



CERTIZENS Newsletter

Certifications of Citizenship in Africa



PHOTO: UNHCR/Héleine Caux

Welcome to Issue 4 of the CERTIZENS Newsletter

As a devastating crisis unfolds in Ukraine, prompting yet another dramatic and painful wave of violent mass displacements and long-term uncertainties, we are reminded of the complex and increasingly precarious relationship between notions of state sovereignty, nationhood, citizenship, identity, boundaries, and belonging. These reflect a set of interweaving dynamics related to the different documented forms of personal identification, their systems of registration and validation, their socio-political value, and their patterns of delivery and access/exclusion. Such dynamics are subject to a range of contextual shifts and challenges. This is true not only under conditions of violent conflict and displacement, where fleeing citizens-turned-refugees are unevenly recognized in given geopolitical spaces, depending on differentiated identification criteria (including race, ethnicity, religion, class and so on). It is also true in seemingly peaceful times and stable places.

As we can see from the range of reflections, reports and readings highlighted in this newsletter, African countries like Ghana and Uganda, among others, are moving forward impressively with more technically sophisticated and increasingly digitised ID ecosystems, aimed at improving security, financialisation, and/or service delivery. Yet simultaneously, new challenges are raised or old ones deepened by these very systems, generating concerns and contestations on legal, institutional, social and political fronts. The combination of progress in some arenas and detours and disjunctures on the other, underscores the need to move cautiously with the introduction of totalizing technical 'solutions' to national ID 'problems'. Rather, policy choices and their implementation need to be well grounded in in-depth understandings of the messiness of real-life social, economic, political and cultural conditions, and their differential effects.

We hope that the varied content of the newsletter provides you with a stimulating sense of the extent, diversity and interconnectedness of 'ID issues' across Africa and globally. As always, we welcome your feedback and contributions via the CERTIZENS email address: certizens@teol.ku.dk.

Amanda Hammar, CERTIZENS Project Leader
Copenhagen, March 2022

CERTIZENS Updates

Three Ways in Which People Are Excluded from ID Systems

By [Toke Møldrup Wolff](#), CERTIZENS Researcher. *Toke's research looks at the transition from pre-existing technologies and logics to emerging and increasingly digitalized ID infrastructures in Uganda. You can read about his project on this page.*

It is estimated that around 1 billion people worldwide lack proof of their legal identity. On top of that, many people have various forms of identification documents but these may not be considered sufficient or legitimate by public authorities. Furthermore, an unknown number of people – often with precarious citizenship statuses – are forced to navigate emerging ID regimes in order to access the same public services that were available to them prior to the new system, where very particular IDs have become indispensable to everyday life.

It is important to distinguish between these three categories because each represents distinct challenges related to ID infrastructures. Whereas the first two categories often struggle to even access a specific form of ID, the last category of people may find it too risky to make use of the national ID they have in fact obtained. They may be afraid that state authorities could discover that the genuine documents do not represent the cardholder. This risk means that many abstain from using their IDs for accessing all kinds of services such as registering land, applying for a scholarship, or making use of public healthcare facilities.

As such, the implementation of ID systems across the African continent has enhanced marginalization and exclusion for particular groups who for one reason or another are struggling to obtain proper forms of documentation. Such examples show that there is a long way to go before we can talk about ID systems as a tool to meet the World Bank mandate of *empowering* populations and enhancing individuals' access to services and participation in the formal economy.

A proper implementation of *inclusive* ID systems must include careful consideration of local dynamics and pre-existing forms of marginalization that such systems risk enhancing. Otherwise, the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16.9 ('legal identity for all') may pose a serious threat to already marginalized populations around the world.

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In the News

Here we present a selection of CERTIZENS-relevant issues in the press. To suggest a news report or feature for the next newsletter, please email: certizens@teol.ku.dk

Uganda voter registration controversy

Debates over which documents are required to vote in elections in Uganda flared up in December 2021, after people without national identity cards were prevented from taking part in local elections. [Chimp Reports covered the story.](#)

Ghanaian drivers' union calls for passenger registration

An interesting story [covered by Modern Ghana](#) on why drivers working for the taxi app Bolt are calling for an identification system which would easily trace passengers who commit violent offences against drivers.

New system for birth registration in Ghana

The Ghana Health Service is to begin digitally tracking pregnant women across the country to ensure new born babies immediately receive a national ID number at birth. However, mothers-to-be must have a Ghana Card ID in order to be tracked, raising concerns of exclusion. Read the story by [Modern Ghana here.](#)

And more...

[Difficulties in registration for Ghana's digital ID worries lawmakers](#), *Biometric Update*, 24 Feb 2022

[Ghana card fiasco continues with e-passport confusion](#), *The Africa Report*, 23 Feb 2022

[Uganda's digital ID achievements, challenges and prospects](#), *Biometric Update*, 31 Jan 2022

What We're Reading

This section presents a selection of recent journal articles, books, reports and blogs on CERTIZENS-relevant themes. To suggest an item for the next newsletter please send a link to the work and a brief description of its relevance to: certizens@teol.ku.dk

Journal articles

[Nicki Kindersley, Dodgy Paperwork and Theories of Citizenship on the Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan Borders Diaspora](#), *Advance Access Article* (2021)

In brief: This article reflects on conversations with cross-border residents in the northwest region of Uganda, examining their ideas of the nature of political authority and questions of identity paperwork. It notes that there is very little that is really 'national' or 'state' about the identification paperwork and practices that have emerged on these borders from the 1990s onwards – with residents rather highlighting the importance of class systems, globalized capital, and power relations in how citizenship works in the region.

