

CENTRE HUMAN RIGHTS IN UGANDA'S DIGITAL NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM

A STATEMENT BY THE INITIATIVE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS (ISER) ON INTERNATIONAL IDENTITY DAY 2026

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The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) joins the world in commemorating International Identity Day under the theme [“My Identity, My Shadow. Never Apart!”](#) The commemoration is premised on [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 16.9](#), which calls on States to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030. The day provides an opportunity to reflect on Uganda's progress towards universal legal identity and, importantly, on whether the national identification system is being implemented in a manner that respects, protects and fulfils human rights.

Legal identity is an important enabler of the enjoyment of human rights. It can facilitate access to social protection, healthcare, education, financial services and other public services, as well as participation in social and economic life. However, universal legal identity cannot be understood solely in terms of registration and coverage. A [rights-based approach](#) requires that identification services are accessible, inclusive, non-discriminatory and affordable, and that individuals have effective mechanisms to correct inaccurate records and obtain redress where their rights are affected.

ISER commends the efforts of the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) to expand access to identification and registration services. The parish-level mass enrolment and renewal exercise launched in May 2025 resulted in approximately [6.4 million out of a targeted 17.2 million new registrations and 14.3 million renewals and updates](#), migrating to the [Modular Open Source Identity Platform \(MOSIP\)](#), a modern open-source architecture for managing digital identity. NIRA has also taken services closer to communities through its Mobile Track services and intensified birth registration, including registration outreaches at health facilities. These measures are important steps towards achieving universal legal identity in Uganda.

Nevertheless, significant barriers to access remain. [10 million persons](#) remain unregistered, while more than 5.4 million printed national identity cards remain uncollected. NIRA also faces a [significant staffing gap](#): only 418 of its 571 approved positions are filled, with just 201 staff directly serving clients. Staffing and operational constraints continue to affect the timely delivery of identification services.

The [cost](#) of correcting errors on the national ID remains high. Individuals may pay up to UGX 200,000 (about US\$57) to correct some errors, while cases requiring legal processes such as a deed poll and gazetting it can cumulatively cost close to UGX 1,000,000 (about US\$286). This does not include costs involved in moving to and from NIRA service centres. These costs are particularly burdensome in a country where [16.1 percent of the population](#), about 7 million people, live below the national poverty line of approximately US\$1 (about UGX 3,600) per person per day.

All this is in the context where a national ID is mandatory for accessing vital public services. In [*Chased Away and Left to Die*](#), ISER, together with the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice and Unwanted Witness, documented how the mandatory requirement of a national ID under the Registration of Persons Act Cap 332 excludes vulnerable groups such as older persons and women from accessing healthcare and social protection services, among others.

Uganda's increasing adoption of digital public infrastructure (DPI), anchored by the national identification system, makes human rights safeguards increasingly important. The national ID provides a foundational layer for identifying and verifying people across government and private systems that offer services, including social protection, education, banking, telecommunications, health, etc. As these systems become interconnected, errors, exclusion, or failed verification in the national ID system can affect access to multiple services. The government must center safeguards that protect rights, including data protection, ensure accountability and provide effective remedies.

ISER has consistently advocated for a human-rights-based approach to Uganda's national identification system. In [*Seizing the Opportunity to Improve Uganda's National Digital ID System*](#), ISER and its partners called for a comprehensive Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA), greater transparency and participation, proactive measures to address the exclusion of marginalised groups and appropriate safeguards in the transition to the new digital architecture.

As Uganda advances its digital transformation agenda, the expansion of digital identification should be accompanied by strengthened human rights protections and accountability mechanisms. The objective should not only be to increase the number of people registered, but to ensure that the identification system contributes to the equal enjoyment of rights.

ISER calls upon the Government of Uganda to:

1. Increase staffing for NIRA to improve the timely delivery of identification services;
2. Reduce or waive (for some vulnerable groups) the costs of correction of errors on national IDs and continue simplifying these processes;
3. Strengthen decentralisation and last-mile registration to bring identification services closer to communities;
4. Provide alternative means of identification and verification to ensure that mandatory national ID and digital verification requirements do not exclude people from accessing essential public services;
5. Undertake and publish a comprehensive Human Rights Impact Assessment of the national identification system, including its implications for groups at heightened risk of exclusion;
6. Ensure data protection compliance and safeguards in the collection, processing, sharing, and use of identity data.