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Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Nigeria: Prevalence of fraudulent national identity cards; state efforts in response, including effectiveness (2014-October 2016) [NGA105657.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

According to sources, the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) [1] is in charge of producing the National Electronic Identity Card (BBC 24 Feb. 2015; Nigeria n.d.c), which is also known as the "National Identity Smart Card" (ibid.; MasterCard 8 May 2013). Sources indicate that the National Electronic Identity Cards is being produced in collaboration with MasterCard (ibid.; BBC 24 Feb. 2015). The BBC states that prior to the 2014 launch of the National Electronic Identity Card, Nigeria did not have a unified national system to record identity data (24 Feb. 2015). In October 2012, Biometric Update, a website publishing "news, analysis, and research about the global biometrics market" (Biometric Update, n.d.), quoted the Director of NIMC as stating that "Nigeria lacks a comprehensive database for its citizens as 75 percent of the available identity documents are fake or self-issued" (ibid. 1 Oct. 2012). In 2013, *Vanguard*, a daily Nigerian newspaper (*Vanguard*, n.d.), similarly cited the Director of IT and Database at NIMC as indicating that "75 percent of identity cards in Nigeria are counterfeits without any form of verification or authentication while over 100 million Nigerians have no official identity at all" (ibid. 6 Mar. 2013).

According to *Vanguard*, in July 2015, the Director-General of NIMC announced that the system managing the data for the National Electronic Identity Cards had become functional (ibid. 23 July 2015). The same source further quotes the Director-General in August 2015 as stating that seven million Nigerians had been registered (ibid. 25 Aug. 2015). In an article published in October 2015, *Vanguard* cites the Director-General as indicating that 10 million Nigerians had obtained a National Identity Number (NIN) from the enrollment exercise (ibid. 30 Oct. 2015). In September 2016, sources reported that the NIMC developed a plan to outsource the personalization and printing of national identity cards to private printing companies, due to the backlog of unprinted cards (*Nigerian Tribune* 4 Sept. 2016; *Today.ng* 6 Sept. 2016). Media sources report that in September 2016 the Director-General of NIMC stated that more than 11 million unique data sets have been recorded in the National Identity Database and that one million national identity cards have been printed, of which more than 400,000 cards have been issued to cardholders (ibid.; *Nigerian Tribune* 4 Sept. 2016).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a lawyer working at a firm in Lagos indicated that, based on his personal knowledge in the fields of employment and immigration law, the National Smart Card Scheme of 2014 has not been fully implemented as only approximately 7 million people [or around 1 percent of the Nigerian population] have been registered (Lawyer 26 Oct. 2016). In correspondence with the Research

Directorate, a senior associate at a law firm in Abuja stated that the "Federal Government has not issued an alternative directive to stop the recognition of the old [n]ational ID card" (Senior Associate 31 Oct. 2016). The same source explained that the old national identity cards "remain a valid identity validation exercise until the new Identity Management System ha[s] made the required penetration in Nigeria" (ibid. 31 Oct. 2016). In contrast, the lawyer stated that the older identity cards are "no longer valid as a means of identification," because of the unique features of the new National Electronic Identity Card (Lawyer 26 Oct. 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the NIMC Director General and Chief Executive Officer indicated that "the National Identity Management System (NIMS) and the eID Card scheme have, as of 2014, been fully implemented (Nigeria 18 Nov. 2016). The same source explained that "older [n]ational [i]dentity [c]ards that were produced prior to the National eID Smart Card Scheme were deemed not valid as [of the] 1st day of September 2015" (ibid.).

2. Security Features of the National Electronic Identity Card

According to the BBC, the National Electronic Identity Cards are equipped with "Match-On-Card technology," which links an individual's fingerprint with a profile stored on an embedded chip (BBC 24 Feb. 2015). ZDNet, a website that covers news and analyses on trends in information technology (ZDNet n.d.), similarly indicates that the National Electronic Identity Card has a chip that stores the biometric data of the cardholder (ibid. 29 Aug. 2014). Data stored on the identity cards includes:

- Fingerprints (BBC 24 Feb. 2015; MasterCard 8 May 2013; Nigeria 18 Nov. 2016);
- A picture of the face (ibid.; MasterCard 8 May 2013; CNN 25 Sept. 2014)
- An image of the iris (ibid.; ZDNet 29 August 2014; Nigeria 18 Nov. 2016);
- Age and place of birth (CNN, 25 Sept. 2014); and
- Digital signature (MasterCard, 8 May 2013).

