photo of the applicant.<sup>6</sup> Upon approval of the application, the applicant is registered in the civil registry, assigned a national identity number and issued a civil registration certificate.

There seem to be different requirements regarding the need for bringing a witness depending on the applicant's ethnicity.

Source A (2023), who had applied for a national identity number in Khartoum, told us that it was unnecessary to bring a witness if one has the necessary documentation.

The General Directorate told the Norwegian ID Centre in November 2016 that there are higher documentation requirements for members of ethnic groups from border areas (Bureau Documenten & Norwegian ID Centre 2016).

According to Source B (2023), an employee in an international organization which works with civil and identity documentation in Darfur, it is necessary to bring a witness in addition to identity documentation. The witness should be a male paternal ascendant, such as a father or an uncle. In some cases, a local tribal leader – an *'umda* or a *shaykh* – can be a witness instead. The witness must, in any case, have a national identity number and present a copy of his identity documentation.

If the applicant does not have the necessary breeder documents, or if there are other doubts about his/her identity, further witnesses are required to substantiate the claim of Sudanese citizenship. The sources differ somewhat on how many witnesses it is necessary to provide in such cases, but they agree that it at least must be more than one and that the witnesses must have a national identity

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<sup>5</sup> Previously, nationality certificates and an older version of the ID card were issued to Sudanese citizens. Source B (2023) stated that a birth certificate is also accepted as a breeder document.

<sup>6</sup> Fingerprints are not recorded for applicants under the age of 12 (Norwegian ID Centre 2016).

number (Darfur Bar Association 2022; Source B 2023; Source C 2022; UK Home Office 2018, pp. 62-66).

### **2.1.2 Issuance to children**

A father can apply for a national identity number on behalf of a child until the child is 12 years old (Source A 2023; Source B 2023).

He must provide the following documents:

- Birth certificate
- His own national identity number and the national identity number of the child's mother
- Marriage certificate

After the child is 12 years old, he or she must meet in person when applying for a national identity number (Source A 2023).

### **2.1.3 Changes in personal information in the civil registry**

According to the online service portal of the Ministry of Interior, it is possible to request amendments to wrongful entries or to change information about the place of residence, address, or profession in the civil registry.

The person requesting the amendment must meet in person at a civil registry office, give his/her fingerprints and provide documentation supporting the claim (Ministry of Interior n.d.-a).

### **2.1.4 Registration in the conflict areas – with particular reference to Darfur**

All consulted sources suggest that the overall registration rate is lower in the conflict areas, such as Darfur, than in the rest of the country. This is likely to be caused in part by the historically lower birth registration and generally poorer public services in the peripheries compared to central areas of Sudan.<sup>7</sup> In addition,

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<sup>7</sup> UNICEF's most recent Multiple Indication Cluster Survey, from 2014, found that 67 % of children in Sudan under five years old were registered with the authorities, while 50 % had a birth certificate (MICS 2014, p. 192). Registration of children was found to be almost universal in Khartoum and along the Nile Valley north of the capital, while the share of registered is overall lower in the peripheries. The lowest percentages were recorded in the Darfur states, where less than 50 % were registered. Socio-economic factors were found to influence whether a birth is registered or not. While 89 % of the children under the age of five living in an urban area were registered with the authorities, the corresponding number for rural areas was 59 %. The prevalence of registration was also found to be far higher in wealthier households than in poorer ones (MICS 2014, p. 193).

a large part of the population in the conflict areas live in IDP settlements, while some live in remote areas under the control of rebel groups.<sup>8</sup>

According to the sources, it is generally straightforward for Darfuris (regardless of ethnicity) in possession of identity documents or with paternal relatives having identity documents, to register and obtain a national identity number (Darfur Bar Association 2022; Source B 2023; Source C 2022). There are registration offices in all major cities in Darfur,<sup>9</sup> and the incentives to register are generally the same in Darfur as in Khartoum.

