



23 February 2024

Danish National ID Centre

Birkerød Kongevej 2
DK-3460 Birkerød
Denmark

Phone +45 61 98 39 00
Email nidc@nidc.dk
Website www.nidc.dk

Kenya: Issuance of the Kenyan national ID card

Introduction

The following note describes the issuance procedure of Kenyan national ID cards. The note is based on a meeting with the issuing authority, the National Registration Bureau (NRB) conducted in January 2020 in Nairobi and open source information.

ID cards in Kenya

The primary proof of identity in Kenya for persons over the age of 18 is the national ID card, which is issued by the National Registration Bureau (NRB). The card is needed for all civil services and transactions, and is further submitted in connection with application for a nationality passport.¹

Kenyan national ID documents have undergone several changes since they were first introduced in 1919. Changes have been made to the eligibility criteria for the ID document/card as well as the physical specifications. Since 2011, the card has been issued in plastic with a secondary image of the holder on the back (see image 1 and 2).

National Registration Bureau

NRB in Kenya has been in charge of issuing national ID cards since 1919. They further issue civil servant's cards and process the alien's ID card and refugee ID card on behalf of the Immigration Department.²

As of January 2020, NRB estimated that approximately 95% of eligible citizens in Kenya have obtained an ID card. The remaining 5 % is assessed to reside in rural areas.³

NRB does not issue identity documents to persons under the age of 18, which means that the primary proof of identity for residents in Kenya under the age of 18 is the birth certificate.⁴

¹ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

² National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

³ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

⁴ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

Issuance of the ID card

ID cards are produced and personalised centrally in Nairobi, but can be applied for locally. First time issuance of the national ID card is free of charge.⁵

In order to obtain an ID card, the applicant must present:

a) Proof of names, age and place of birth

Valid documents for this purpose are birth certificate, notification of birth, child health card, school graduation certificate, age assessment certificate from a medical officer of health, letter from administrative officer chief/assistant chief, religious certificate and marriage certificate/parental consent.⁶

b) Proof of citizenship

Valid documents for this purpose are either one of the parents' identity cards, certificate of registration as a Kenyan citizen (Kenyan registration or naturalisation) or any other document that may be required by the registration officer.⁷

According to NRB, they will pursue a verification of the birth certificate through the Civil Registration Service, which is in charge of birth registration and issuance of birth certificates.⁸

NRB captures fingerprints from the applicant and store them in their database.⁹

After handing in the application, the applicant will receive a waiting slip as proof of submitted application. This waiting slip must be presented when collecting the ID card. NRB will also take fingerprints from the person collecting the ID card and check it against the fingerprints taken in connection with the application. If the fingerprints match, the person will be able to collect the ID card.¹⁰

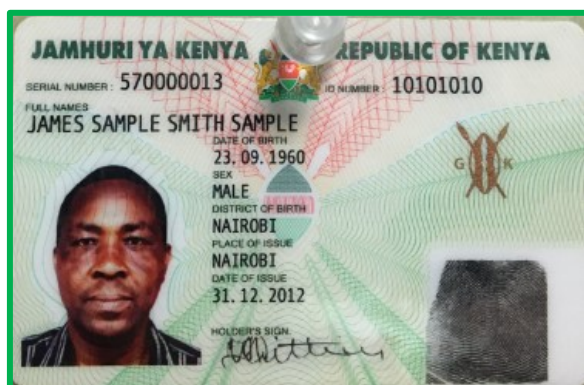


Image 1: Front of the 2011 version of the Kenyan national ID card. (NIDC reference material)

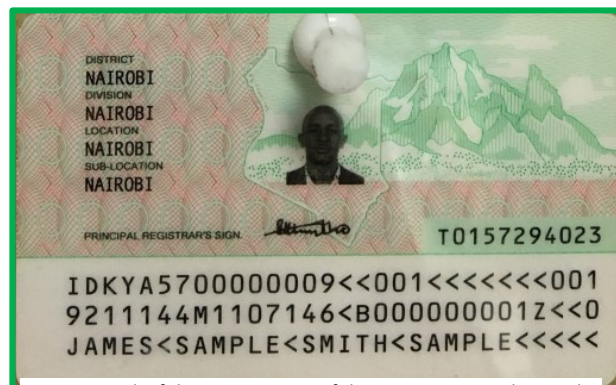


Image 2: Back of the 2011 version of the Kenyan national ID card. (NIDC reference material)

⁵ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

⁶ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

⁷ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

⁸ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

⁹ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

¹⁰ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

Reissuance and change of information

It is possible to have an ID card reissued locally for a fee. In case of a lost ID card, a reissuance is possible for a fee of 100 shilling, while reissuance due to change of information is possible for a fee of 1,000 shilling.¹¹ A change of information will typically be applied for in connection with marriage and religious conversions, where a name change takes place. If the name change is related to religion, one must provide a letter from the religious official along with an affidavit.¹²

If a Kenyan national changes his/her name after obtaining the national ID card, it is the responsibility of the cardholder to initiate the process of receiving a new ID card with the updated information. In order to have a new card issued, the cardholder must reapply for a national ID card with the new information, and the request will then be processed by NRB. When a new ID card is issued, it will contain the same ID number as the previous ID card. ID numbers are not reused when a person dies, but go permanently out of circulation.¹³

Database

In connection with the application for a national ID card, NRB registers the information pertaining to the individual in their database.¹⁴

The information registered in the database is name(s) of the applicant, date and place of birth, names of parents, gender, marital status, and residence at the time of application and contacts. NRB will also capture and store the biometric information of ten fingerprints, facial image and signature of the applicant. NRB further maintains a database that they have received from the UNHCR with information on asylum seekers and refugees in Kenya.¹⁵

New biometric ID card – The Huduma card

According to the Government of Kenya, a Huduma card is a digital multipurpose identity card issued to an individual upon registration. The issuance of the Huduma card was initiated 1 December 2020 through a pilot project followed by a countrywide distribution in February 2021. The current National ID card (image 1 and 2) will remain in use as the official national identity card until the Cabinet Secretary declares the Huduma card the official national identity card.¹⁶

According to news media outlets, the Huduma card is biometric and includes the unique national number known in Swahili as *Huduma Namba*.¹⁷

¹¹ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

¹² National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

¹³ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

¹⁴ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

¹⁵ National Registration Bureau, Nairobi, January 2020.

¹⁶ Huduma Namba, 2021.

¹⁷ YC News, 19 November 2020; the Elephant, 14 June 2019; Citizenship Rights Africa, 22 April 2020; Biometric Update, 9 September 2021.

Huduma Namba

Huduma Namba is a unique and permanent personal identification number randomly assigned to every resident individual at birth or upon registration and it only expires or is retired upon the death of the individual.¹⁸

¹⁸ Huduma Namba, 2021.

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