The Guardian Nigeria quotes the Acting Director of Defence Information as stating in September 2015 that the national identity card has over 18 security features, some of which are "not visible to naked eyes" (*The Guardian Nigeria* 23 Sept. 2015). The Senior Associate likewise explained that the National Electronic Identity Card has "nothing less than 18 security features backed by a managed Public Key Infrastructure" (Senior Associate 31 Oct. 2016).

According to the BBC, the National Electronic Identity Cards can be utilized for tasks other than personal identification due to "Public Key Infrastructure technology that allows for document signing, non-repudiation and encryption" (BBC 24 Feb. 2015). Sources state that the card is also used as a form of payment (ibid.; CNN 25 Sept. 2014; MasterCard 30 June 2015) and as a travel document (BBC, 24 Feb. 2015; Nigeria, n.d.a.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the EU agency Frontex [2] stated, based on information from the Frontex Training and Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, that "as far as Nigeria is a member of ECOWAS [the Economic Community of West African States], a Nigerian ID card might be accepted as a travel [document] within this region, but it is not accepted in the EU" (Frontex 27 Oct. 2016). When asked whether the National Electronic Identity Card can be used as a travel document, the NIMC Director General and Chief Executive Officer explained that

It can presently be used for regional travel where a visa is not required. The full details for implementation are still under discussions with the Nigerian Immigration Service as part of the harmonization and integration drive of the Federal Government of Nigeria. (Nigeria 18 Nov. 2016)

Concerning the ID document's ability to be used as a method of payment, sources state that the card uses MasterCard's prepaid technology and that it is certified by way of chip and PIN (BBC 24 Feb. 2015; MasterCard 8 May 2013). MasterCard indicates that the chip hosts the national identity data and prepaid payment functionality, which is secured by authenticating biometric data (ibid. 2013). The BBC quotes the Division President for Sub-Saharan Africa at MasterCard as stating that the computer chip that is embedded in the card "protects against the creation of counterfeit cards" and "protects cardholders from fraud" (BBC 24 Feb. 2015). Likewise, in a press release, MasterCard noted that the payment function of the card helps the government of Nigeria to "minimize fraud and corruption" (MasterCard 30 June 2015). ZDNet quotes MasterCard's business head for West Africa as indicating that "MasterCard does not handle the biometric data" and that they are "strictly confined to the payment technology on the chip" (ZDNet 29 Aug. 2014).

According to the lawyer, state authorities have put various measures in place to combat the creation of fraudulent ID cards, including: biometric data registration; issuance of unique NINs; online verification through authentication and verification clearing house (AVCH); and the verification through fingerprint reading devices (Lawyer 26 Oct. 2016). The lawyer further explained that:

To a very large extent these securities features are very effective and ha[ve] made it difficult for fraudulent cards to be produced under the new scheme. From experience, what is happening is that people are attempting to produce fake identity cards but because of the inherent security

measures[,] which include online verification and finger print reading devices, the fake cards are easily identified and destroyed. (26 Oct. 2016)

3. Fraudulent National Identity Cards and Responses From The State

The Representative of Frontex explained the difference between fraudulent documents and forged documents, based on information gathered from the Frontex Training and Frontex Risk Analysis Unit:

"[i]t is quite difficult to detect a fraudulent Nigerian ID card because in this case you should check the provided document during the application process of the ID card. To detect a forged Nigerian ID card is easier as this can be compared with a specimen of the card (looking at printing techniques and other security features.)" (27 Oct. 2016).

In an interview with the Research Directorate, a Police Public Relations Officer with the Nigeria Police Special Fraud Unit indicated that [i]n terms of the old national identity cards that were produced prior to the new National Electronic Identity Cards, there are definitely fraudulent national identity cards in circulation (Nigeria 27 Oct. 2016).

The lawyer explained that:

Fraudulent registration was possible under the old identity card regime as registration was basically manual so it was easy to duplicate cards. However, under the new scheme, because registration involves biometrics data capture and the issuance of a unique personalized National Identity Number upon registration as well as several other security features, it is difficult to reproduce or duplicate [the new card,] but rather what you have is fake National Identity Cards. (Lawyer 26 Oct. 2016)

When asked whether fraudulent national identity cards are available or in circulation, the NIMC Director General and Chief Executive Officer stated that

To the best of our knowledge, the new National Identity Card has not yet been successfully cloned and there have been no reports of any counterfeits in the field. (Nigeria 18 Nov. 2016)

