

Country Report:

Biometric Identification in Angola



Dr. Dércio Tsandzana,
Ph.D. & Independent Researcher

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Executive Summary

This report focuses on Angola and is part of a multi-region research seeking to identify and compare the state of biometrics and digital identity threats, usage, and impact in Africa, the Balkans, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South and Southeast Asia.

This report focuses on the biometric identification landscape in la *República de Angola* (the Republic of Angola or Angola), a critical component of the broader digital identity conversation. For purposes of this report, biometric identification is defined as the ‘use of a human’s unique physical or behavioral characteristics to establish their identity, in digital and offline environments’.¹

Using a mixed-methods approach relying on a desk review and 10 in-depth interviews, this report details Angola’s adoption of biometrics for identification purposes and presents the lived access challenges faced by Angolans. The report focuses on two types of biometric identification documents, including the passport and national ID card, with light commentary on the electoral card and driving license.

The report concludes that the barriers to access in Angola’s biometric identification system are negatively impacting individuals’ rights to identity and nationality, with consequences for the exercise of other civil rights and liberties. The key findings are summarized in detail below and explored extensively further in the report.

¹ New Jersey, ‘New Jersey Notary Public Rules,’ [https://www.nj.gov/treasury/proposed_rules/PRN-2021-103-\(53%20N.J.R.-1809\(a\)\).pdf](https://www.nj.gov/treasury/proposed_rules/PRN-2021-103-(53%20N.J.R.-1809(a)).pdf), accessed 2 February 2023.

Key Findings

This report details core challenges in the issuance of biometric identification documents signaling the government's failure to protect, promote, and fulfil Angolan's rights to identity and nationality as follows:

- **Finding 1:** delays in biometric ID issuance are negatively impacting individuals' rights to identity and nationality and have created opportunities for illegal activities, such as facilitation payments by individuals seeking expedited ID issuance.
- **Finding 2:** technical and technological constraints are affecting the timely issuance of biometric ID, revealing that technological promises of speed and efficiency have not been realized.
- **Finding 3:** centralization of ID processes is entrenching bureaucratic inefficiencies and risks creating single-point failures.
- **Finding 4:** continuing dependence on public offices to issue biometric ID documents reveals that biometric technologies alone are not sufficient to fully automate biometric identification processes in Angola.
- **Finding 5:** increase of the biometric passport cost by nearly USD 41 risks disproportionately affecting indigent populations, thus limiting their ability to obtain biometric identification.
- **Finding 6:** government's adoption of technology for identification services is affected by digital literacy gaps and infrastructural challenges, such as the lack of electricity and poor internet connectivity. This underscores the need for holistic digital transformation in Angola.

Key Recommendations

- **The Government of Angola is urged to:**

Promote individuals' right to identity and nationality in accordance with international human rights law obligations by minimizing direct and indirect barriers preventing individuals' timely access to biometric identification.

- **Civil society actors in Angola are urged to:**

Launch targeted advocacy campaigns aimed at educating public officials about the importance of streamlined ID issuance, with an emphasis on the impact of efficient identification processes on public service delivery.

- **Users of biometric ID in Angola are urged to:**

Avoid facilitation payments when applying for identification documents.

The findings in this report serve as a call to action for better efficiency in public service delivery in Angola, highlighting the urgent need to address barriers preventing individuals' unrestricted access to identification documentation.

Introduction

This report does not endorse the blanket adoption of biometrics in ID systems. We reiterate the World Bank’s commentary that ‘biometrics are not required or appropriate in all contexts especially where privacy, data protection, exclusion risks will significantly add to the cost of the ID system and add operational complexity.’²

The ‘Right to Identity, Privacy, and Intimacy’ is provided for under Article 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Angola, which stipulates that “everyone is recognized as having the right to personal identity, civil capacity, nationality, a good name and reputation, image, speech and the privacy of private and family life.”³ The right to citizenship in Angola is derived by birth within the country or from one’s parents.⁴

Under Article 6 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 16 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the right to be recognized as a person before the law is an inalienable, universal right.⁵ The right to legal identity, including birth registration, is advanced under Goal 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁶ Additionally, the right to nationality, an element of individual identity, is recognized in numerous international and legal instruments. These include Article 24 of the ICCPR, which Angola ratified in 1992,⁷ and Article 6 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR).⁸

Central to the right to identity is the ability to prove legal identity, which is facilitated through state-issued credentials, including birth certificates, national identity (ID) cards, or

² World Bank, ‘Practitioners Guide: Types of ID Systems,’ <https://id4d.worldbank.org/guide/types-id-systems>, accessed 25 May 2023.

³ Constitution of the Republic of Angola (2010), <https://reformat.co.mz/documentos-diversos/constituicao-da-republica-de-angola-copia.pdf>, accessed 20 March 2023.