Books

[The Design Politics of the Passport: Materiality, Immobility and Dissent](#), Mahmoud Keshavarz, US: Bloomsbury 2018

In brief: A study of the passport and its associated social, political and material practices – combining design studies, critical border studies, and ethnographic work among undocumented migrants. The book traces the histories, technologies, power relations and contestations around this small but powerful artefact to establish a framework for understanding how design is always enmeshed in the political, and how politics can be understood in terms of material objects.

[Dual citizenship: A comparative study of Kenya and Uganda](#), Anthony Ssembatya, Doctoral Thesis at Universität Potsdam (2021)

In brief: This doctoral thesis analyses the reasons behind Kenya and Uganda's decisions to enact legal reforms allowing dual citizenship. The thesis explores why both countries undertook these reforms in such close historical proximity – 2010 in Kenya and 2009 in Uganda – and undertakes a comparative study on the processes, actors and impact of both reforms.

Reports and Analysis

[Privacy International](#) have produced a [series of videos](#) exploring the issue of 'double registration' in Kenya, which has left tens of thousands of citizens in legal limbo due to their fingerprints being captured in refugee databases.

[A report published in November 2021](#) by [Research ICT Africa](#) and the [Centre for Internet and Society](#) investigates the state of digital identity ecosystems in 10 African countries – including Ghana and Uganda.

[A blog post](#) by NGO [Global Data Justice](#) casts a much-needed critical eye on developments in the identity industry during the pandemic, with a focus on humanitarian aid environments.

A more technocratic report on the potential benefits of digital financial services and digital IDs for taxation in Africa was published by the [Institute of Development Studies](#) in February. [Read it in full here.](#)

The UK-based NGO [Women In Identity](#) published a report this January on the human impact of exclusion from financial services – [access it here.](#)

Upcoming

To suggest an entry for the next newsletter's Upcoming section, please send details of the conference, seminar or other relevant event to: certizens@teol.ku.dk

[ID4Africa LiveCast: The Mobile Identity Saga](#)

Part 1: 9 March, 14:30 (CET)

Part 2: 23 March, 14:30 (CET)

Part 3: 13 April, 14:30 (CET)

Part 4: 27 April, 14:30 (CET)

Four part series on the significance of mobile phones for IDs and development. Keynote speakers will cover topics including trends of mobile phone usage in Africa, mobiles as empowering tools for women and girls, and the uses of mobile technologies for birth registration. [Register for the series here.](#)

[ID4Africa Annual Meeting](#)

Physical conference (Marrakesh, Morocco): 15-16 June 2022

Virtual conference (Online): 28 & 30 June 2022

The ID4Africa Annual Meeting brings together stakeholders from the African and international identity community for knowledge exchange and networking. The event will be held in two parts: in person in Marrakesh and online later the same month. **Registration opened on 9 March.** [See more details and how to register here.](#)

Resources and Opportunities

We encourage you to submit announcements of relevant opportunities for the next CERTIZENS newsletter, including conference calls, calls for journal articles or book chapters, job openings, researching funding, or other opportunities. Please email: certizens@teol.ku.dk

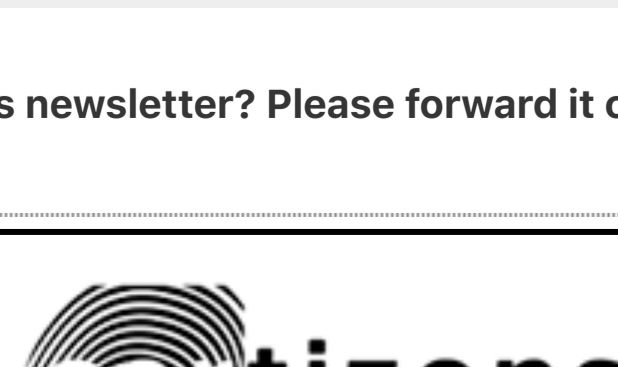
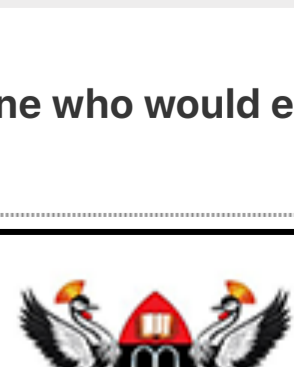
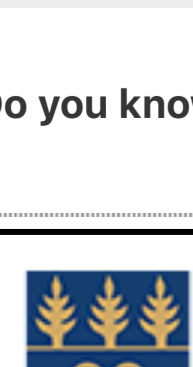
[Podcast: 'The trouble with identity in Kenya'](#)

In this [podcast produced by Privacy International](#), Yusuf Bashir (Executive Director of identity rights NGO [Haki na Sheria](#)) and Dr Keren Weitzberg, an academic at UCL, discuss the [falling na Sheria's](#) identity system: from double registration to exclusion and discrimination.

[Call for submissions: Statelessness and Citizenship Review \(SCR\)](#)

The SCR is [calling for general submissions for its next two issues](#), to be published in December 2022 and July 2023. Submissions should be on any theme or context relating to citizenship and statelessness issues. The journal welcomes proposals from any discipline by the respective deadlines of **1 April** (for publication in December 2022) and **1 October** (for publication in July 2023).

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You can contact the CERTIZENS team at certizens@teol.ku.dk

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