

# Addressing the Link between Travel Document Security and Population Registration/Civil Registration Documents and Processes



# **Expert Roundtable on Addressing the Link between Travel Document Security and Population Registration/Civil Registration Documents and Processes**

**26-27 November 2013, Warsaw**

## **Findings and Recommendations<sup>1</sup>**

On 26-27 November 2013, the OSCE Secretariat's Transnational Threats Department/Action against Terrorism Unit (TNTD/ATU) and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) co-organized an *Expert Roundtable on Addressing the Link between Travel Document Security and Population Registration/Civil Registration Documents and Processes*, in Warsaw.

The roundtable gathered 15 travel document security and civil registration experts from Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, as well as the European Commission and International Organizations including, European Police Office (EUROPOL), The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Commission on Civil Status (ICCS), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Statistical Division. The objectives of the roundtable were to:

1. Explore the latest trends in forging travel documents and in particular practices criminals and terrorists employ to obtain genuine travel documents (including electronic Passports) under a fake identity;
2. Showcase measures that have been taken to securely identify people in the process of travel document issuance specifically by interlinking civil registries with travel document issuance systems to prevent identity fraud, and;
3. Identify what more the OSCE can do to enhance international efforts that link travel document issuing systems to civil registry systems as part of robust national identity management and travel document issuance.

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<sup>1</sup> The findings and recommendations summarize key points made by experts during the discussions as captured by the roundtable organizers. They are not to be understood as agreed outcomes by the roundtable participants, have no official status and are not based on the consensus of OSCE participating States. Their inclusion in this report do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the OSCE Secretariat and/or ODIHR.

## Findings

- 1. Secure civil registration systems and documents in many OSCE participating States are central in the travel document issuance process:** Experts underscored that secure civil registration systems and documents are the backbone of the travel document issuance process since documentary evidence from and access to civil registry paper records or electronic databases, are being used in many OSCE participating States as the only means to validate a passport applicant's identity. They stressed that with travel documents becoming ever more secure, fraudsters are increasingly turning to civil registry documents and systems to adopt a fake identity which is then used to apply for a genuine travel document. In this regard they also acknowledged that identity deceptions are particularly prevalent when there are disconnects between passport and civil registry identity management systems with civil registry systems often being the weaker link. Having said that, experts also stressed that to date there is little reliable data on the depth and scale of the problem in OSCE participating States.
- 2. Civil registry systems are gaining international significance and determine the level of trust in a country's travel document:** Experts pointed out that civil registry systems have predominantly been designed to serve national purposes of establishing one's identity and providing proof thereof taking into account ever evolving national and historical contexts and technologies. As such, they differ greatly from country to country in terms of content and purpose, how updated they are, and consequently how credible they are as a source to identify people. Nevertheless, such systems are increasingly gaining international and cross-border importance in particular when it comes to the issuance of travel documents and potential identity fraud.
- 3. Civil registry upgrades need to go in parallel with travel document upgrades:** Experts recommended that countries investing in modern travel documents and pertinent issuance systems should upgrade civil registry systems in parallel, if not first. Such efforts need to focus on: 1) processes, 2) documents or products, and 3) staff (i.e. anti-corruption measures). In this respect it was also stressed that secure national civil registration systems are the foundation for the successful implementation of global strategies and tools designed to bring the benefits associated with ePassports such as faster and more secure cross-border movements to both travelers and competent authorities.
- 4. The international community needs to continue dialogue on the possibility of developing assistance related to the establishment and validation of identity during travel document issuance:** Recognizing the increasing role civil registration systems play in the way countries trust another country's travel document, experts stressed that there may be a need for the international community to further discuss about the feasibility of e.g. defining some basic standards/guidelines on how states establish identities and determine entitlement as part of passport application processes. A good starting point would be to take stock of current efforts and existing materials by national, regional and global entities designed to strengthen and standardize aspects related to civil registration which could further enhance global initiatives based on evidence of identity related to travel document issuance.
- 5. Border Control Officers need to remain central to travel document inspection:** Since it is extremely difficult for first line officers to detect genuine yet fraudulently obtained travel documents, experts stressed the need for border control officers to further strengthen their skills in the area of profiling and behavioral analysis. This becomes particularly important with the introduction of new border solutions and a trend in overtly relying on technology such as Automated Border Control systems. In this regard, experts stressed that technology should only

complement the work of border control officers, and they in turn should remain on guard even if technology authenticates a traveler's passport as genuine.