Nonetheless, most Darfuris living in IDP settlements have not been registered in the new civil registry and lack a national identity number (Darfur Bar Association 2022; Source B 2023; Source C 2022). The sources pointed to several reasons for this:

- Many IDP communities remain distrustful of the registration process. One reason for this is that it is not generally possible to register place of origin as place of residence. IDPs hoping to return to their place of origin may fear that registering their current place of displacement as “place of residence” can be held against them in the future, for example in relation to claim of customary landholdings in their place of origin (Source B 2023).
- There are no civil registration services in the IDP settlements. A trip to the nearest city to register can be both time-consuming and costly. In addition, officials generally demand a fee for issuing a national identity number.
- Many IDPs do not have any identity documents to start with, and hence do not have the necessary breeder documents to obtain a national identity number. In some cases, they might also lack paternal relatives with identity documents enabling them to stand as witnesses.
- Some IDPs come from villages or cities where the civil registry office has burnt down, making any previous records unavailable.

### **2.1.5 Application abroad for a national identity number**

It is possible to apply for a national identity number and obtain a civil registration certificate at certain embassies with equipment to record biometric data. Mobile teams have occasionally visited other embassies to provide the service (see Landinfo 2019).

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<sup>8</sup> SLA-AW controls remote areas in northern Jabal Marra, while SPLA-al-Hilu controls an enclave in the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan.

<sup>9</sup> The civil registry office in al-Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, was burnt down in December 2019 (Darfur 24 2019). Landinfo does not know whether the offices have been rebuilt, or if its services are conducted elsewhere in West Darfur.

An announcement by the Sudanese Embassy in Brussels, dated 21 May 2019, confirms that the embassy issues national identity number. Applicants must provide the following documents (Sudanese Embassy in Brussels 2019):

- Nationality certificate
- Birth certificate or age assessment document (*at-tisnin*)
- Documentation of profession

It is furthermore stated that in cases where applicants lack documentation that can prove their Sudanese citizenship, the embassy will conduct preliminary investigations. The case is then transferred to the civil registry in Khartoum for further investigation through witnesses related to the applicant on the father's side. If the applicant's claim of citizenship is validated, the case is transferred back to the embassy, which will issue a national identity number to the applicant.

According to the webpage of the Sudanese Embassy in London, applicants must provide the identity documents of a witness in addition to their own birth certificate and nationality certificate (The Sudanese Embassy in London 2021b).

A minor who applies for a national identity number at the Sudanese Embassy in London, must provide the following documents (The Sudanese Embassy in London 2021b):

- Birth certificate
- Father's national identity number
- Mother's national identity number, if she has one
- Marriage certificate of parents

## 2.2 Birth certificate

Birth registration is the process of registering a child's birth in the civil registry. Subsequently, based on the registration, a birth certificate can be issued.

The General Directorate of Civil Registration issues the certificate. It is a light blue/green document in A4 format, containing machine-written information about the child and the parents, and a unique QR-code for verification (DISCS n.d.-a).

Previously, "official extracts of the general birth certificate" and hand-written certificates were issued. According to officials in the General Directorate, however, this is no longer the case (The Norwegian Embassy in Khartoum 2021).

It is required by law to register births. The health institution where delivery has occurred must provide a "notice of birth" to the parents and send a copy of the notice to the local authorities within 15 days. If the birth has taken place outside

of a health institution,<sup>10</sup> the responsibility to notify the authorities lies with the midwife, the parents or another adult residing in the same house as the mother at the time of birth (Civil Registry Act 2011, art. 20 & 21).

Births can be registered free of charge for one year. A fee is charged if the birth is registered later (Ministry of Interior n.d.-b; UNICEF n.d.).

### **2.2.1 Issuance**

The General Directorate for Civil Registration issues birth certificates upon application, usually by the parent(s) at a civil registry office. According to the online service portal of the Ministry of Interior (n.d.-a), applicants must provide “notice of birth” and the ID card of the father or a relative on the father’s side.

