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Ethiopia: Appearance and issuance of the Ethiopian kebele card

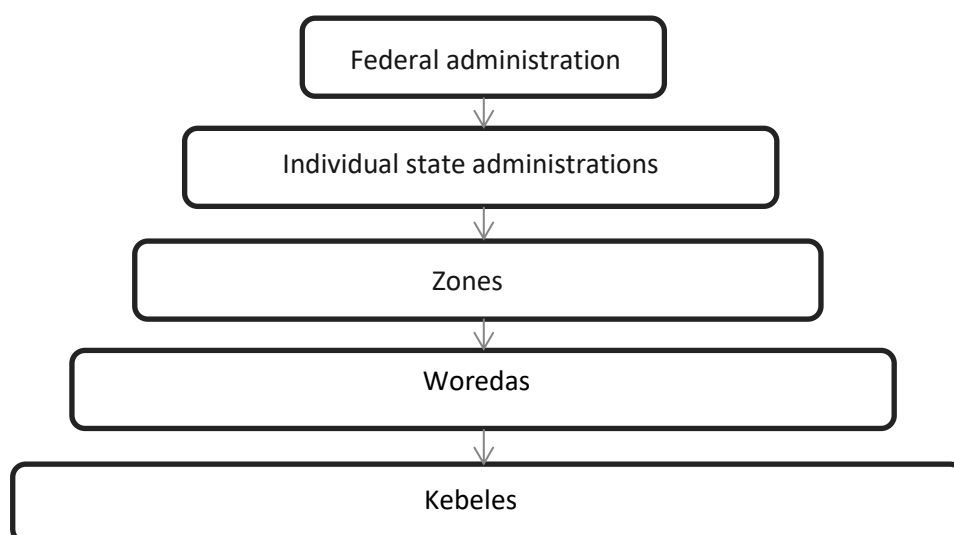
Introduction

The kebele card represents the first registration of an identity and is a breeder document for most other ID-documents in Ethiopia. The kebele card is issued at the lowest level of administration in the country.¹

This note describes the appearance and issuance procedure of the kebele card. It includes information regarding the notoriety of the card.

The Ethiopian administrative system

The Ethiopian administrative system consists of a federal government divided into nine regional states and two city administrations (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa) with individual administrations. The states are divided into a number of administrative units called zones, which are again divided into woredas. The woredas are divided into kebele offices.²



¹ Landinfo 31 January 2020 p. 7; Vital Events Registration Agency, Addis Ababa, May 2018.

² Landinfo 31 January 2020, p. 7.

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Appearance of the kebele card

In a report from The World Bank, the appearance of the kebele card is described as varying. Some kebele cards are produced as booklets and some are produced as cards with personal details on the front and back.³ The information on the card may be written in the official language of the respective regions.⁴ The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) confirms the lack of uniformity regarding the visual appearance of the kebele cards.⁵ A third source further points out, that kebele cards issued in Addis Ababa will have the word “Kebele” replaced by “Woreda”.⁶

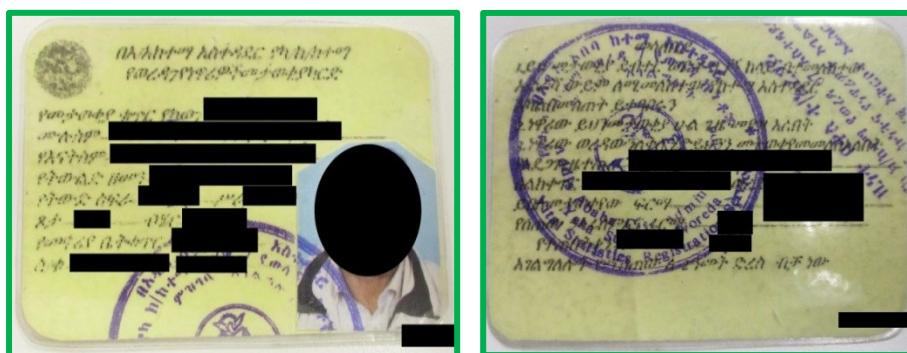


Image 1 & 2: Example of the front and back of a kebele card. (NIDC reference material)

Validity

According to The World Bank, the validity of the kebele cards may also vary. While some cards must be renewed and exchanged for a new card every second year, other kebele cards are valid for four years, but require the holder to present himself personally at the kebele office every year for the card to remain valid.⁷

When the renewed kebele card is issued by the same woreda it carries the same unique ID card number as the old card. The number only changes when a person moves from one woreda to another.⁸

According to an Ethiopian lawyer, who is the holder of the kebele card displayed in image 1 and 2, this kebele card is valid for two years from the date of issuance.⁹

Issuance procedure

Information about the kebele card is not conclusive and nuances in descriptions of the card and its application varies depending on the source of information. EASO

³ World Bank Group, 2016, p. 9.