6. **The variety and number of security features on current travel documents are a “double edged sword” for border control:** Experts confirmed that the many security features that are available today make travel documents extremely difficult to forge. On the flip side, the multitude and different security features found on current travel documents pose a challenge to border officials around the world who not only have to facilitate an ever increasing number of travelers but are also under pressure to do so in less time. There is simply no time for first line officers to check all security features of each and every national passport in circulation. Consequently, there is a probability that high-quality forgeries are more likely to get through border inspection. Experts therefore stressed the need for national authorities to “de-clutter” travel documents so as to give border control officers a higher chance to detect forgeries. Likewise, experts pointed out that in many instances border control agencies are not reading or authenticating biometric information on the chip. They stressed that more discussions were needed on how to urge national border authorities to make systematic use of biometric information to identify people.

## Potential OSCE Secretariat/ODIHR follow-up

1. Experts highlighted the need for the OSCE to look at Travel Document Security in a more holistic and cross-dimensional manner making use of the Secretariat's Transnational Threats Department expertise in Travel Document Security as well as ODIHR's expertise related to freedom of movement and population registration. In this connection experts pointed to the newly adopted ICAO Traveller Identification Programme (TRIP) Strategy which focuses, inter alia, not only on the security of travel documents but also related issuance processes and their inter-linkages to modernized civil registers.
2. They also underscored the need for the OSCE to use its observer status in the ICAO New Technologies Working Group (NTWG) and the ICAO Implementation and Capacity Building Working Group (ICBWG) and actively partake, complement and support relevant work related to identification management based on its considerable expertise related to Travel Document Security and Civil Registration. Likewise, experts stressed the need for the OSCE to promote the work of the ICAO working groups in the OSCE area.
3. Given the diversity of civil registry systems in operation and national discrepancies in how well they are linked to travel document issuance, the experts stressed that the OSCE could consider the following follow up activities complementing pertinent and potential efforts by the ICAO Working Groups:
  - To take stock of and continue following closely current efforts and existing materials by national, regional and global entities focusing and operating in the OSCE region designed to strengthen and standardize aspects related to civil registration which in turn could further enhance global initiatives on evidence of identity.
  - Develop a compendium of best practices on effectively linking the most common civil registration systems in the OSCE region with travel document issuance systems<sup>2</sup>. This

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<sup>2</sup> Including centralized and de-centralized models.

compendium would allow OSCE participating States to compare their own system to best practice examples that are most similar to their own system thereby allowing them to spot potential weaknesses. Likewise, this compendium could be used for capacity building purposes in the OSCE area.

- An alternative and/or complementing the above would be for the OSCE to conduct a study on the most common challenges related to linking civil registry systems and travel document issuance systems as experienced by OSCE participating States. The study's results could lay the ground work for an "assessment tool" by the OSCE, other relevant international entities or indeed participating States designed to identify potential weaknesses in interlinking the two systems.
4. It was stressed that currently there are no reliable figures on how many travel documents are issued to fraudsters who have either forged breeder documents or applied for travel documents by abusing other weaknesses in the civil registry process. Recognizing the need to scale the problem on the national, regional and eventually global level, experts felt that the OSCE with its tradition in fostering dialogue between its participating States is in an ideal position to facilitate dialogue on this politically sensitive issue. Part of this could be the development of a questionnaire for national authorities to get a feel for the perceived extent of the problem on the national level.
  5. Experts pointed to the frustration of many border control officials with getting judicial procedures started when faced with imposters or individuals travelling under a fake identity. It appears that in many instances suspicion alone in the absence of "hard evidence" such a forged or fraudulent document is insufficient for prosecution services to pursue the matter further. Experts suggested for the OSCE to organize awareness raising seminars for judicial officials on the latest methods terrorists and criminals use to cross borders undetected, including by impersonating a person on a stolen passport, or by obtaining a genuine travel documents under a fake identity.