Source B (2023), who has recently assisted applicants in this regard, stated that applicants must provide the following documents:

- Notice of birth
- National identity number of both parents
- Marriage certificate of the parents

Furthermore, the source stated that while presenting national identity numbers for both parents is an absolute requirement, the civil registry office can be more flexible with regard to the notice of birth and marriage certificate. It might in practice accept any official document regarding the birth, such as a vaccination card, in the case that the parents do not have notice of birth, or a letter from an *‘umda* confirming the marriage, if the parents do not have a marriage certificate (Source B 2023).

### **2.2.2 Issuance to “illegitimate” children**

To register a so-called illegitimate child, where the father does not accept responsibility or his identity is unknown, one must first apply to the Ministry of Social Welfare for them to issue fictitious paternal names. Afterwards, the following documents must be presented to the civil registry office:

- Acknowledgement of the mother and her national identity number

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<sup>10</sup> Most deliveries in Sudan occur at home with a midwife or trained birth assistant (TBA) present. The exception is in Khartoum, River Nile and Northern State, where the majority of deliveries occur in a health facility (MICS 2014, pp. 152-155).

- Acknowledgement of a witness belonging to the mother's paternal family<sup>11</sup> and his national identity number
- A letter from the Ministry of Social Welfare

The letter from the ministry contains information about the child and time and place of birth. The staff in the ministry will choose the paternal names (*nasab*), while the child is allowed to keep his/her first name (*ism*) (Source B 2023).<sup>12</sup>

### 2.2.3 Issuance abroad

Sudanese birth certificates are issued by certain embassies abroad. According to the webpage of The Sudanese Embassy in London (2021a), the following documents must be presented:

- The Sudanese passport or the national identity number of parents
- The British birth certificate of the newborn.

The embassy states that the birth certificate can only be issued in the year of birth, meaning that a child born in any month in 2021 can apply no later than 31 December 2021.

### 2.2.4 Age assessment documents

The sources are in conflict regarding whether the National Medical Commission still conducts age assessments or issue age assessment certificates (*shahadat at-tisnin*) to persons yet to register their birth at the age of 16. Previously, at least, the commission performed a brief age assessment<sup>13</sup> and issued an age assessment certificate, which could be used in place of a birth certificate.

According to the undated online portal of the Ministry of Health (n.d.), unregistered Sudanese citizens above the age of 16 can apply for an age assessment. An applicant is obliged to meet in person and submit the following documents:

- A certificate of non-registration from the civil registry

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<sup>11</sup> Only a paternal relative has overlapping name elements with the mother (Source B). Thus, the mother's mother will not be a sufficient witness since her paternal names belongs to a different paternal lineage.

<sup>12</sup> Paternal names (*nasab*) are the name of your father, father's father and so on. In Sudanese passports and ID cards, there is space for a given name and three paternal names (Mustafa 2012). For more on naming customs in Arab countries, see Landinfo (2012).

<sup>13</sup> According to the Norwegian ID-centre, who met with the National Medical Commission in Khartoum in 2016, the assessment was carried out by three medical doctors, who based their assessment on documents brought by the applicant, an interview and a physical check. The process took about three to five minutes (Bureau Documenten & Norwegian ID Centre 2016).

- Two recent photographs
- Proof of identity, or proof of identity from a relative on the father's side

However, according to the Director of the Sudanese National Medical Commission, quoted in Sudanese Online (2018), the commission suspended the issuance of age assessment certificates in 2018 due to concern that it was possible to obtain multiple certificates. Instead, after an investigation by a medical commission, cases are now referred to the civil registry, which registers the individual and issues a birth certificate. The estimated birth year appears in the certificate. According to the Director, the date 1 January is no longer used as a default birth date. Instead, the date of registration, or the date of birth if the applicant knows it, is registered as the date of birth.

Source B (2023) claims that age assessments are no longer conducted.

## 2.3 Marriage certificates

The Judiciary (*as-sulta al-qada'iyya*), which sorts under the Ministry of Justice (U.S. State Department n.d.), issues marriage certificates (*wathiqat 'aqd zawaj*).<sup>14</sup> DISCS' database contains several different versions of this document, which suggests there is not a single standard version.