⁴ UNICEF, ‘Angola: CRVS,’ <https://data.unicef.org/crvs/angola/>, accessed 24 April 2023.

⁵ UDHR, [https://www.ohchr.org/en/universal-declaration-of-human-rights#:~:text=The%20Universal%20Declaration%20of%20Human%20Rights%20\(UDHR\)%20is%20a%20milestone,rights%20to%20be%20universally%20protected](https://www.ohchr.org/en/universal-declaration-of-human-rights#:~:text=The%20Universal%20Declaration%20of%20Human%20Rights%20(UDHR)%20is%20a%20milestone,rights%20to%20be%20universally%20protected), accessed 25 May 2023. ICCPR - General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>, accessed 25 May 2023.

⁶ UN Legal Identity Agenda, ‘Background,’ <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/>, accessed 25 May 2023.

⁷ Angola ratified the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights on January 10, 1992. United Nations Treaty Collection, ‘Status of ICCPR,’ https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&clang=en, accessed 25 May 2023.

⁸ African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-treaty-0011_-_african_charter_on_human_and_peoples_rights_e.pdf, accessed 14 June 2023.

digital ID cards.⁹ Conversely, under international law, passports provide individuals with state-issued *prima facie* proof of nationality, which is tied closely to citizenship.¹⁰ Driving licenses and voters cards serve specific purposes under law, with the former serving as a proof of the holder's authorization to drive, and the latter serving as proof of registration as an eligible voter.

Under this national, regional, and international framework, the Angolan government is obligated to provide legal ID documentation to those in its jurisdiction and minimize direct and indirect barriers that prevent or delay individuals' timely access to this documentation, including bureaucratic and administrative delays, exorbitant fees, and travel costs, amongst others.¹¹

As evidenced in the results and analysis section of this report, the failure of the states to issue legal and biometric ID to its citizenry can result in digital, social, economic, political, and financial exclusion. Notably, these barriers deny individuals' ability to claim and exercise a wide range of basic civil rights and liberties, including the right to employment, healthcare, education, and freedom of movement, both inside and outside the country.

Illustratively, Angolans' possession of the national ID card will facilitate their ability to exercise their right to vote during the 2027 general elections, following the discontinuation of the voters' card in 2021.¹² Further, for individuals to access mobile connectivity, they are required to adduce proof of identity, a national ID for citizens, or a passport with a valid visa for foreigners, under mandatory SIM card registration drives.¹³

With advancements in technology, governments are continually incorporating biometrics, such as fingerprints or face images, into their ID systems to provide secure and accurate

⁹ UN Legal Identity Agenda, 'Background,' <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/>, accessed 25 May 2023.

¹⁰ Oxford PIL, 'Passports,' <https://opil.ouplaw.com/display/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e857>, accessed 25 May 2023.

¹¹ Open Justice Society Initiative & NAMATI, 'A Community-Based Practitioner's Guide: Documenting Citizenship and Other Forms of Legal Identity,' accessed 27 May 2023. World Bank, 'Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development: Toward the Digital Age,' <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/59db4aaa4.pdf>, accessed 26 May 2023.

¹² This was confirmed by the Angolan Minister of Territory Administration. VerAngola, 'In 2027, the Identity Card will be Enough to Vote,' <https://www.verangola.net/va/en/102021/Politics/27819/In-2027-the-Identity-Card-will-be-enough-to-vote-in-Angola.htm>, accessed 9 June 2023.

¹³ Privacy International, 'Timeline of SIM Card Registration Laws,' <https://privacyinternational.org/long-read/3018/timeline-sim-card-registration-laws>, accessed 9 June 2023. See also: Phone Travel WIZ, 'Angola: 2 Best Prepaid SIM Cards Buying Guide (2023),' <https://www.phonetravelwiz.com/buying-a-sim-card-in-angola-guide/>, accessed 10 June 2023.

“identity proofing (de-duplication) and/or...verification and authentication to service providers.”¹⁴ The use of biometrics for identification (i.e., establishing uniqueness) or verification (i.e., authenticating transactions) is accompanied by benefits and challenges.

Generally, biometric identification in Angola has the potential to transform identity verification and authentication in various sectors, including healthcare, banking, and government services. Proponents argue that biometric identification establishes secure, accurate and reliable identities, and provides increased security to curb digital challenges such as identity theft and fraud.¹⁵ It is argued that biometric data, such as facial images and fingerprints, is unique to everyone, making it difficult to forge or duplicate.¹⁶ This level of security is what makes biometric digital identity attractive to organizations that deal with sensitive personal information.

Furthermore, biometric digital identity provides a convenient and fast way for individuals to verify their identity without the need for physical documents or passwords. This can improve efficiency in processes such as online banking, where customers can use their fingerprints to log in to their accounts (Nadeem & Malik, 2016).

