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Refugees and Returnees Service



National ID
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UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

PLACE

Addis Ababa

DATE

6 March 2024

Ethiopia launches inclusive ID system for refugees, boosts access to national services

The Government of Ethiopia, through its Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) in partnership with National ID Program (NIDP) and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency launched an initiative to include refugees and asylum seekers into the Ethiopian Digital ID system.

Aiming to facilitate refugees' access to basic services, this initiative – currently in its pilot stage – is being rolled out in Addis Ababa with the issuance of digital refugee ID cards that feature a unique identification number called “Fayda”.

Using biometric technology, the “Fayda” number issued by the National ID Program of Ethiopia (NIDP), which will be printed on the refugee ID cards, will help in preventing double registration and duplicate ID cards issuance to the refugees.

“Issuing digital IDs to refugees is a huge step that demonstrates that the Ethiopian Government is committed to include refugees in its national systems. This initiative is in line with two of our bold commitments announced during the Global Refugee Forum in 2023: including refugees into national systems and enhancing access to documentation. These IDs will grant refugees access to government-directed services” said Teyiba Hassen, Director General of Ethiopia’s Refugees and Returnees Service.

“In a world where identity is the key to access, Fayda Digital ID for refugees is not just an ID; it is a gateway to dignity, enabling access to essential services, legal recognition, and opportunities to be integrated into host communities. Let's build systems that recognize everyone, ensuring that no one is left behind” said Yodahe Zemichael, Executive Director at the National ID Program.

This new refugee ID (with Fayda number) will allow refugees to access key services like obtaining a SIM card, healthcare or school enrolment and will also help them improve their access to financial services, providing refugees with the opportunity to open bank accounts and engage in financial transactions. Refugee entrepreneurs can also formally register their businesses, contributing to the local economy.

"This is an exciting development and demonstrates how Ethiopia is bringing to life the Global Compact on Refugees, which aims to support long term solutions for refugees no matter where they are and UNHCR hopes this will be emulated by other countries across the continent, " said Andrew Mbogori, UNHCR’s Representative in Ethiopia

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Entitled the “PING project (PRIMES Interoperability Gateway), this initiative has been in the works for close to a year. It is also to be recalled that RRS, UNHCR and NIPD had signed a tripartite data sharing agreement to make sure both refugee and national ID databases can communicate, ensuring that the data protection rights of refugees and asylum seekers are respected.

This is the first time in East Africa, and one of the first times globally, that the PING project is being implemented, making Ethiopia a pioneer in the inclusion of refugees in its national systems. This initiative is also in line with Ethiopia’s pledge to include 814,000 refugees into the National ID system during the 2023 Global Refugee Forum.

Although the Fayda ID will be rolled out on an opt-in basis, the goal is to scale this up to the 77,000 refugees living in Addis Ababa before availing it to nearly 1 million refugees - mainly from South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan - living across Ethiopia - the third largest refugee-hosting country in Africa.

This initiative is part of the World Bank’s Identification for Development (ID4D) project that aims to improve the inclusivity, functionality and governance of national ID and civil registration systems.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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