

# **Country Report:**

## **Biometric Identification of Youth Populations in the Democratic Republic of Congo**



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

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# Executive Summary

**This report focuses on the Democratic Republic of Congo 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 explores the topic of biometric identification and the ease of ID documentation access to the youth or young people in la *République Démocratique du Congo* (Democratic Republic of Congo or DRC) in the context of a rapidly evolving digital landscape. 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.’<sup>1</sup>

Using a mixed-methods approach relying on a desk review and 10 in-depth interviews, the report provides an overview of DRC’s biometric identification drives with an exclusive focus on the national ID card. Further, the report details the existence of contextual and group-specific realities that may impact the successful uptake of planned biometric ID initiatives by Congolese youth populations in the future.

The report concludes that biometric identification presents significant opportunities for the youth in the DRC to participate in the digital economy, engage in digital activism, and contribute to positive social change. However, realizing these opportunities requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders to address the challenges and ensure that youth have the necessary resources and support to navigate the rapidly evolving digital landscape of the country. The key findings are summarized in detail below and explored extensively in the report.

## Key Findings

This report details the operating environment that may impact young people’s meaningful access to and use of biometric identification documents in the DRC as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

- **Finding 1:** Many Congolese youth above 18 years do not possess national identity cards, with citizens relying on the electoral card as a provisional ID card.<sup>2</sup>

Consequence: This lends to the finding that young people in DRC cannot easily access biometric identification.

- **Finding 2:** The government's ongoing failure to establish a biometric national ID system is negatively impacting young people's ability to exercise their right to identity and nationality.

Consequence: This failure has generated indifference amongst youth populations, who may view the pending biometric ID cards as important for their *functional utility* rather than as *symbols of identity or status*.

- **Finding 3:** Education gaps and differences among the youth will likely impact the meaningful access and use of biometric IDs by youth in DRC, with more educated youth populations facing fewer access and use challenges.

- **Finding 4:** Initial reliance on the voter registry as the basis for the launch of the planned integrated population management system may lead to the development of an inaccurate database.

Consequence: This may anticipatedly impact the accurate generation and issuance of national ID numbers and cards for all young people, in a timely manner.

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<sup>2</sup> DigWatch, 'DRC to roll out a national population register,' <https://dig.watch/updates/drc-roll-out-national-population-register>, accessed 27 May 2023.

## Key Recommendations

- **The Government of the DRC is urged to:**

promote young people's right to identity and nationality in accordance with international human rights law obligations by operationalizing and actualizing biometric ID card issuance;

engage young people in the design and piloting of the biometric ID systems to ensure that the solutions are aligned with their unique needs/preferences.

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

provide free, legal pro-bono support, counseling, and other forms of assistance to help youth to fulfill their right to identity and nationality.

# 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.’<sup>3</sup>***

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.<sup>4</sup> The right to legal identity, including birth registration, is advanced under Goal 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>5</sup> Closely linked to the fulfilment of the right to identity is the provision of proof of nationality and other legal documentation, such as birth certificates and national or digital IDs, by states.

The right to nationality is recognized in numerous international and legal instruments, such as Article 24 of the ICCPR, which DRC ratified in 1976,<sup>6</sup> and Article 6 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR).<sup>7</sup> In the DRC, this right is provided under Chapter 10, Article 2 of the Constitution of the DRC (2005, as amended in 2011). This states that “Congolese nationality is one and exclusive. It may not be held concurrently with any other. The Congolese nationality is either of origin, or by individual acquisition.”<sup>8</sup>

The adoption and use of biometric technologies to establish the unique identity of individuals has been deployed in the DRC for voter registration purposes. Since 2019, the

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<sup>3</sup> World Bank, ‘Practitioners Guide: Types of ID Systems,’ <https://id4d.worldbank.org/guide/types-id-systems>, accessed 25 May 2023.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> UN Legal Identity Agenda, ‘Background,’ <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/>, accessed 25 May 2023.

<sup>6</sup> The DRC ratified the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights on November 1, 1976. United Nations Treaty Collection, ‘Status of ICCPR,’ [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg\\_no=IV-4&chapter=4&clang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&clang=en), accessed 25/05/2023.