On the other hand, stakeholders decry the operational, privacy and technological limitations of biometric identification, including the potential for false positives or negatives.¹⁷ Critically, establishing the operational need for biometrics in ID systems necessitates, amongst others, a thorough assessment of the feasibility of biometric integration into a country’s existing legal and technical infrastructure. Additionally, it is imperative that the use of biometric data is regulated and protected to prevent any misuse or violation of individual privacy. Proper safeguards and regulations are necessary to ensure that biometric digital identity is used in a responsible and ethical manner.¹⁸

¹⁴ The World Bank Group - Identification for Development (ID4D) Initiative, ‘Primer on Biometrics for ID Systems (Primer),’ <https://id4d.worldbank.org/id-biometrics-primer>, accessed 25 May 2023.

¹⁵ THALES, ‘Legal Identity: A Proxy for Inclusion,’ <https://www.thalesgroup.com/en/markets/digital-identity-and-security/government/inspired/legal-identity>, accessed 24 May 2023.

¹⁶ Jain, A. K., Ross, A., & Nandakumar, K, ‘Introduction to Biometrics,’ https://books.google.co.ke/books/about/Introduction_to_Biometrics.html?id=ZPt2xrZFtzkC&redir_esc=y, accessed 6 March 2023.

¹⁷ Access Now, ‘Putting People First in Digital ID Systems,’ <https://www.accessnow.org/digital-identity/>, accessed 25 May 2023. The World Bank Group - Identification for Development (ID4D) Initiative, ‘Primer on Biometrics for ID Systems (Primer),’ <https://id4d.worldbank.org/id-biometrics-primer>, accessed 25 May 2023.

¹⁸ Jain, A. K., Ross, A., & Nandakumar, K, ‘Introduction to Biometrics,’ https://books.google.co.ke/books/about/Introduction_to_Biometrics.html?id=ZPt2xrZFtzkC&redir_esc=y, accessed 6 March 2023.

Methodology

Table 1: Research Topic and Research Question (by researcher)

Research Topic	Citizens' Access to Identity Documentation in Angola
Research Question	What challenges do Angolans face when obtaining biometric identification documents?

To investigate the challenges faced by Angolan citizens when seeking biometric identification documents (research purpose), this report adopted a qualitative approach using mixed methods, including a desk review of relevant studies and reports and in-depth interviews. This research methodology is appropriate for exploring complex and nuanced topics, such as biometric identification in Angola. Angola was selected because of its transformation from paper-based to digitised identification systems and its embrace of biometrics and biometric technologies to streamline its national ID and passport systems.

The researcher held anonymized interviews between March–April 2023 with 10 interviewees based on their lived experiences applying for national biometric identification documents and their professional background and digital rights activism in Angola. To recruit interview respondents, the snowball sampling technique was used.¹⁹

The researcher analyzed the interview respondents' feedback and opinions to: (i) understand the challenges in accessing biometric identification documents and public services in Angola, (ii) enable interviewees to share their local experiences, beliefs, and attitudes about biometric identification, and (iii) support the formulation of recommendations targeting the government and CSOs.

Research Limitations

This research report was limited by the following:

¹⁹ It is a technique for recruiting respondents for focus groups or individual interviews. It is, therefore, a sampling method for qualitative research. The snowball effect consists of asking each person contacted for the contact details of one or more other people to be interviewed.

- ✦ **Limited generalizability:** the interview sample size does not fully represent the diversity of lived perspectives and experiences, leading to limited generalizability of the report findings.
- ✦ **Assumptions in sources:** this report relied on publicly accessible material, with the reviewed studies and reports containing the assumptions of respective authors in their individual and professional capacities.
- ✦ **Inability to engage government representatives or private service providers:** this report has not benefited from the perspectives of representatives of government or private service providers dealing directly with the issuing of biometric identification documents.

Glossary

Biometrics	A measurable physical characteristic or personal behavioural trait used to recognize the identity, or verify the claimed identity, of an applicant. This report details the collection of biometrics, namely fingerprints and iris scans. ²⁰
Biometric Identification	The use of a human’s unique physical or behavioural characteristics to establish their identity in digital and offline environments. Biometric identification involves comparing an individual’s captured biometric data against a stored database of biometric templates to verify/authenticate their identity. This report focuses exclusively on biometric passports & IDs.
Digital ID	Tools and systems by which people can provide proofs of claims they make about themselves in digital environments. To ensure that different stakeholders offer different promises based on different ideologies, technologies, and models of implementation.

²⁰ NIST, ‘Glossary – Biometrics,’ <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/biometrics>, accessed 3 February 2023.

