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Danish National ID Centre

Ethiopian Kebele cards

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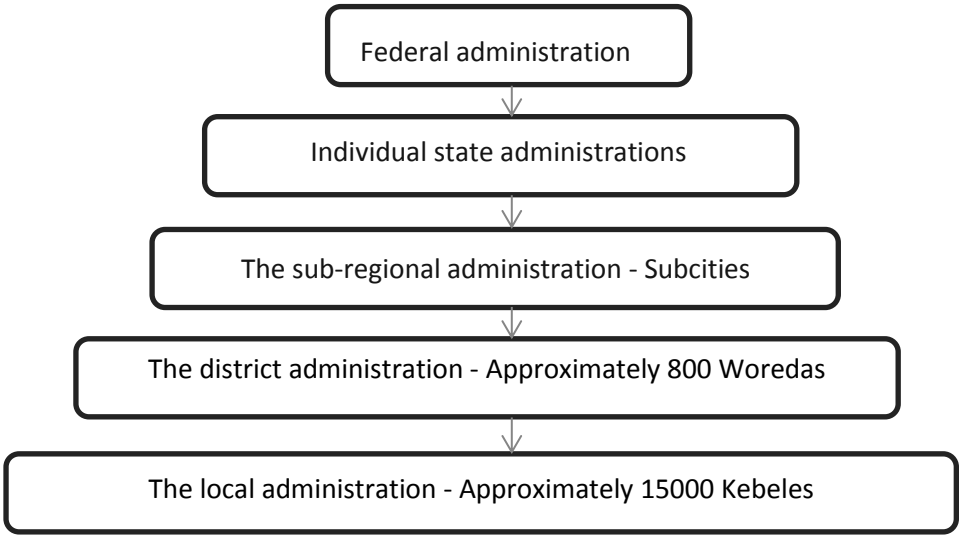
1. Introduction

This note describes the issuance procedure and formal appearance of the Ethiopian Kebele card based on a private sample that the Danish National ID Centre encountered in Ethiopia.

This note should not be regarded as fully conclusive partly because general information about the Kebele cards is in itself inconclusive and partly because the Danish National ID Centre was not able to obtain a genuine specimen or enough samples to compare them.

2. *Background*

The Ethiopian governmental structure consists of a federal government divided into 9 regional states and two city administrations with individual administrations. The states are divided into a number of subcities, which are again divided into approximately 800 Woredas, the district administrations, which are again divided into approximately 15000 Kebele offices, the local administrations:[1]



[1] Ethiopian Governmental Portal, http://www.ethiopia.gov.et/regional-states1. Link accessed on August 23, 2018.

The Kebele card is regarded as main proof of identity in Ethiopia, though it is not a national ID card.[2] The cards are issued regionally and can be written in the official language of the respective regions.[3]

3. The appearance of the card

The Kebele card encountered by the Danish National ID Centre (see figure 1 and 2) is made of yellow cardboard covered by a see-through plastic laminate; it contains no technical security elements. The card is stamped on the front and back; the stamp on the front covers part of the holder's picture and the stamp on the back shows the name of the issuing Woreda (figure 2).[4]

The personalized text on the Kebele card is applied by hand. The preprinted text is produced on a regular desk printer and the stamps on the cards are produced with wet ink.[5]

4. Autonomy

The World Bank states that the appearance of the Kebele cards varies, but specifically how much is difficult to deduce; some Kebele cards are formed as booklets and some are simple cards with personal details on the front and back.[6] The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) confirms the lack of uniformity regarding the visual appearance of the Kebele cards in a report from August 2018.[7] One source points to the fact that Kebele cards issued in Addis Ababa will have the word "Kebele" replaced by "Woreda".[8]