<sup>7</sup> 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](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-treaty-0011_-_african_charter_on_human_and_peoples_rights_e.pdf), accessed 14 June 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Constitution of the DRC (2005 as amended in 2011), [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Democratic\\_Republic\\_of\\_the\\_Congo\\_2011.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Democratic_Republic_of_the_Congo_2011.pdf?lang=en), accessed 20 March 2023.

government of DRC has been planning to deploy a biometric ID system and population register. These biometric identification processes entail the collection and processing of the personal and biometric data for parts of the youth population.

Generally, leveraging biometric technologies for identification purposes can facilitate youth populations' access to development opportunities and public services, can support the promotion of their right to legal and digital identities, and can contribute to their overall development and well-being. To achieve this, several factors must be considered, including (a) a contextualized definition of the term 'youth', (b) the establishment of comprehensive, accurate, secure, and accessible identification systems for youth populations, (c) the engagement of young people in biometric identification decision-making processes and the internalization of their perspectives.

In defining the term 'youth', this report aligns with the definition used in the DRC's *Politique Nationale de la Jeunesse* (National Youth Policy) and the African Union's 'African Youth Charter,' which categorize youth as people aged between 15 and 35 years.<sup>9</sup> This preferred definition is different from the United Nation's youth age cohort of 15–24 years<sup>10</sup> due to the specific contextual realities in the DRC where a significant proportion, representing more than half of the total population, falls within the age range of 15–35.<sup>11</sup>

Generally, the establishment of comprehensive, accurate, secure, and accessible identification systems for youth populations relies on various factors. The most central factor is the creation of a comprehensive and reliable database for youth identification. Increasingly, governments worldwide have been collecting a wider pool of 'individual's basic characteristics, i.e., 'name, age, sex, place and date of birth'<sup>12</sup> and sensitive biometric data, such as fingerprints or face images. This data is being used in ID systems to provide

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<sup>9</sup> The DRC, as of April 2023, has not ratified the African Youth Charter. See: African Union, 'State of African Youth Report,' [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39663-doc-state\\_of\\_the\\_african\\_youth\\_report.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39663-doc-state_of_the_african_youth_report.pdf), accessed 12 June 2023. Also: République Démocratique du Congo, 'Politique Nationale de la Jeunesse,' [https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Congo\\_Kinshasa\\_2009\\_National\\_Youth\\_Policy.pdf](https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Congo_Kinshasa_2009_National_Youth_Policy.pdf), accessed 17 April 2023. Also: African Union, African Youth Charter, [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033\\_-\\_african\\_youth\\_charter\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033_-_african_youth_charter_e.pdf), accessed 17 April 2023.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Youth, 'Definition of Youth,' <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>, accessed 17 April 2023.

<sup>11</sup> République Démocratique du Congo, 'Politique Nationale de la Jeunesse,' [https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Congo\\_Kinshasa\\_2009\\_National\\_Youth\\_Policy.pdf](https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Congo_Kinshasa_2009_National_Youth_Policy.pdf), accessed 17 April 2023.

<sup>12</sup> World Bank, 'Practitioners Guide: Types of ID Systems,' <https://id4d.worldbank.org/guide/types-id-systems>, accessed 25 May 2023.



secure and accurate deduplication, verification and/or authentication to governments and private sector infrastructure and service providers.<sup>13</sup>

This biometric ID database must be able to provide accurate identification for youth populations, which must be regularly updated, and should prioritize accessibility for all young people, including marginalized, indigent, and remote populations. Additionally, this database must be properly secured, to promote the integrity and confidentiality of the data collected from young people. This is central to the promotion of trust and the fulfilment of the right to privacy and data protection. Lastly, young people should be proactively included in biometric identification decision-making processes.

## Country Context

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a low-income country in Central Africa and has an estimated population of 111,860,000 (2023) in a territory of 2,345,000 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>14</sup> The DRC is the second-largest country in Africa and is the fourth most populous African country.<sup>15</sup> Despite its vast natural resources and potential for development, the country has faced numerous and ongoing challenges, including political instability, corruption, and armed conflict.<sup>16</sup> These challenges have had a significant impact on the country's development, including the provision of identification documentation to its citizenry.

DRC's youth population aged 15-35 currently stands at "33% (27.8 million) ... this proportion is projected to increase to 36% by the year 2063."<sup>17</sup> The DRC was ranked 170/181

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<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> World Bank, 'DRC - Overview,' <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/drc/overview>, accessed on 6 June 2023. IMF, 'Five Takeaways from DRC's IMF Program,' <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2019/12/20/na122019five-takeaways-from-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congos-imf-program>, accessed 6 June 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Google Arts & Culture, 'Democratic Republic of Congo,' <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/m088xp?hl=en>, accessed 12 June 2023.