Overview: Biometric Identification in Angola

The Republic of Angola is a lower middle-income country in southern Africa and has an estimated population of 34 million people (2023) in a territory of 1,246,700 km².²¹ Angola is a culturally diverse country whose official language is Portuguese.²² Transparency International reports a positive improvement in Angola's global corruption standing, but this is tempered by Angola's low corruption score of 33/100, revealing the existence of corruption practices in the public sector, including bribery.²³

Angola ranks low in the e-government development index (157th out of 193 countries), which assesses, inter alia, "how a country is using information technologies to promote access and inclusion of its people."²⁴ The 2021 African E-Connectivity ranked Angola at 37/55, revealing that the quality of internet connectivity remains poor.²⁵ Angola has a low internet penetration rate of 32.6%, which is attributed to a lack of infrastructure, high cost of devices and services, and digital literacy gaps.²⁶

Generally, Angola does not have a consolidated digital identity system, with its civil registration and national identity systems remaining separate. According to the World Bank, only 28% of Angola's population had biometric national ID coverage in 2017, which is attributed to implementation challenges, particularly affecting poor, and rural

²¹ World Bank, 'Angola - Overview,' <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/angola/overview>, accessed 17 April 2023. Britannica, 'Angola Facts | Britannica,' <https://www.britannica.com/facts/Angola>, accessed 14 June 2023.

²² US Department of State, '2021 Investment Climate Statements: Angola,' [https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-investment-climate-statements/angola/#:~:text=Angola%20is%20a%20lower%20middle,Monetary%20Fund%20\(IMF\)%20estimates](https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-investment-climate-statements/angola/#:~:text=Angola%20is%20a%20lower%20middle,Monetary%20Fund%20(IMF)%20estimates), accessed 14 June 2023. See also: UNICEF, 'Angola: The impact of language policy and practice on children's learning: Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa,' <https://www.unicef.org/esa/sites/unicef.org/esa/files/2018-09/UNICEF-2016-Language-and-Learning-Angola.pdf>, accessed 22 May 2023.

²³ "On a scale of 0-100, 0 means highly corrupt and 100 means very clean." Transparency International, 'The ABCs of the CPI: How the Corruption Perceptions Index is Calculated,' <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/how-cpi-scores-are-calculated>, accessed 12 June 2023.

²⁴ According to the UN, the E-Government Development index "incorporates the access characteristics, such as the infrastructure and educational levels, to reflect how a country is using information technologies to promote access and inclusion of its people. The EGDI is a composite measure of three important dimensions of e-government, namely: provision of online services, telecommunication connectivity and human capacity." See: UN E-Government Knowledgebase, 'Angola,' <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Data/Country-Information/id/5-Angola>, accessed 22 May 2023.

²⁵ Investment Monitor, 'African e-Connectivity Index 2021: The final frontier and a huge opportunity,' <https://www.investmentmonitor.ai/tech/africa-connectivity-index-2021/>, accessed 28 May 2023. See also: Freedom House, 'Freedom on the Net 2022: Angola,' <https://freedomhouse.org/country/angola/freedom-net/2022>, accessed 28 May 2023.

²⁶ Datareportal, 'Digital 2023: Angola,' <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-angola>, accessed 22 May 2023.

populations.²⁷ The cost associated with obtaining necessary prerequisites for registration, such as birth certificates, exacerbates these coverage gaps.²⁸

Table 2: Summary of County Context

Angola: Country Context	
Population (Est., 2023)	34,031,000
Biometric National ID Cards (% of population, 2017)	28%
Biometric Passports	<i>Unknown coverage</i>
Corruption Score (2022)	33/100
E-Gov Development Index (2020)	157/193
African E-Connectivity Index (2021)	37/55
Internet Penetration (% of population, 2023)	32.6%

Biometric National ID Cards

Angola commenced its provision of national ID - *bilhete de identidade* - to its citizens in 1999, with national IDs being mandated from the age of 10 years.²⁹ From 2008/2009, the Angolan government contracted *DGM-Sistemas of Luanda* (DGM),³⁰ a private provider of software and IT services headquartered in Luanda, to implement a “national IT infrastructure and criminal registry database to support the personal data capture, card issuance and downstream application processes.”³¹

²⁷ World Bank, ‘The State of Identification Systems in Africa,’ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/298651503551191964/pdf/119065-WP-ID4D-country-profiles-report-final-PUBLIC.pdf>, accessed 22 May 2023.

²⁸ ITU, ‘Review of National Identity Programs,’ https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-T/focusgroups/dfs/Documents/09_2016/Review%20of%20National%20Identity%20Programs.pdf, accessed 1 June 2023.

²⁹ World Bank, ‘The State of Identification Systems in Africa,’ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/298651503551191964/pdf/119065-WP-ID4D-country-profiles-report-final-PUBLIC.pdf>, accessed 22 May 2023.

