

Creating digitized, interoperable ID systems

Open Linking data to provide identity for all configuration options



Photo: UNICEF Ethiopia/2016/Nahom Tesfaye

It is estimated that [1 billion people](#) worldwide do not have legal proof of identity. . This means they can't prove important information such as their name or age. They're denied basic services and rights as a result, which puts them at greater risk of poverty, exploitation, abuse, and statelessness.

[More than 90%](#) of people who lack ID live in low- and lower-middle-income countries. Many of these countries either have no ID system or one that doesn't cover the whole population. Inefficient ID systems are often paper-based or decentralized, which leads to issues such as data duplication, delayed updates, and identity theft and fraud.

Linking data to provide identity for all

Inclusive ID systems are essential for protecting human rights, providing opportunities, and achieving sustainable development. A critical step towards inclusivity is to link a country's national ID management system with its civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system.

A CRVS system registers vital events – such as births, deaths, marriages, and divorces – on a continuous and permanent basis. Linking this data with a national ID register has significant benefits:

- Increased reach (particularly to marginalized groups)
- Better security
- Legal sanctity
- Efficient use of resources

However, this link doesn't guarantee inclusivity in all situations. There are other issues and challenges that must be recognized and addressed. In particular, a country must ensure its CRVS system is universal, accurate, and reliable. It should also put the necessary resources, technologies, and legal frameworks in place to support the process of linking its ID register and CRVS system.

Digitizing to keep the data flowing

CRVS and national ID systems must be linked organically, either by integrating them or ensuring they can connect seamlessly at the individual record level. This is best done when these systems are maintained on digital platforms.

Yet most low- and lower-middle-income countries have [paper-based CRVS systems and digitized national ID registers](#). Even when ID and CRVS systems are digitally linked, the flow of information may be intermittent in countries where the CRVS data is entered offline.

This issue can be understood by imagining an ID system as a water tank, as illustrated below. People enter the 'tank,' or national ID register, when they're born or they migrate into the country. They leave it when they die or migrate out.



Image source: [Linking National ID and CRVS Systems: An Imperative for Inclusive Development](#)

When ID and CRVS systems are fully integrated and digitized, the 'taps' stay open at all times, meaning the national ID register is updated in real-time. This ensures greater accuracy, reliability, and security.

Case study: Botswana's integrated ID system

[Botswana provides a good example](#) of integrating CRVS and ID systems on a digital platform, where the national ID register is automatically updated in real-time:

- Parents can simultaneously register a child's birth and add them to the national ID register.
- The register generates a unique number which appears on the child's birth certificate.
- The child can use their birth certificate as ID until they turn 16.
- At 16 years old, they provide biometric information to get a national ID card.
- People are automatically removed from the national ID register when their death is registered.

Botswana has one of the most modern integrated ID systems in Africa. However, it doesn't have any laws around creating, maintaining, or sharing electronic records. This exposes the country to security risks and legal scrutiny.

Learn more

You can learn more about the necessary legal provisions and other challenges relating to ID systems by reading our new paper – [Linking National ID and CRVS Systems: An Imperative for Inclusive Development](#). This paper is part of a [knowledge brief series on gender and CRVS](#) published by the Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems in partnership with [Open Data Watch](#).

Consult the [Compendium of Good Practices in Linking CRVS and ID Management Systems](#). Developed with the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, this new publication highlights the experiences of six countries around the world. A summary of findings and good practices is available in a [synthesis document](#) and [infographic](#).

[Watch our video](#) on why legal identity is important, and how countries can provide ID for all.