<sup>16</sup> World Bank, 'Project Information Document - DRC Transport and Connectivity Support Project (P161877),' <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099825005152223936/pdf/P16187701fe9880d0ab8708199bae14aa3.pdf>, accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>17</sup> African Union, 'State of African Youth Report,' [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39663-doc-state\\_of\\_the\\_african\\_youth\\_report.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39663-doc-state_of_the_african_youth_report.pdf), accessed 12 June 2023.

in the Youth Development Index with a score of 0.499, signaling that there is low youth development in the country.<sup>18</sup> Only 37% of the population in DRC have a national ID card.<sup>19</sup>

Transparency International reports a positive improvement in the DRC's global corruption standing, but this is tempered by the country's low corruption score of 20/100, revealing the existence of corruption practices in the public sector, including bribery.<sup>20</sup> The DRC ranks low in the e-government development index (175 out of 193 countries), which assesses, inter alia, "how a country is using information technologies to promote access and inclusion of its people."<sup>21</sup>

In general, access to technology is limited in the DRC, with a glaring digital divide limiting rural populations' access to the internet and other modern technologies more. The 2021 African E-Connectivity ranked the DRC at 27/55, revealing that the quality of internet connectivity remains poor.<sup>22</sup> The DRC has a low internet penetration rate of 22.9%,<sup>23</sup> which is attributed to a weak digital connectivity infrastructure, and high device and service costs, with DRC being cited as the 'most expensive country in Africa for mobile data.'<sup>24</sup> This lack of access to the Internet and digital technology generally has a significant impact on the country's economic development, as it limits opportunities for innovation and access to global markets.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "The YDI score is a number between 0 and 1, with 1 representing the highest possible level of youth development attainable across all indicators. A score of 0, therefore, reflects little to no youth development." The Commonwealth Secretariat, 'Global Youth Development Report 2020,' [https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-05/global-youth-development-report-2020%20\(1\).pdf?VersionId=NPqn9ixg6YR11762eRVdBG5AQ3feSeL](https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-05/global-youth-development-report-2020%20(1).pdf?VersionId=NPqn9ixg6YR11762eRVdBG5AQ3feSeL), accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>19</sup> UN LIA Task Force Secretariat, 'Implementation of the UN Legal Identity Agenda in selected African Countries: Synthesis Report Review of the 10 Country Assessment Reports,' <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/53rd-session/documents/BG-3f-UN-Legal-Identity-Agenda-in-selected-African-Countries-E.pdf>, accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>20</sup> "On a scale of 0-100, 0 means highly corrupt and 100 means very clean." Transparency International, '2022 Corruption Perceptions Index,' <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/cod>, accessed 15 June 2023. See also: 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.

<sup>21</sup> 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, 'Democratic Republic of Congo,' <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Data/Country-Information/id/47-Democratic-Republic-of-the-Congo>, accessed 22 May 2023.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> Datareportal, 'Digital 2023: Democratic Republic of Congo,' <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-democratic-republic-of-the-congo>, accessed 22 May 2023.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, n. 16.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, n. 16.

Access to information is also limited in the DRC, with restrictions on freedom of the press. The government has been accused of censorship and using internet shutdowns to restrict information flows, particularly during times of political unrest.<sup>26</sup>

**Table 1: Summary of County Context**

<b>DRC: Country Context</b>	
<b>Population (Est., 2023)</b>	111,860,000
<b>Youth Population (2019)</b>	33% (27.8 million)
<b>National ID Cards (% of population, 2022)</b>	37%
<b>Corruption Score (2022)</b>	20/100
<b>Youth Development Index (2020)</b>	170/181
<b>E-Gov Development Index (20)</b>	175/193
<b>African E-Connectivity Index (2021)</b>	27/55
<b>Internet Penetration (% of population, 2023)</b>	22.9%

<sup>26</sup> Rudi International & Access Now, 'Joint submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council, for the 33rd Session of the Universal Periodic Review for Democratic Republic of Congo,' <https://www.accessnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DRC-digital-rights.pdf>, accessed 16 June 2023.