⁴ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2014.

⁵ EASO, 22 October 2018, p. 1 and 6.

⁶ United Kingdom: Home Office. October 2017, p. 33.

⁷ The World Bank, 2016, p. 9.

⁸ World Bank Group, 2016, p. 9

⁹ Local lawyer, Addis Ababa, May 2018.

states in a report from August 2018 that the issuance system of ID cards in Ethiopia continues to lack rigidity.¹⁰

In a report from January 2020, Landinfo concludes that the kebele card is issued at the local kebele office, where the kebele manager and other employees are generally charged with maintaining the register of inhabitants in the kebele.¹¹ However, in Addis Ababa, the lowest administrative level is represented by the woreda instead of the kebele.

This information is corroborated by sources including The World Bank and the UK Home Office.¹² The World Bank states in a report concluded in 2016 that the kebele cards are issued by the local administration, kebele offices.

The general process of obtaining a kebele card as a first time applicant is to collect personal information about the applicant and establish an association with the kebele.¹³

The World Bank states that some kebele offices require two identical photos as documentation when applying for a kebele card. One photo is attached to the kebele card and the other is stored with the application in the kebele's hard-copy archive. At other offices, only one picture for the kebele card must be submitted.¹⁴

The application fee for a kebele card is 10-20 Birr, not counting the price of obtaining photos and transportation to the kebele office. For some this is a big expenditure resulting in a low number of applications until there is a specific need for it.¹⁵ The card is not officially mandatory but the World Bank estimates that only about 5% of the adult Ethiopians did not have a kebele card in 2016.¹⁶ In some regions, having a valid kebele card is mandatory and in turn, no issuance fee is required.¹⁷

In order to obtain reissuance of a lost kebele card, the applicant must show up at the kebele office that initially issued the kebele card. This is due to the fact that the information about previously issued kebele cards is not digitalised, but the kebele offices have archives with hard copies of issued cards.¹⁸

¹⁰ EASO, 22 October 2018, p. 6.

¹¹ Landinfo, 31 January 2020 p. 17.

¹² The World Bank, 2016, p. 33; UK: Home Office, 2017, p. 33.

¹³ The World Bank, 2016, p. 7.

¹⁴ The World Bank, 2016, p. 9.

¹⁵ The World Bank, 2016, p. 9.

¹⁶ The World Bank, 2016, p. 9.

¹⁷ The World Bank, 2016, p. 10.

¹⁸ Local lawyer, Addis Ababa, May 2018.

Personal information in the card

In 2016, all kebele cards contained following personal information:¹⁹

- Full name (name of holder, name of father and name of grandfather)
- Mother's name
- Photo of holder
- Date of birth (including the place and time of the event)
- Occupation
- Ethnic group
- Emergency contact details
- Kebele and woreda where the holder resides
- Date of issue
- Issuing officer
- Kebele/woreda stamp

General regulations of the ID card

When moving from one kebele to another, the individual must hand in their kebele card to the authorities that issued it. The authorities will then issue a letter of reference to the cardholder, which they can use to register at their new address and obtain a new kebele card.²⁰

It is difficult to determine how often this procedure is followed but a local Ethiopian lawyer assessed that misuse in the area does not constitute a significant problem.²¹ In opposition to this statement the World Bank stated in 2016 that the amount of exit applications was very low, and that some officers had never processed one. They estimated that it is not uncommon for people to hold more than one kebele card, especially in urban areas.²²

According to several sources, the kebele card is required when applying for a nationality passport in Ethiopia.²³

However, a source at the Ethiopian Embassy in Canada stated to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada in 2014 that the Embassy did not accept local identity cards (such as the kebele card) as proof of nationality without supporting documentation for passport applications.²⁴

¹⁹ The World Bank, 2016, p. 9.

²⁰ Local lawyer, Addis Ababa, May 2018; Landinfo, 31 January 2020, p. 19.

²¹ Local lawyer, Addis Ababa, May 2018.

²² World Bank 2016, p. 11.

²³ Ethiopian Immigration Authorities, Addis Ababa, May 2018; Landinfo 2020, p. 18; Local lawyer, Addis Ababa, May 2018.

²⁴ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, October 2014, p. 1.

Notoriety of the kebele card

According to the World Bank, the kebele cards are relatively easy to forge.²⁵ This is supported by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, which points out that the many varieties of kebele cards makes it difficult for the authorities to verify them, thus forgery of kebele cards is one of the most common kinds of fraud in Ethiopia.²⁶ The credibility of the kebele cards is compromised by the local administration's insufficient access to a national register in order to verify the identity of an applicant as well as the many varieties of kebele cards that lack technical security features.²⁷

²⁵ The World Bank, 2016, p. 10.

²⁶ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, July 2016.

²⁷ EASO, 22 October 2018, p. 1 and 6.

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