³⁰ RocketReach, DGM Sistemas Lda Information, https://rocketreach.co/dgm-sistemas-lda-profile_b5d7fbd6f42e3e4a, accessed 27 June 2023.

³¹ Secure Technology Alliance, ‘LaserCard Gets Green Light to Supply the Initial \$8.8 Million of Secure Credentials for Angola’s National ID Program,’ <https://www.securetechalliance.org/laser-card-gets-green-light-to-supply-the-initial-8-8-million-of-secure-credentials-for-angolas-national-id-program/>, accessed 21 May 2023.

In turn, DGM sub-contracted two private infrastructure providers, namely *Unisys Africa* (South Africa) and *LaserCard (acquired by HID Global (United States))*.³² These were geared at supporting the deployment of an electronic ID framework on behalf of the Angolan Social Security Ministry and deploying a citizen ID card program for the Angolan Ministry of Justice's Civil and Criminal Identification and Archiving Department.³³

These public-private partnerships birthed the Angola National ID Card Program tasked with the distribution of 'one new National ID card per person' relying on biometrics matching.³⁴ It resulted in the creation and distribution of digital ID cards that captured personal (e.g., demographic) and biometric (fingerprints, iris) data stored directly on the card.

Table 3: Angola's Biometric ID System³⁵

HID Global & DGM
Resulting from a public-private partnership with DGM, supported by HID Global and Unisys Africa, the Angolan government's biometric ID system now includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Centralized ID Database: national ID database with capacity to deliver real-time government civil services.³⁶❖ Printers and Encoder Systems: distribution of hundreds of ID card printers and encoder systems.❖ Distributed Capture: through 243 fixed and mobile issuance centers, with data being sent to a center.❖ Biometric ID cards: new ID card is issued in an hour's time, from the moment of biometric data collection to its issuance to the citizen. The veracity of this statement is challenged by the lived experienced of Angolans as described below.

HID Global and DGM have continued to provide biometric ID services to the Angolan government via the newly constituted National Directorate for Identity, Registration and

³² ITWeb, 'Angola invests in smart IDs,' <https://www.itweb.co.za/content/KPNG8v8X8NJv4mwD>, accessed 28 May 2023.

³³ Secure Technology Alliance, 'LaserCard Gets Green Light to Supply the Initial \$8.8 Million of Secure Credentials for Angola's National ID Program,' <https://www.securetechalliance.org/lasercard-gets-green-light-to-supply-the-initial-8-8-million-of-secure-credentials-for-angolas-national-id-program/>, accessed 21 May 2023.

³⁴ HID Global, 'The Angola National ID Card,' <https://www.hidglobal.com/documents/angola-national-id-card-case-study>, accessed 22 May 2023. See also: Secure Technology Alliance, 'LaserCard Gets Green Light to Supply the Initial \$8.8 Million of Secure Credentials for Angola's National ID Program,' <https://www.securetechalliance.org/lasercard-gets-green-light-to-supply-the-initial-8-8-million-of-secure-credentials-for-angolas-national-id-program/>, accessed 21 May 2023.

³⁵ HID Global, 'The Angola National ID Card,' <https://www.hidglobal.com/documents/angola-national-id-card-case-study>, accessed 22 May 2023.

³⁶ RNA, 'Ministry of Justice creates National Directorate of Identification, Registration and Notary – RNA,' <https://rna.ao/rna.ao/2020/11/28/ministerio-da-justica-cria-direccao-nacional-de-identificacao-registo-e-notariado/>, accessed 8 June 2023.

Notary Affairs (NDIRNA).³⁷ The NDIRNA is responsible for document certification and provision of personal documents. From late 2020, the Angolan government embarked on a nationwide campaign for mass registration and issuance of identity cards signaling its commitment to expanding digital biometric ID coverage in Angola.³⁸

Reports by HID Global and the World Bank magnify the impenetrable security features safeguarding the biometric cards and ID system, and the personal data protection measures present, including access to card data by authorized personnel only.³⁹ This report was unable to examine the adherence of HID/DGM's biometric ID system with Article 32 of the Constitution on the right to privacy, and Law 22/11 on the Protection of Personal Data.⁴⁰

Biometric Passports

Many countries have embraced technological advancements and issued biometric passports to provide residents with contactless travel identification. In 2019, reports emerged that biometric passports would be issued through the Foreigners Migration Service (SME), amidst concerns of a steep price hike from 3,000 kwanzas (USD 4.4) to 30,500 kwanzas (USD 45).⁴¹

Reports resurfaced of this transition in 2021,⁴² with no action being taken to actualize this transition until May 31, 2023, following the execution of a contract to provide Angola's Ministry of Interior and Migration and Foreigners Services with a next-generation biometric passport solution. The contract with *ANY Security Printing Company* (Hungary) is worth USD

³⁷ The NDIRNA is a consolidation of the Civil and Criminal Identification Archive (personal ID issuance) and the National Directorate for Registries and Notaries (document certification) into a single department. See: RNA, 'Ministry of Justice creates National Directorate of Identification, Registration and Notary – RNA,' <https://rna.ao/rna.ao/2020/11/28/ministerio-da-justica-cria-direccao-nacional-de-identificacao-registo-e-notariado/>, accessed 8 June 2023.