# Methodology

**Table 2: Research Topic and Research Question (by researcher)**

<b>Research Topic</b>	BDI Access to Essential Services
<b>Research Question</b>	Are young people able to access biometric identification in the DRC?

To investigate young people’s access and use of biometric identification in the DRC (research purpose), this report adopted a qualitative approach using mixed methods, including a desk review of relevant studies and reports, an online survey, and semi-structured interviews. This research methodology is appropriate for exploring complex and nuanced topics such as biometric identification among the youth in DRC. DRC was selected as a focus country because of government announcements about its deployment of a biometric ID system and population register in 2019.

The researcher held anonymized interviews between March–April 2023 with eight DRC citizens (interviewees), out of whom five interviewees aged 18 – 35, who were selected using the purposive sampling technique. The interviewees were selected based on their lived experiences accessing national biometric identification, their professional background and digital rights activism in the DRC.

The researcher analyzed the desk review data and interviewees’ feedback and opinions using a thematic analysis approach to identify key themes and patterns related to youth access to biometric identification in DRC’s rapidly evolving digital landscape. The study also disseminated an online survey targeting a particular segment of the youth population in the DRC. This survey aimed to gather quantitative data regarding their utilization of biometric digital technologies and their attitudes toward biometric and digital identity generally.

# Research Limitations

This research report was limited by the following:

- ✚ **Limited generalizability:** the interview sample size does not fully represent the diversity of lived perspectives and experiences in the DRC, 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.
- ✚ **Limited responses to the online survey:** the responses to the online survey were limited due to technological challenges faced by respondents in the DRC, and the research report was not able to benefit extensively from this.

## Glossary

<b>Biometrics</b>	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. <sup>27</sup>
<b>Biometric Identification</b>	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 individuals captured biometric data against a stored database of biometric templates to verify/authenticate their identity. This report focuses exclusively on IDs following President Tshisekedi’s 2019 announcement.
<b>Digital ID</b>	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.
<b>National Identification and Population Board (NIPD)</b>	The government agency responsible for maintaining of population data and issuing identification cards. This agency also collaborates with other government bodies and private entities to establish and maintain a national identification system.
<b>Office National de l’Identification de la Population (ONIP)</b>	The government agency tasked with issuing the biometric national identity card and the resident card for foreigners.
<b>Public-Private Partnership (PPP)</b>	Cooperative arrangement between government entities and private sector organizations in which both parties share resources, expertise, and risk to achieve a common goal. PPPs are typically established to develop and operate public infrastructure projects, such as digital ID or biometric systems.

<sup>27</sup> NIST, ‘Glossary – Biometrics,’ <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/biometrics>, accessed 3 February 2023.

# Biometric Identification in the DRC

## Overview

Identity in the DRC is a complex topic and continues to be shaped by the country's history, culture, socio-economic, legal, and political contexts.<sup>28</sup> Illustratively, national identity in the DRC is tempered by discussions around what it means to be 'uniquely Congolese,' which was magnified in the recently rejected '*Congolite*' bill.<sup>29</sup> While digital technologies have become increasingly pervasive in the country in recent years, many people still face challenges in accessing and using these technologies in a meaningful way. The World Bank notes that numerous opportunities exist for the adoption of digital technologies in the DRC, with the "digitalization of financial and nonfinancial services [offering] the opportunity to expand local markets."<sup>30</sup>

The DRC government's commitment to embracing digital technologies for DRC's digital transformation is evident in the "*Congo digital 2025*," the national development strategy for the digital economy, and the National Development Plan 2022–2026 (NDP).<sup>31</sup> The digital strategy is based on three pillars: e-citizen for the public, e-government for digital administration, and e-business for private societies' ICT development. Critical to the cost of internet connectivity is the NDP, which seeks to extend the "national optical fiber network to lower internet connection costs."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 'A Looming Calamity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,' <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/looming-calamity-democratic-republic-congo-drc/>, accessed 16 June 2023. See also: Norman Pinduka & Alfred G. Nhema (2020) 'Reconnoitring the past while shaping the future: The identity crisis, internal displacement and the way forward in the Democratic Republic of Congo, African Security Review,' [10.1080/10246029.2020.1837894](https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2020.1837894), accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>29</sup> The term is used in reference to "someone being uniquely 'Congolese' due to both their parents' national identity." LSE, 'The next DRC elections could weaponise 'Congolite' identity,' <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2021/12/29/the-next-drc-elections-could-weaponise-congolite-identity/>, accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>30</sup> World Bank & DE4A, 'DRC - Digital Economy Assessment,' <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/61714f214ed04bcd6e9623ad0e215897-0400012021/related/DRC-DE4A-EN-Final.pdf>, accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>31</sup> UNDP, 'The era of the digital: the Republic of Congo in the starting block,' <https://www.undp.org/fr/congo/blog/era-digital-republic-congo-starting-block>, accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

