



# UNHCR Strategy on Digital Identity and Inclusion



*“Digitally Yours” – Why the digital inclusion of Refugees, Stateless and other forcibly displaced persons not only makes sense but is the right thing to do.*

## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Globally, more than 1 billion people lack identity papers. In our modern world this excludes from services and socio-economic participation, it limits access, for example, to work, housing, a mobile phone and a bank account. In fact, the lack of a documented identity constitutes for vulnerable and already marginalized people a constant risk of transgressing the lines between legal and illegal.

Most people affected by the lack of legal identity live in their own country and may have chances of obtaining identity documents if specific measures are put in place in their favour.

But what if you don't live in your home area but abroad, if you are a foreigner, migrant, asylum seeker or refugee? In this situation, protection risks are high while chances of obtaining a legal and recognized identity and inclusion are low.

## WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?

In an ideal world, everybody should have documents, such as a birth certificate and an ID card. Especially in poor countries this is not always the case.

The ongoing digitalization of civil registries and the establishment of integrated population registries in many countries creates opportunities to provide a legal identity for everybody residing on a given State's territory, which is not restricted to nationals only. UNHCR supports countries not only to set-up separate refugee registration systems but to include them into their national identity systems as this is a win-win for everybody: States have a clearer picture on who lives on their territory whilst refugees and other forcibly displaced persons can expect to receive valid identity documents.

But identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is no longer just paper-based and centred on breeder documents, such as birth certificates and ID cards. With new technologies providing access to the internet, mobile phones and related services, to information, education, banking, and other economic opportunities, the concept and realities of identity broadens.

States have the responsibility to provide for the digital inclusion and identity of their citizens and those living on their territory. UNHCR assists member states in ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other forcibly displaced are – digitally speaking - not left behind.

# What are UNHCR's objectives for achieving the digital inclusion and digital identity of refugees, stateless persons, and other forcibly displaced persons?

## Empowering refugees, stateless and forcibly displaced persons

Refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other forcibly displaced persons should have a legally recognized as well as a digital identity. Individuals will be able to request UNHCR to certify their identity. Such a certified individual identity will be portable and valid across borders and can be used and shared in a self-determined way by each user.

A legal identity for every individual is of utmost importance. However, a digital identity that give access to the internet, mobile phones and related services is equally becoming important.

Empowerment passes through digital inclusion: Access to jobs, income and remittances, online learning and web-based economic activities will make a difference in the lives of people we care for.

## Strengthening State capacity

Integrated national identity systems providing a foundational identity to everybody, incl. refugees and asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other forcibly displaced, will receive UNHCR's full support. Hence, the UN Refugee Agency will focus on refugee registration as a functional subset of a multi-sector and multi-purpose ID infrastructure and assist States to register and document all individuals living on the State's territory, incl. those under the organization's mandate. State capacity should be strengthened so as to ensure that nobody will be deprived of the opportunities of the digital age. UNHCR will assist States to conform with international standards of data security and privacy.

## Improve service delivery

UNHCR and other aid agencies need to improve their service delivery by using the internet and mobile services more extensively.

Refugees and other forcibly displaced persons will, for example, have relief accounts that show entitlements in a transparent manner and track cash and relief items that have been or will be made available to them

Legal and protection services, in particular for asylum seekers, refugees and stateless persons, will be provided online in a speedy and secure manner. eGovernment will enhance service delivery, allow for easy and a more dignified access, obtain opinions and complaints. Efficiency gains will lead to more client satisfaction.

## HOW DO WE GET THERE?

UNHCR is currently rolling out its Population Registration and Identity Management EcoSystem (PRIMES), which includes state of the art biometrics. A consolidated global database will be in place soon. In partnership with governments, academic institutions, international organizations and private sector companies, we will embark in 2018/2019 on a number of pilot projects to proof concepts, establish use cases and processes, and test IT infrastructure.

Technology is a powerful enabler. However, for digital inclusion in the context of forced displacement and statelessness to succeed, we will have to overcome regulatory voids and barriers. Hence, UNHCR will

negotiate with its partners sustainable and appropriate regulatory frameworks.

Giving everybody access to a legal and digital identity is an outstanding civilizing challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that encompasses the capacity of a single entity. Hence, there is a need for collaboration of governments, international organizations and private sector companies to achieve practical and effective solutions for legal and digital inclusion. Together we can make a meaningful contribution to an important target of the Sustainable Development Goals: Providing a legal identity to everybody. (SDG Goal 16.9). "Leaving nobody behind" applies to all countries and sectors of society. Even to the digital space.