³⁸ AllAfrica, 'Angola: 2 Million Registered for National Identity Card,' <https://allafrica.com/stories/202101060405.html>, accessed 9 June 2023.

³⁹ World Bank, 'The State of Identification Systems in Africa,' <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/298651503551191964/pdf/119065-WP-ID4D-country-profiles-report-final-PUBLIC.pdf>, accessed 22 May 2023. See also: HID Global, 'The Angola National ID Card,' <https://www.hidglobal.com/documents/angola-national-id-card-case-study>, accessed 22 May 2023.

⁴⁰ Data Guidance, 'Angola - Data Protection Overview,' <https://www.dataguidance.com/notes/angola-data-protection-overview>, accessed 17 April 2023.

⁴¹ MNA, 'Angola to have biometric passports,' <https://www.macaubusiness.com/angola-to-have-biometric-passports/>, accessed 15 June 2023.

⁴² BiometricUpdate, 'Angola, Dominican Republic to introduce biometric passports, Ukraine updates issuance progress,' <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202106/angola-dominican-republic-to-introduce-biometric-passports-ukraine-updates-issuance-progress>, accessed 1 June 2023.

139 million and spans 10 years, during which passport booklet development, personalization, production, and supply, including setting up biometric enrolment stations, will ensue.⁴³

Results/Analysis: Challenges with Biometric Identification in Angola

Under regional and international human rights law, states are obliged to protect, promote, and fulfil human rights.⁴⁴ The Angolan government is obligated to provide legal ID documentation to those in its jurisdiction. During Angola’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR, 2019), stakeholders identified the following as the core barriers faced by citizens desirous of accessing identification services: “distances to reach registration points, poor access conditions, limited transport services, high costs, lack of materials in the posts, and corruption.”⁴⁵ These challenges are still present in Angola, as outlined below, and are preventing unhindered access to biometric identification by Angolans.

Delays in Biometric ID Issuance

The fulfilment of individuals’ rights to identity and nationality continues to be constrained by delays in the issuance of biometric IDs, biometric passports and driving licenses, according to interview respondents. These delays, which are extensively documented in media reporting,⁴⁶ frequently impact individuals’ access to essential services, with respondents noting that uncertainty in the issuance system continually hampers their ability to organize their lives.

⁴³ BiometricUpdate, ‘Angola seals financing agreement for \$139M biometric passport contract,’ <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202306/angola-seals-financing-agreement-for-139m-biometric-passport-contract>, accessed 15 June 2023.

⁴⁴ OHCHR, ‘Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework (The Ruggie Principles) - A/HRC/17/31,’ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf, accessed 12/05/2023.

⁴⁵ UNHRC, ‘Summary of Stakeholders’ Information on Angola,’ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ao-index>, accessed 22 May 2023.

⁴⁶ AllAfrica, ‘Angola - Justice Explains Delays in Issuing Identity Card,’ <https://allafrica.com/stories/201601290922.html>, accessed 14 June 2023.

“The biggest challenge has been the large waiting time. For example, we must wake up in the morning and there is no guarantee that we will have the document (passport or personal ID).”

(EH, Digital Rights Activist and Journalist, March 22, 2023)

Additionally, delays have created opportunities for illegal activities, such as facilitation payments by individuals seeking expedited ID issuance, which must be framed against reports observing that “facilitation payments remain a common part of doing business in Angola.”⁴⁷ Concerningly, these payments normalize a culture of corruption in the ID system services and can lead to an erosion of trust in the system generally.

“It’s still a big challenge to have biometric documents in Angola, which is why many people don’t carry the original identity card, because if they lose it, it can take months or years to get it again. When people have these documents, they make a copy. To get those services we must engage in corruption and bribe public servants. It’s the same for passports and driving licenses, which are biometric documents. For example, I have been waiting almost nine years for a duplicate of my driving license. It is now very expensive, but it takes more than a month to get it.”

(SH, Reporter, Luanda, March 21, 2023)

“On occasion, the systems for the printing of biometric documents fail, such as the ID printers, and we must corrupt public servants to get those documents.”