# Population Management Systems and Biometric National ID

## Biometric Identification: Current System

*“National ID cards were last issued in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1990s, when the country was called Zaire and ruled by longtime dictator Mobutu Sese Seko.”<sup>33</sup>*

This report works from the well-documented reality that many Congolese youth above 18 years do not possess national identity cards, with citizens relying on the electoral card as a provisional ID card.<sup>34</sup> This is attributed to the “fact that national IDs are rare and difficult to obtain.”<sup>35</sup>

In 2017, the government introduced the National Biometric Identification System (SNIB). SNIB serves as a foundational identification system capable of registering all citizens and legal residents, assigning a unique number to each enrolled Congolese citizen, and issuing secure, biometric ID cards.<sup>36</sup>

Further, in 2019, the government announced the launch of the DRC’s national population and national ID registry with a 2020 launch date.<sup>37</sup> Reports indicate that the SNIB and the registry were not operationalized due to funding and infrastructure concerns.<sup>38</sup> The researcher was not able to locate evidence to the contrary.

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<sup>33</sup> Barrons from AFP News, ‘DR Congo Yearns For End To Long Wait For New ID Cards,’ <https://www.barrons.com/news/dr-congo-yearns-for-end-to-long-wait-for-new-id-cards-ff36d54f>, accessed 17 June 2023.

<sup>34</sup> DigWatch, ‘DRC to roll out a national population register,’ <https://dig.watch/updates/drc-roll-out-national-population-register>, accessed 27 May 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Imani Development, ‘Review of Existing Schemes to Facilitate the Cross-Border Movement of Traders in the COMESA Region,’ <https://imanidevelopment.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Final-Traders-Scheme-Report-.pdf>, accessed 29 May 2023.

<sup>36</sup> World Bank & DE4A, ‘DRC - Digital Economy Assessment,’ <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/61714f214ed04bcd6e9623ad0e215897-0400012021/related/DRC-DE4A-EN-Final.pdf>, accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>37</sup> Biometric Update, ‘Democratic Republic of Congo to launch biometric population register by 2020,’ September 2019, <https://www.biometricupdate.com/201909/democratic-republic-of-congo-to-launch-biometric-population-register-by-2020>, accessed on 24 March 2023.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* See also: World Bank & DE4A, ‘DRC - Digital Economy Assessment,’ <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/61714f214ed04bcd6e9623ad0e215897-0400012021/related/DRC-DE4A-EN-Final.pdf>, accessed 16 June 2023.



## Biometric Identification: Expected System & Developments

The revival of the 2019 registry project is evidenced by the adoption of Decree No. 22/07 as of 02/02/2022 mandating the establishment of an ‘integrated population management system.’<sup>39</sup> Under Article 1 of Decree No. 22/07, a general population file is created in the DRC (FGP). The FGP will be constituted and maintained by the *l'Office National d'Identification de la Population* (National Office for Population Identification or ONIP), with advisory support from the Minister for Digital Affairs on the FGP’s digitization (Articles 1 & 8).

**Table 3: FGP Purposes<sup>40</sup>**

<b>FGP</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The FGP fulfils various purposes, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Serving as a centralized database for population identification, with single population reference files being updated through civil status.</li><li>❖ Assign a national identification number to natural persons.</li><li>❖ Provide identification and authentication services to any authorized entity.</li><li>❖ Prevent and fight against identity fraud and all forms of crime.</li><li>❖ Facilitate the administrative formalities related to the identification of citizens by public authorities as well as by private organizations and entities.</li><li>❖ Design, produce and provide identity and civil status documents or other documents to establish the identity of natural persons.</li></ul></li></ul>

The FGP will mandatorily record, process, store, and communicate information, on a continuous basis, individuals’ biographical (e.g., name, place and date of birth, birth certificate number, national ID number) and biometric data (e.g., digitized image of the face and fingerprints) relating to the identity and/or civil status of Congolese citizens, Congolese in the diaspora and foreign residents (Articles 2, 3, 7 & 9). Any public or private entities with databases containing natural persons’ data must send their databases to and register them with ONIP (Article 5). Individuals’ data will be kept by ONIP for the duration of a person’s life, and in the event of death for a period of 100 years, in accordance with archiving provision (Article 14).