Figure 1: the front of the Kebele card

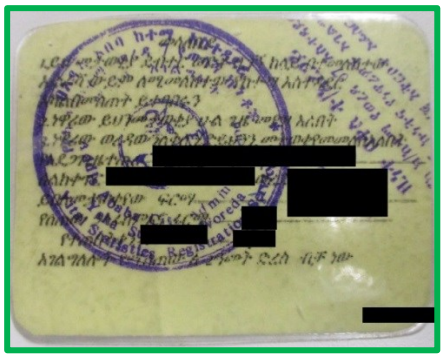


Figure 2: the back of the Kebele card

[2] VERA (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.
[3] Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Ethiopia: Appearance of identity cards and birth certificates issued in Addis Ababa, including description of features, variation in appearance, and issuing authorities (2012-2014)*, October 1 2014, http://www.refworld.org/docid/54bf5d616.html, accessed July 17, 2018.
[4] Local Ethiopian lawyer (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.
[5] United Kingdom: Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note - Ethiopia: Background information, including actors of protection and internal relocation*, October 2017, http://www.refworld.org/docid/59ef3b954.html, accessed on June 12 2018, page 34.
[6] World Bank, 2016, accessed on June 27, 2018, page 9.
[7] EASO. *Assessment of credibility of Ethiopian Identity cards – query no. 67,* August 22, 2018, page 1 and 6.
[8] United Kingdom: Home Office. October 2017, page 33.

5. Validity

According to The World Bank the validity of the Kebele cards varies; some cards must be renewed and exchanged for a new card every two years. 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.[9] 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.[10]

According to the Ethiopian lawyer, who owns the Kebele card displayed in figure 1 and 2, this Kebele card is valid for two years from the issuance date.[11]

6. 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.

It is difficult to determine exactly which authority is currently issuing the Kebele cards. The World Bank states in a report concluded in 2016 that the Kebele cards are issued by the local administration, Kebele offices, [12] whereas a local and a diplomatic source inform that issuance of the cards is conducted by the district level authorities, the Woredas. [13] The UK Home Office writes in a report from 2017 that the Kebele cards are issued by the Woreda in the Addis Ababa city administration, but by the Kebele offices in the rest of Ethiopia.[14] EASO states in a report from August 2018 that the issuance system of ID cards in Ethiopia continues to lack rigidity.[15] The general process of obtaining a Kebele card as a first time applicant according to the World Bank is to collect personal information about the applicant and establish an association with the Kebele.[16]

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[9] The World Bank. 2016, page 9.
[10] The World Bank. 2016, page 9.
[11] Local Ethiopian lawyer (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.
[12] World Bank. 2016. ID4D Country Diagnostic: Ethiopia, Washington, DC: World Bank License: Creative Commons Attribution (http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/822621524689442102/Ethiopia-ID4D-Diagnostic-Web040418.pdf), accessed on June 27, 2018. page 9 & Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *DFAT Country Information Report Ethiopia,* 28 September 2017. https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/country-information-report-ethiopia.pdf, page 31.
[13] Local Ethiopian lawyer, (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa, Diplomatic source, Western Embassy F, e-mail received on 5 September, 2018 & Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: *Responses to Information Requests,* May 2013.
[14] UK Home Office. *Country Policy and Information Note – Ethiopia: Background information, including actors of protection and internal relocation.*October 2017. http://www.refworld.org/docid/59ef3b954.html, accessed on September 28, 2018. Page 33.
[15] EASO, August 2018, page 6.
[16] The World Bank, 2016, page 7.