(EH, Digital Rights Activist & Journalist, March 22, 2023)

Few interviewees allude to the possibility that the delays in issuing biometric IDs could be occasioned by a lack of political will to address ID gaps in Angola, particularly for individuals who only possess birth certificates as the only proof of identity. Building on this theme of issuance delays occasioned by political will, one respondent notes the ease and speed with which electoral cards have been issued, in some instances without charge and in remote villages.

“I think that there is a lack of political will to provide passports in Angola, but when it is for electoral cards, they [government] do it quickly and for free and it reaches every corner of the country (villages), but other documents do not.”

⁴⁷ US Department of State, ‘DRL: Reducing Corruption in Angola,’ <https://www.state.gov/statements-of-interest-requests-for-proposals-and-notices-of-funding-opportunity/drl-reducing-corruption-in-angola/>, accessed 15 June 2023.

(SH, Reporter, Luanda, March 21, 2023)

“Our problem in obtaining biometric documents has to do with the unwillingness of government authorities to acquire the means to reach more Angolans who only have a childbirth certificate. Politicians create private companies to provide the service for personal interests.”⁴⁸

(FG, Researcher & Activist, Luanda, March 27, 2023)

In the excerpt above, the interviewee contextualizes Angola’s corruption challenges, by speaking to the creation of private companies by politicians, alluding to a potential conflict of interest in the provision of public services in Angola. This report was not able to ascertain whether DGM, the main contractor tasked with the deployment of an electronic ID framework and a citizen ID card program, is owned by individuals with ties to the government.

Technological Constraints and Centralization of ID Processes

According to statements by government officials in media reports, the processing and issuance delays observed in the biometric ID and passport systems have been caused by ‘technical and technological constraints.’⁴⁹ Interviewees affirmed that these constraints exist, that technological promises of speed and efficiency have not been realized, and that these failures are impacting their unfettered access to biometric IDs. One interviewee alluded to the existence of broader political and socio-economic factors influencing the provision of biometric documents in the country.

“There are sophisticated means to collect these so that the document comes out quickly, but even with these advancements, the documents, like the passport, take a long time. The technological advance has not made it easy to access documents... 20 years ago, it was necessary to take a physical photo to make documents, but even with new machines the process is still slow. Many people can process their

⁴⁸ The interviewee, FG, did not specify the companies referenced.

⁴⁹ AllAfrica, ‘Angola - Justice Explains Delays in Issuing Identity Card,’ <https://allafrica.com/stories/201601290922.html>, accessed 14 June 2023. See also: VerAngola, ‘Government authorizes spending of 7.5 million dollars to overcome delay in issuing passports,’ <https://www.verangola.net/va/en/022022/Society/29355/Government-authorizes-spending-of-75-million-dollars-to-overcome-delay-in-issuing-passports.htm>, accessed 14 June 2023.

documents and they are never issued. There are people who can send their personal data electronically, but they must travel to other provinces to get their documents."

(KU, Civic Movement Leader, Luanda, March 22, 2023)

"Likewise, there are no companies that produce the local material (printing paper and recording machines) to increase the number of citizens with personal identity documents and passports, because there is a strategy of not providing the documents due to the high number of Angolans who wish to leave the country due to economic fragility and political instability."

(FG, Researcher and activist, Luanda, March 27, 2023)

Despite the technological challenges present in Angola's biometric ID systems and processes, interviewees also noted that the centralization of ID and passport processes has the potential to entrench bureaucratic inefficiencies. This report notes that despite the 'establishment of the 243 fixed and mobile data capture and issuance centers' by DGM/HID, ID data captured at these centers is sent to a central authority for processing and verification (*see Table 3 above*). This not only risks the creation of single-point failures but can exacerbate bureaucratic inefficiencies.

"Angola is still a centralized state; despite all available technology, centralization makes it difficult."

(KU, Civic Movement Leader, Luanda, March 22, 2023)

Building on this, the interviewee, noted that biometric ID issuance is still heavily dependent on public offices, even where biometric technologies have been deployed, demonstrating that the actual process of issuing biometric IDs is primarily carried out through traditional public office procedures. Concerningly, this indicates that the biometric technologies alone are not sufficient to fully automate biometric identification processes in Angola. Despite this, a respondent notes that government campaigns have helped individuals to access biometric IDs, but not passports.

"The processing of our identity documentation depends on public offices, even if it is biometric. The main problem is with the passport, but identity cards have been regularly issued. I consider that it is a good achievement. The government has made public campaigns for citizens to access the services, which is not the case with the passport."

(VB, Public Worker, March 24, 2023)

Price Increments an Identification Barrier

Positively, the Angolan government has not increased the cost of IDs. Conversely, this report noted that the cost of biometric passports was hiked from 3,000 kwanzas (USD 4.4) to 30,500 kwanzas (USD 45).⁵⁰ While price increments can be justified by reference to higher costs of production, they should be reasonable. One respondent observed that unreasonable price increments in Angola risk disproportionately affecting indigent populations, thus limiting their ability to obtain biometric identification. In turn, this can create situation of digital, social, economic, political, and financial exclusion.