<sup>39</sup> Décret n° 22/07 du 02 mars 2022 portant création d'un fichier général de la population en République Démocratique du Congo (Decree No. 22/07 of 2 March 2022),

[https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p\\_isn=114407&p\\_lang=en](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_isn=114407&p_lang=en), accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, Article 6 (translated from French to English).

Article 4 of Decree 22/07 specifies that access to the FGP database will be defined by the Ministers of Interior and Digital Affairs, in accordance with DRC’s data protection law, and will be localized in the DRC. The DRC has legislated on the protection of personal data through the law on telecommunications, information, and communication technology No. 20/017 as of 25 November 2020,<sup>41</sup> and more recently, through the Digital Code.<sup>42</sup> Book 3, Article 168 of the Digital Code prescribes rules for public data and the protection of personal data, including data in the National Population Register and the register of citizens and migrants. The DRC has also ratified the African Union Convention on Cybersecurity and the Protection of Personal Data.<sup>43</sup>

To support the operationalization of the FGP, the government of DRC announced a EUR 400 million (US 428 million) contract for the relaunched biometric ID card project relying on a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) agreement. The PPP agreement is expected to last between six to eight years, with various private identity and biometric infrastructure providers, including Idemia, Thales, and Veridos, expected to pitch for the contract.<sup>44</sup>

**Table 4: Operationalization of Congo Digital 2023 and NDP**

<b>Biometric ID: Key Operationalization Activities (2019 - 2023)</b>	
•	<b>September 2019:</b> H.E. President Félix Tshisekedi unveils the <i><b>Biometric Data Identification</b></i> at the opening of the validation workshop of the national digital plan Horizon 2025. The President makes it clear that the national biometric identification file will address a security challenge. <sup>45</sup>
•	<b>2022:</b>
❖	<b>January:</b> the <i>Ministre du Numérique</i> (Ministry of Digital Affairs) launches <i><b>new service functionalities for citizens</b></i> , given its mandate to support

<sup>41</sup> This law was published on 22 September 2021 and came into force on 25 November 2020. DLA Piper, ‘Data Protection Laws of the World – Democratic Republic of Congo,’ <https://www.dlapiperdataprotection.com/index.html?t=law&c=CD>, accessed 12 June 2023.

<sup>42</sup> Ordinance-Law No. 23/010 of 13 March 2023 on the Digital Code, [Cérémonie de présentation du code du numérique - RD Congo \(gouv.cd\)](https://www.gouv.cd/actualites/actualites/2023/03/13/13-03-2023-ceremonie-de-presentations-du-code-numerique), accessed 12 June 2023.

<sup>43</sup> TechHive Advisory, ‘Bimonthly Update on Privacy in Africa (March and April, 2023),’ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/bimonthly-update-privacy-africa-march-april#:~:text=Anticipation%20of%20the%20Malabo%20Convention,to%20finally%20come%20into%20force.>, accessed 5 June 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Biometric Update, ‘Thales, Idemia, Veridos reportedly jostle for mega biometric ID card contract in DR Congo,’ <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202302/thales-idemia-veridos-reportedly-jostle-for-mega-biometric-id-card-contract-in-dr-congo>, accessed on 24 March 2023. See also: Africa Intelligence, ‘Kinshasa relaunches €400m mega contract for future ID cards,’ <https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-africa/2023/02/06/kinshasa-relaunches-e400m-mega-contract-for-future-id-cards.109910314-bre>, accessed on 24 March 2023.