3.1 Fraudulent Production Centres and Fake Agents

On the fraud alert page of its website, the NIMC warns of "fraudsters posing as [NIMC] Agents or Staff" (Nigeria n.d.b). Likewise, *Daily Post*, a daily Nigerian newspaper (*Daily Post* n.d.), reports in September 2014 that NIMC has warned against the existence of individuals who falsely claim to be staff of NIMC and that there are unauthorized centres providing national identification number enrollment services (ibid. 22 Sept. 2014). The same article quotes the Deputy Director of Corporate Communications at the NIMC as stating that there have been business centres that "use banners bearing the NIMC or Presidential logos" and "charge eligible applicants for pre-enrollment, making applicants believe they are paying for the NIN or the National e-ID Card" (*Daily Post* 22 Sept. 2014).

Leadership, a daily Nigerian newspaper (*Leadership*, n.d.), reports in November 2014 that there are fake agents claiming to work for firms outsourced by NIMC who have defrauded "hundreds of Lagos residents" (ibid. 16 Nov. 2014). The same source indicates that the fake agents have charged residents 300 Nigerian Naira (NGN) [C\$1.27] and have requested a driver's license, international passport, or other source of personal identification to complete the "registration" process (ibid.). According to *Leadership*, fake agents have been spotted in Berger, Oshodi, 2nd Rainbow in Festac, Obalende and Lekki Phase 1 in Lagos (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Media sources report that, in September 2015, the Nigerian army identified a business centre in Maiduguri, Borno, that was producing counterfeit national identity cards, among other documents, for Boko Haram (*Daily Post* 19 Sept. 2015; *The Guardian Nigeria* 17 Sept. 2015). Sources report that the two business operators were arrested (ibid.; *Daily Post* 19 Sept. 2015).

3.2 State Efforts in Response

The Police Public Relations Officer of the Nigeria Police Special Fraud Unit explained that individuals who produce fraudulent documents in offices that tend to operate underground are referred to as "document vendors" (Nigeria 27 Oct. 2016). The same source stated that the Nigerian police does not tolerate the operations of document vendors (ibid.). According to the Police Public Relations Officer, the police routinely arrest document vendors, conduct investigations, and prosecute those involved in forgeries (ibid.). The source

further explained that the police notifies the public about such cases, and cautions them not to "patronize document vendors" (ibid.).

Vanguard quotes the Director-General of the NIMC as stating that their agency works "to ensure that [the] proliferation of data, fraudulent activities and cases of insecurity among other[s] are addressed in the shortest possible time" (*Vanguard* 23 July 2015). On its website, NIMC explains that the NIN and the national identity card are free of charge and that one is only able to obtain the NIN and the national identity card at the NIMC Enrolment Centres (Nigeria n.d.b).

Similarly, sources report that a statement issued by the Acting Director of Defence information in September 2015 provides that the only agency authorized to register and issue a national identity card is NIMC (*Codewit World News* 25 Sept. 2015; *The Guardian Nigeria* 23 Sept. 2015). Sources further indicate that the Acting Director stated that military authorities had issued a "red alert" in September 2015, warning against "prevailing incidences of unauthorized production of the national identity card" (ibid.; *Codewit World News* 25 Sept. 2015. *The Guardian Nigeria* reports that the Acting Director urged "members of the public to report any attempts by unauthorized persons to issue cards similar to the national identity cards to security agencies" (*The Guardian Nigeria*, 23 Sept. 2015).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The NIMC was established by the *National Identity Management Commission Act 2007* and is responsible for "carry[ing] out the enrolment of citizens and legal residents as provided for in the Act, [c]reat[ing] and operat[ing] a National Identity Database, [and] [i]ssu[ing] Unique National Identification Numbers to qualified citizens and legal residents" (Nigeria n.d.c). It is also in charge of "issu[ing] a National Identity Smart Card to every registered person 16 years and above, [p]rovid[ing] a secure means to access the National Identity Database so that an individual can irrefutably assert his/her identity [Person Identification Verification Services (PIVS) Infrastructure]" (ibid.).

[2] Frontex is the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, which has the mission of "promot[ing], coordinat[ing] and develop[ing] European border management in line with the EU [European Union] fundamental rights charter and Integrated Border Management" (Frontex n.d).

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Internet sites, including: All Africa; Amnesty International; ecoi.net; Europol; La Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; INTERPOL; IRIN News; Minority Rights Group International; *The Nation*; Nigeria – National Identity Management Commission (NIMC); Radio France Internationale; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; The Sun News Online; Transparency International; UN – Development Programme, Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Refworld; Reliefweb, UN Women; US – Department of State.

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