### 2.3.1 Muslim marriages

According to Source B (2023), who has experience with marriage registration in Darfur, there are two types of marriage registrations: marriage registration and marriage ratification.

The information below about the procedures for registering marriages is based on information provided by Source B (2023).

#### 2.3.1.1 Marriage registration

Marriage registration can be conducted on the day of the marriage if it has been officiated by a *ma'dhun*, appointed by the Chief of Judiciary as an authorised marriage official. In that case, the *ma'dhun* can also issue a marriage certificate immediately. In the case the marriage is officiated by such a *ma'dhun* the couple should present:

- A filled-out form containing personal details about the couple
- National ID card or the national identity number for husband and wife
- Two witnesses with a national identity number or valid ID

<sup>14</sup> The document is called *wathiqat 'aqd zawaj*, which means marriage contract certificate.

- Payment of a fee (Source B 2023)<sup>15</sup>

### 2.3.1.2 Marriage ratification

Marriage ratification is a late registration of a marriage. In such cases, the ma'dhun does not have the authority to issue a marriage certificate without an official letter from the court attesting to the marriage. To obtain this, the couple must write a letter to the court requesting the issuance of a marriage certificate. If the request is accepted, a case will be opened, and they will be required to present the following documents to the court:

- National ID card or the national identity number for husband and wife
- Two witnesses
- Payment of a fee

A judge examines the case and verifies whether the marriage has occurred, whether it was announced and whether the couple is genuine. If the judge accepts the marriage, he will issue a letter to a ma'dhun requesting him to issue a marriage certificate. The couple can then approach the ma'dhun and present the following documents:

- A filled-out form containing personal details about the couple
- National ID card or the national identity number for husband and wife
- Two witnesses with a national identity number or valid ID
- Letter from the judge
- Payment of a fee (Source B 2023)

According to Source B (2023), the certificate issued by the ma'dhun in case of late registration is called a certificate of ratification of marriage (*'aqd tasdiq 'ala zawaj*).

### 2.3.2 Christian marriages

In difference to Islam, where marriage is a contract between two persons, a marriage is considered to be a holy sacrament within the Orthodox church. The wedding is usually conducted in a church, which issues a marriage certificate.

In order to register the marriage with the authorities, one has to go to a personal status court, pay a fee and hand in the following documents:

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<sup>15</sup> According to Source B (2023), the fee was 5,400 SDG in North Darfur in January 2023, which is about 10 USD.

- ID card or the national identity numbers for husband and wife
- The marriage certificate issued by the church (Source B 2023)

### 3 National ID card

ID cards containing the national identity number have been issued since 2011 by the General Directorate for Civil Registration. The Ministry of Interior announced the introduction of a new “smart” ID card with a microchip on 14 October 2017 to replace the older version issued since 2011 (At-tahrir 2017).<sup>16</sup>

The ID card is the size of a bank card. The front of the card has a picture of the holder and biographic information, including the national identity number, in Arabic writing and western numerals. The back of the card contains a microchip, a bar code, an MRZ field and information about the issuance and validity of the card. The ID card is normally valid for five years (DISCS n.d.-c).

#### 3.1 Issuance

ID cards are only issued in Sudan, by the General Directorate of Civil Registration. It is issued to Sudanese citizens over the age of 16 who are registered in the civil registry with a national identity number. In special cases, it can be issued to persons under the age of 16 (Civil Registry Act 2011, art. 27).

According to the online portal of the Ministry of Interior, applicants must meet in person at a civil registry office and provide:

- Civil registration certificate, containing the national identity number.

The registration officer uses the national identity number to retrieve the applicant from the civil registry database, takes a photo of the applicant and records his or her fingerprints. In a meeting with the Norwegian ID Centre in 2016, officials stated that the applicant’s identity is verified biometrically by using fingerprints to check against information already recorded in the civil registry (Norwegian ID Centre 2017).

Source B (2023) stated that applicants must also do a blood test to determine their blood type.

