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Uganda: The National ID card

Introduction

The following note presents information on the Ugandan National ID card. In doing so, it briefly introduces the Ugandan civil registration system and the registration procedure prior to obtaining an ID card, including assignment of the National ID Number (NIN).

The note then provides a description of the extent to which identities are verified, and the possibility to change data in the civil register.

The note is primarily based on an interview with the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) conducted in November 2022 in Kampala, and open source information.

Civil registration system

In 2015, Uganda reformed its civil registration system. NIRA was established by the Registration of Persons Act (ROPA) in 2015 and charged with the responsibility of registering persons; including assignment of the NIN and issuance of the National ID card. NIRA is also responsible for the registration and issuance of certificates for all births and deaths in Uganda.¹

Registration procedure

According to Section 54 of the ROPA, all Ugandan citizens are required to register in the national register.² Parents are responsible for registering children under 18 years of age.³ NIRA estimated, in a report published in 2022, that 17.5 million citizens (approximately 40 % of the population) remain unregistered.⁴

This section will describe the registration process for Ugandans who have not been registered at birth. For information about birth registration, please refer to our note: "Birth registration and issuance of birth certificates".

¹ NIRA, October 2019, pp. 6, 8; Lifos, September 2018, p. 10; Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 5.

² NIRA, 22 November 2022, pp. 4-5.

³ Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 6.

⁴ NIRA, 22 November 2022, pp. 4-5.

To register, one must meet in person at the nearest NIRA office, and fill out the form "Application for registration and national identification card".⁵ In the form, the person will submit the following personal information:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Place of birth
- Indigenous community / tribe to which the applicant belongs
- Residential address
- Occupation
- Education
- Parents' names and places of birth
- Marital status (if applicable)
- Names of spouse and children (if applicable).⁶

If the person has become a citizen by registration or naturalisation, they must present a copy of the certificate of registration/naturalisation.⁷

The person's biometrics, ten fingerprints and facial image, are then captured.⁸

The National Identification Number

When a person has been registered in the national register, a NIN is generated and assigned to the citizen.⁹ The number is unique, and follows the person throughout their lives.¹⁰

National ID card

A person above 16 years will be issued a national ID card after registering in the national register. If the person was below 16 when they were registered, they can request to have the card issued when they turn 16.¹¹

Issuance time depends on the office in question and other factors.¹² NIRA has emphasised in this context that not all applications are automatically approved for ID cards issuance. Some applications are queried for different reasons. Of possible causes, they listed the following: Double applications, incomplete information and questions regarding citizenship verification.¹³

The national ID card is issued free of charge, and is valid for ten years.¹⁴ A holder of a national identification card shall apply to NIRA for renewal at least 2 months before the expiry of the card.¹⁵

⁵ Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 6.

⁶ ROPR, 2015, section 10; Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 6; ASKV, July 2019, p. 14.

⁷ Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 6.

⁸ Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 6; World Bank, May 2018, p. 22; ASKV, July 2019, p. 14.

⁹ ROPA, 2015, section 68; NIRA, 22 November 2022, p. 4; Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 6.

¹⁰ Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 6; World Bank, May 2018, p. 22.

¹¹ ROPR, 2015, section 21; Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 6.

¹² Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 7.

¹³ Kadilo, 9 March 2020; Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 7.

¹⁴ ASKV, July 2019, p. 15.

¹⁵ NIRA, 22 November 2022, pp. 4-5.

The Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control (DCIC) were previously in charge of issuing the national ID card. ID cards issued by DCIC are no longer valid.¹⁶

Appearance of the ID card

The front side of the card displays a photograph of the bearer, name, gender and date of birth, and the bearer's signature. The front of the card moreover displays the national flag in the shape of Uganda.¹⁷

The backside of the ID card has a barcode, which holds the persons biometric data.¹⁸ Moreover, the backside of the card has a Machine-Readable Zone (MRZ).¹⁹

NIRA is planning to replace the current national identity card with a new version by June 2023. The new card will have more security features than the version depicted above.²⁰

On general security measures, NIRA highlighted that if a card batch were stolen, the batch would be cancelled. Thus, cards from the stolen batch would appear genuine but are not valid.²¹

Verification of identity

To verify the identity of applicants NIRA encourages applicants to register at the NIRA office closest to their residence. This measure is intended to minimize the chance of fraud, as the local authorities are most likely to know the applicant, or their relatives, which makes it less likely that applicants submit false information, or falsely claim to be a Ugandan citizen. However, this is not a requirement, but merely a suggestion.²²

If NIRA is not certain about the identity of an applicant, they can request the applicant to provide proof that the information submitted is correct. NIRA may also request supporting documents, such as birth certificate, voter's card, driving licence, passport and/or baptism certificate.²³ However, if the applicant is not able to provide any of these, his/her identity can be verified by oath of a family member.²⁴

Change of data

According to NIRA, it is not uncommon in Uganda to change your last name or drop a name. This can happen for a number of reasons, for example marriage or divorce.²⁵ As an example, one of the interlocutors at the Directorate of Citizenship

¹⁶ NIRA, Kampala, November 2022.

¹⁷ NIRA, November 2022, Kampala; Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 8.

¹⁸ Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 8; World Bank, May 2018, p. 22.

¹⁹ NIRA, November 2022, Kampala; Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 8.

²⁰ NIRA, November 2022, Kampala.

²¹ NIRA, November 2022, Kampala.

²² Landinfo, 2 July 2021, p. 7.

²³ World Bank, May 2018, p. 15.

²⁴ World Bank, May 2018, p. 15.

²⁵ NIRA, November 2022, Kampala.

and Immigration Control (DCIC) dropped his father's name because it was at that time associated with rebels in opposition to Milton Obote and Idi Amin.²⁶

According to DCIC, the legal process in Uganda regarding name change is as follows: You need an affidavit from court where you swear before a Commissioner of Oaths that your name is changed. Then this affidavit should be registered at the Ugandan Registration Services Bureau (URSB) and then you have to go to NIRA to get a new and corrected ID card.²⁷

According to NIRA, it is also possible to change other data, for example your age. In cases of doubt, NIRA will initially conduct an interview with the applicant. NIRA specified that requests to change of data such as date of birth or parentage would require further investigation and possibly a scientific examination.²⁸

A person's NIN however cannot be changed, and a NIN is linked to the person's biometric data. As such, a person cannot change their legal identity. According to NIRA, this prevents people from abusing the possibility to change your data for criminal purposes.²⁹

²⁶ DCIC, Kampala, November 2022.

²⁷ DCIC, Kampala, November 2022.

²⁸ NIRA, 22 November 2022, pp. 4-5.

²⁹ NIRA, November 2022, Kampala.

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