“In 2021, when the crisis of the delay to issue documents began, the government alleged that the problem was the system for printing the documents, but then they [government] increased the price and this is a way to inhibit access to biometric documents, because without them we cannot access services.”

(SH, Reporter, Luanda, March 21, 2023)

Privacy Perceptions and Trust

As flagged above, an environment of corruption can undermine trust in biometric identification systems and processes. This section provides marginal reference to privacy concerns raised by interviewees by virtue of the collection and storage of their biometric data on, e. g., the national ID card. Notably, data protection and information integrity underpin trusted biometric identification systems, with national, centralized databases posing risks for the safe storage of critical and sensitive data, such as biometric data.

“As an activist I feel that my personal data can be used for other purposes, I am afraid about that. For example, sometimes I receive messages from people I never gave my number to, I do not completely trust the system.”

(FT, President of Student Association, March 24, 2023)

“We also have no security for our data. For example, the identification data of an opposition politician has already been exposed because of ideological issues.”

(FG, Researcher and Activist, Luanda, March 27, 2023)

⁵⁰ MNA, ‘Angola to have biometric passports,’ <https://www.macaubusiness.com/angola-to-have-biometric-passports/>, accessed 15 June 2023.

Holistic Digital Transformation

Interviewees below noted that the government's adoption of technology for identification services, such as the use of online application portals and the use of biometric technology, must be accompanied with a holistic digital transformation agenda. Specifically, interviewees noted the existence of digital literacy⁵¹ gaps and infrastructural challenges, such as lack of electricity and poor internet connectivity, which are hampering unfettered access to biometric documentation by Angolan citizens.

One interviewee notes that the process of digital transformation is creating 'digital illiterates,' or individuals who do not have the necessary skills or access to technology to fully participate in the digital world. This suggests that there may be a significant digital divide in Angola, with some individuals being left behind due to lack of access to technology or education.

"We are in a phase of digital transition, and the government has realized the need to bureaucratize some processes to provide public services. Today, the identification number can be obtained digitally through <https://www.sepe.gov.ao/ao/>. The big challenge is digital literacy to know how to request these documents on the platform. This digital transformation is creating digital illiterates... Access to the internet and electricity is a contrast in Angola. About security of my biometric data, I notice that people are still afraid of change. They resist. Also, the system is usually slow, and this creates a lot of mistrust and flaws."

(MS, Activist & Entrepreneur, March 23, 2023)

Critically, government campaigns for uptake are critical, but these should be prioritized for all services.

"The government has made public campaigns for citizens to access the services, which is not the case with the passport."

(VB, Public Worker, March 24, 2023)

⁵¹ 'Digital literacy is considered an essential set of skills needed to find information and communicate in today's world.' UNESCO, 'A Global Framework to Measure Digital Literacy,' <https://uis.unesco.org/en/blog/global-framework-measure-digital-literacy>, accessed 15 June 2023.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report affirms that the government has an obligation to promote and fulfil Angolan citizens' rights to identity and nationality and provides insights into well-documented challenges faced by Angolan citizens when seeking biometric identification in Angola. Generally, ID uptake in Angola is still relatively low, whereas the uptake for biometric passports remains unknown. Addressing these identification barriers requires coordinated effort from the government and civil society organizations, with the former simplifying administrative processes and the latter supporting with information campaigns.

Based on this, the report proposes the following recommendations to the Angolan government, civil society actors and researchers.

Government

We urge the Government of Angola to:

- Promote individuals' right to identity and nationality in accordance with international human rights law obligations by minimizing direct and indirect barriers preventing individuals' timely access to biometric identification.
- Promote civic campaigns for the dissemination of biometric identification services to increase/heighten citizens' digital and biometric literacy.
- Investigate instances of facilitation payments in the biometric ID process to weed out corrupt officials, initiated through the Ministry of Interior and overseen by an independent commission.

Civil Society

We urge CSOs in Angola to:

- Launch targeted advocacy campaigns aimed at educating public officials about the importance of streamlined ID issuance, with an emphasis on the impact of efficient identification processes on public service delivery.

- Partner with and support government public awareness and education campaigns through the development of educational material (pamphlets, awareness through radio and TV, social media campaigns).
- Conduct more in-depth research on Angola's biometric and digital identity to investigate these challenges in more detail and to identify potential solutions to improve the efficiency and accessibility of the process.

Populace/Users

We urge users of biometric ID in Angola to:

- Avoid facilitation payments when applying for identification documents.
- Immediately report any suspicious activity or unauthorized access to your biometric data to the relevant authorities or service providers. This will help prevent any further damage or loss of personal information.

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