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<sup>16</sup> The ID card issued since 2011 have a creamy/light orange colour. The front of the card has a picture of the holder and the Sudanese flag on the left side. On the right side is the logo of the Sudanese police and biographical information of the holder in Arabic writing and western numerals. The back of the card contains a bar code, information about the issuance and an MRZ code. A reference can be found in DISCS.

### 3.2 Extension of validity of ID cards

An online article published by Al-Nawras News (2021) in August 2021, referring to an article in the As-Sayha newspaper, suggested that the issuance of ID cards had been halted since January 2021 because of production problems related to lack of raw materials necessary to produce the cards.

The As-Sayha (2021) newspaper reported later in August that, due to the interrupted production of new ID cards, the Minister of Interior had decided to approve expired ID cards as an official document until 30 June 2022.

According to Source B (2023), who Landinfo talked to in January 2023, ID cards had not been issued in Darfur since 2021.

### 3.3 Who has a national ID card?

According to law, it is mandatory for Sudanese above the age of 16 years to obtain an ID card (Civil Registry Act 2011, art. 27). Officials state that most Sudanese have ID cards, as it is necessary in order to function in society (The Norwegian Embassy in Khartoum 2021).

A local source told Landinfo that many Sudanese do not have an ID card, as it is expensive to obtain. Instead, they use other official documents containing their national identity number for identification purposes (Source A 2022). Source B (2023) also underlined that the national identity number is more important than the ID card. People use other official documents containing with the national identity number on it, such as for example the Civil registration certificate.

Sources quoted in the reports of IRB (2013) and UK Home Office (2018) corroborate that, in practice, it is not strictly required to have a national ID card.

## 4 Passports

Sudan introduced a new electronic passport in 2008.<sup>17</sup> The passport has a dark blue cover. The biographic page contains a photo, passport number, full name, national identity number,<sup>18</sup> place and date of birth, sex, place and date of issue written in English and Arabic. The passports are machine-readable and contain a

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<sup>17</sup> Other sources suggest that the new passport was first issued in 2009, see Mustafa (2012) and Li and Abdalla (2014).

<sup>18</sup> According to the Norwegian ID Centre, which met with Sudanese authorities in 2016, the national identity number has been printed on the biodata page since its introduction in 2011 (Norwegian ID Centre 2018).

chip with biometric data. Ordinary passports are valid for five years for adults and two years for children (DISCS n.d.-d; Norwegian ID Centre 2018).

In addition to ordinary passports, business (dark blue), diplomatic (red), official (dark green) and special (black) passports are issued. The three latter are issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (U.S. Department of State n.d.).

According to an article in *The National*, an Emirati newspaper, the enrolment of electronic passports was “mired in complication”. The first version contained the holder’s four names in Arabic but only the two first names in English. The omission of the complete name in English caused the American Embassy in UAE to refuse to issue visas to holders of the passport (Mustafa 2012). A new version with the complete name, also in English, was issued in 2012 (Norwegian ID Centre 2018).

On 25 November 2015, the passport authorities stopped extending the validity of previous handwritten passport types (Sudan Tribune 2015).

## 4.1 Issuance

Passports are issued by the General Directorate for Passports and Migration, which sorts under the Interior Ministry. According to the online service portal of the Ministry of Interior (n.d.-b), applicants must meet in person and bring their national ID card or national identity number.<sup>19</sup>

The online service portal of the General Directorate for Passports and Migration (n.d.-b) states that applicants also must provide an official record of their blood type.<sup>20</sup>

If the applicant is under the age of 18, written consent from the father or a legally appointed guardian is required. If the previous passport is lost, the applicant must provide a notification of loss (General Directorate of Passport and Migration n.d.-b).