The World Bank states that some Kebele offices require two identical photos as documentation when applying for a Kebele card. One photo is fastened to the Kebele card and the other is stored with the application in the Kebeles' physical archive. At other offices only one picture for the Kebele card must be submitted.[17]

The application fee of a Kebele card is 10-20 Birr not counting the price of obtaining photos and transportation to the Kebele office. For some this combined is a big expenditure, consequently not everybody obtain a Kebele card until they need it.[18] 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.[19] In some regions having a valid Kebele card is mandatory and in turn no issuance fee is required.[20]

The physical archive of issued Kebele cards at the individual Kebele/Woreda office causes the holder of a lost Kebele card to go back to the office that originally issued the card to obtain a new one.[21]

7. Personal information in the card

In 2016 all Kebele cards contained following personal information:[22]

- 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

This is confirmed by the United Kingdom Home Office in a report issued in 2017, adding that the holder's phone number is stated on the Kebele card.[23]

8. General regulations of the ID card

When moving from one Woreda to another the individual must go to the Woreda office connected to the vacated address to return his/her Kebele card. The Woreda office provides the individual with a reference letter and cancels the old Kebele

[17] The World Bank, 2016, page 7.
[18] The World Bank, 2016, page 9.
[19] The World Bank, 2016, page 9.
[20] The World Bank, 2016, page 10.
[21] Local Ethiopian lawyer (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.
[22] The World Bank, 2016, page 9.
[23] UK: Home Office, October 2017, page 33.

card. The reference letter must be handed in at the Woreda office of the new address when applying for a new Kebele card.[24]

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.[25] 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 is not uncommon for people to hold more than one Kebele card, especially in urban areas.[26]

According to the home page of the Ethiopian Immigration Authorities the card is required when applying for a nationality passport in Ethiopia.[27] The home page of the Ethiopian Immigration Authorities was last updated in 2016, but it was confirmed by the local Ethiopian lawyer[28] and the Immigration Authorities that this is currently the process.[29]

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.[30]

9. Notoriety of the Kebele card

According to the World Bank the Kebele cards are relatively easy to forge.[31] This is supported by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada who points out that the many varieties of Kebele cards makes it difficult for the authorities to verify the documents, thus forgery of Kebele cards is one of the most common kinds of fraud in Ethiopia.[32] 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.[33]

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[24] Local Ethiopian lawyer (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.
[25] Local Ethiopian lawyer (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.
[26] World Bank 2016, page 11.
[27] Home page of the Ethiopian Immigration Authorities, http://www.immigration.gov.et/ourservices.aspx., link accessed July 19, 2018.
[28] Local Ethiopian lawyer (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa
[29] Ethiopian Immigration Authorities (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.
[30] Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Ethiopia: Appearance of identity cards and birth certificates issued in Addis Ababa, including description of features, variation in appearance, and issuing authorities (2012-2014),* October 2014, http://www.refworld.org/docid/54bf5d616.html, page 1.
[31] The World Bank, 2016, page 10.
[32] Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Ethiopia: Availability of fraudulent identity documents; state efforts to combat document fraud (2014-January 2016)*, July 28, 2016, http://www.refworld.org/docid/589444d84.html, accessed 13 June 2018.
[33] EASO, August 22, 2018, page 1 and 6.

However, the substantial level of state surveillance in Ethiopia makes it difficult to conduct identity fraud using the Kebele cards, why diplomats at a Western Embassy thought that Kebele cards are difficult to use for personal fraud.[34] Another diplomatic source stated that it is due to the significant level of state surveillance that he found the Kebele card trustworthy.[35]

10. Corruption

Ethiopia was ranked as number 107 on Transparency Internationals Corruptions Perceptions Index in 2017.[36] Diplomats at a Western Embassy stated that low salaries earned by minor government officials make petty corruption common.[37] Furthermore diplomatic sources at a Western Embassy also expressed general consensus that the level of both petty and high scale corruption is currently increasing.[38] Several of the diplomatic sources were under the impression that civil documents can be bought upon request.[39]

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Diplomatic sources at Western Embassy D (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.

Diplomatic sources at Western Embassy E (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.

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[34] Diplomatic source at Western Embassy (D) & (E), (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.
[35] Diplomatic source at Western embassy (F) (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.
[36] Transparency International, https://www.transparency.org/country/ETH. Accessed on August 24, 2018.
[37] Diplomatic source at Western Embassy (E), (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.
[38] Diplomatic sources at Western Embassy E (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.
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