Upon application, the fingerprints and a photo of the applicant is recorded. The applicant’s identity is verified through control of the presented documentation and by using the national identity number to retrieve information about the applicant through the civil registry database. According to the Norwegian ID Centre, which

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<sup>19</sup> The online service portal of the General Directorate for Passports and Migration (n.d.) states that the applicant can show a copy of the ID card. According to Order no. 9 of 2020 regarding the Passports and Immigration Act 1994, it is also possible to present the civil registration certificate (*shahadat al-qayd al-madani*), which contains the national identity number.

<sup>20</sup> According to the Norwegian ID Centre (2018), the driving license, which states the blood type, may be used.

met with the passport authorities in 2016, the fingerprints taken upon application are compared with those registered in the database.

The passport officer also examines whether the applicant is recorded in the list of persons banned from obtaining a passport (Order no. 9 of 2020).

According to the online service portal of the General Directorate (n.d.-a), it is possible to apply for a passport in nearly all states of Sudan. There are four offices in Khartoum<sup>21</sup> and at least one office in all the states except for West Kordofan. It is possible to apply for a passport at any office.

Applying for a passport costs SDG 51,000 (Radio Dabanga 2023).<sup>22</sup>

## 4.2 Issuance abroad

Passports are issued at certain embassies abroad. Landinfo does not have a complete list of embassies issuing passports in Europe. The embassy in Brussels issues passports (The Norwegian Embassy in Khartoum 2021), and judging from the webpage, the same goes for the embassy in London (The Sudanese Embassy in London 2021c). Occasionally mobile teams, with equipment to record biometric data, have visited other embassies to register national identity numbers and receive passport applications (see Landinfo 2019, pp. 2-3).

Embassies and consulates issuing passports are subject to the same rules and regulations as passport offices in Sudan (Order no. 9 of 2020).

According to the webpage of the Sudanese Embassy in London, applicants must be present in person and submit an original or a copy of the national ID card or national identity number. In case of renewal, the applicant is asked to bring the original passport.

## 4.3 Exit visa

Exit visa (*ta'shirat khuruji*) is the popular term for the certificate of eligibility (*shahadat istifa*'), which Sudanese citizens, according to article 12 in The

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<sup>21</sup> According to the online service portal of the General Directorate for Passports and Migration (n.d.-a), passports are issued at the following offices: Donqola (Northern), Meröe (Northern), ad-Dabba (Northern), Atbara (River Nile), Shandi (River Nile), Port Sudan (Red Sea), Kosti (White Nile), ad-Damazin (Blue Nile), Sennar (Sennar), Sanja (Sennar), al-Qadarif (al-Qadarif), al-Faw (al-Qadarif), al-Qilabat (al-Qadarif), Kassala (Kassala), Halfa al-jadida (Kassala), Madani (al-Gezira), Al-Ubayd (South Kordofan), Kaduqli (North Kordofan), al-Fashir, (North Darfur), Kutum (North Darfur), Nyala (South Darfur), al-Geneina (West Darfur), Zalanagey (Central Darfur) and ad-Da'ayn (East Darfur).

<sup>22</sup> As of 5 January 2023, 51,000 SDG is equivalent to 90 USD, or about half the monthly salary of a schoolteacher in Sudan (Radio Dabanga 2023).

Passport and Migration Law of 2015, must have to be allowed to leave the country (see Landinfo 2018).

The requirement of obtaining an exit visa before leaving the country was suspended on 1 August 2020 (Radio Dabanga 2020b). According to sources Landinfo talked to in Khartoum, the exit visa was reintroduced some three or four months after the coup of October 2021 (Source D 2022).

## **5 Reliability of Sudanese documents**

The military establishment has ruled Sudan for most of its history since its independence from colonial rule in 1956. Since then, the army and its auxiliary forces have fought several rebellions and civil wars in its peripheries (Johnson 2016). The Sudanese state is thus a security state, with an interest in keeping an overview of its population, and, at times being able to control their movement. To do so, it is necessary to keep reliable registers and oversight over document issuance.

To assess the reliability of Sudanese identity documents, one must consider issuance procedures and corruption levels.

### **5.1 Control routines for registration and issuance of documents**

#### **5.1.1 Assignment of national identity number**

To be assigned a national identity number, a person must first prove his/her identity. Most Sudanese are registered in the civil registry at birth (MICS 2014, s. 192) and thus have an official identity record.

Persons not registered and lacking identity documents must instead register through witnesses – a tribal leader (*umda* or *shaykh*) and/or paternal relatives with whom the applicant shares a common lineage (see chapter 2.1). In such cases, the biographic information about the applicant relies on information provided by him/herself and the witnesses. Provided the witnesses are truthful about their relation to the applicant, it will generally be possible for the registration officer to control the applicant's name, as the applicant and the witness (in most cases) share a paternal lineage. Other biographic information, such as the exact date of birth, will depend on the applicant's and witnesses' recollection.

Since fingerprints are recorded upon registration, it is in theory not possible to register with another identity once a person has been registered and assigned a

national identity number. However, Landinfo does not have any information about the maintenance of the electronic databases or whether they are routinely checked for duplicates.

### **5.1.2 Issuance of ID card and passport**

The civil registry is centralised, electronic and biometric. This means that all offices issuing ID cards and passports have electronic access to the civil registry, including photo and fingerprints, and can use it to control an applicant's identity (see chapter 3.1 and 4.1). Landinfos sources have substantiated that applicants are looked up in the register. The sources said that providing a national identity number is an absolute requirement when applying for official documents (Source A 2022, Source B 2023, Source D 2022).

Presuming that the electronic register is appropriately maintained and that applicants and their biometric data are checked against the information in the register, it will generally be very difficult to obtain an ID card or a passport containing other identity information than what is registered in the civil registry.

## **5.2 Corruption**

Sudan is regarded as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Transparency International (2023) ranks it as 162<sup>nd</sup> out of 180 countries on its Corruption Perception Index.

The payment of bribes to access public services is relatively common. In a study by Transparency International (2019, p. 38), 24% of respondents in Sudan said they had paid a bribe to access a public service in the previous month. Likewise, a survey conducted by Afrobarometer (2022, p. 3) found that 31 % of respondents who had applied for an identity document in 2021 said that they had paid a bribe. This kind of corruption does not necessarily imply that the actual content in documents can (easily) be manipulated, but rather that some public servants expect a bribe to perform a service the applicant is entitled to.

An activist Landinfo talked to, said that in light of the general level of corruption in Sudan, it is “surprisingly hard” to get officials to change information in the civil registry, for example in order to get another passport, and that it would require a “very large bribe” (Source D 2022).

### **5.2.1 Passports sold to foreigners**

In 2017 Sudanese news sites reported that citizenship, along with original personalised passports, were sold to foreigners at black markets in Khartoum, especially catering to Syrian refugees.

According to an investigative article in The New Humanitarian, regime insiders provided the passports in a scheme allegedly overseen by the President's brother Abdullah al-Bashir (Suleiman & van Dijken 2018). The legal basis for the scheme was a presidential decree from 2014 stating that Syrians, Iraqis, Yemenis or Palestinians could be granted citizenship by naturalisation after 6 months of residence. However, in practice, the issuance of passports depended on payment through "the black market" to the above-mentioned network (Al-Monitor 2021). A regular Sudanese passport, including personalisation, cost 10,000 USD, while business and diplomatic passports were even more expensive (Suleiman & van Dijken 2018).

In November 2019, the Minister of Interior stated that those involved in "illegally granting citizenship to foreigners" would be prosecuted. At the same time, he announced a review of all those who had been granted Sudanese nationality by naturalisation during Omar al-Bashir's reign from 1989 (Radio Dabanga 2019).

The authorities opened investigations in about 13,000 cases and announced on 9 December 2020 the decision to withdraw citizenship from 3,548 naturalized citizens, while reviews of other naturalisations were ongoing (Radio Dabanga 2020a). Landinfo has not found official information regarding the origin of those who had their Sudanese citizenship revoked. The news site Q-Posts cited an official from the Interior Ministry, stating that most of them were Syrians who had obtained it illegally (Suleiman 2020).

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