<sup>45</sup> Telecom, ‘RDC: Félix Tshisekedi annonce l’identification biométrique d’ici 2020,’ <https://www.agencecofin.com/gestion-publique/0509-68966-rdc-felix-tshisekedi-annonce-l-identification-biometrique-d-ici-2020>, accessed on 12 February 2023.

digitization in public service and safeguard citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms in the digital field.<sup>46</sup> Some services that are of importance to this report include e-Mobeko, a platform for litigants and Congolese citizens to obtain information and clarify digital laws in the DRC, and the eVisa platform.<sup>47</sup> ***This report could not ascertain the functionality of the two platforms.***

- ❖ **May:** the Congolese Prime Minister, Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde, launches the biometric identification operation of civil servants (also regular certified agents of central services) in the Public Administration Reference File.<sup>48</sup>
- **June 2023:** a Memorandum of Understanding is signed between the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), the National Identification and Population Office (ONIP), and the National Institute of Statistics (INS). The CENI will ***transfer voter registration material to the ONIP & INS, who will use this data to launch the Integrated Population Registration System.*** This will anticipatedly facilitate the issuance of biometric national ID cards in preparation for the upcoming 2023 General Elections.<sup>49</sup>

## Results/Analysis: Challenges with Biometric Identification in DRC

Under regional and international human rights law, states are obliged to protect, promote, and fulfil human rights.<sup>50</sup> The government of DRC is obligated to provide legal ID documentation to those in its jurisdiction. During the DRC's Universal Periodic Review (UPR, 2019), the government supported a recommendation to "... facilitate...the issuance of identity documents."<sup>51</sup> This section offers an insight into the identification realities of

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<sup>46</sup> *Ministère du Numérique, sur base de l'ordonnance N°22/003 du 7 janvier 2022* (Ordinance No. 22/003 of 7 January 2022).

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Digital Affairs, 'Citizen Services,' <https://numerique.gouv.cd/>, accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Zoom-Eco, 'RDC: le Gouvernement a lancé l'opération d'identification biométrique des agents du secteur public,' <https://zoom-eco.net/a-la-une/rdc-le-gouvernement-a-lance-loperation-didentification-biometrique-des-agents-du-secteur-public/>, accessed on 12 February 2023.

<sup>49</sup> SOS Media Burundi, 'DRC: Congolese in process of obtaining national identity card,' <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/en/2023/06/11/drc-congolese-in-process-of-obtaining-national-identity-card/>, accessed 17 June 2023.

<sup>50</sup> 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](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf), accessed 12 May 2023.

<sup>51</sup> UN Human Rights Council, 'UPR of Democratic Republic of the Congo (3rd Cycle – 33rd session) - Thematic list of recommendations,' <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cd-index>, accessed 17 June 2023.

young people in the DRC and outlines potential barriers for the successful deployment of DRC's biometric ID system.

## Education Gaps and Limited ID Access/Use

One interviewee contextualizes the government's attempts to operationalize the integrated population management system, noting that this hadn't commenced at the time of the interview (March–April 2023). Further, interviewee underscores that the ongoing failure of citizens lacking access to ID cards is not in the central question, as this is a lived reality. Rather, the respondent flags that glaring education gaps are currently impacting meaningful access and use of national IDs by both the youth and the general populace, with this challenge likely being replicated during the biometric ID rollout.

Given that youth populations' access and use of biometric IDs will be influenced by broader socio-economic factors, such as education levels, with more educated youth populations facing less access and use challenges. The correlation between having an ID, being able to access services, and education levels was underscored by the World Bank's ID4D initiative. Specifically, the report notes that “[all] else equal, people in [lower income countries] LICs are ... less likely to have an ID when they have attained only a primary level of education, are female, live in a rural area, and are in the bottom 40 percent of the income distribution.”<sup>52</sup>

Lastly, the interviewee argues that access to digital services is difficult for people in the DRC, particularly those in rural areas who may have limited access to the internet.

*There is no digital identification file in the DRC. We have sectoral files – each ministry has file for everyone who applies for passports. There is a file at the national electoral commission, we don't have identity card, we haven't had one for years. We have the voter's card to identify people. The banks also have files for their clients – the bank digitizes client data, including digital loans. Administration is digital, but we have physical voters' cards.*

*Digital access to these services for people is difficult, especially access to the internet, particularly in the villages. Young girls can have this access, but only for social networking. The main question is not about gender, women and men having access to these services, it's not a debate – but for people who are*

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<sup>52</sup> ID4D, 'Global ID Coverage, Barriers, and Use by the Numbers: Insights from the ID4D-Findex Survey,' <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/953621531854471275/Global-ID-Coverage-Barriers-and-Use-by-the-Numbers-Insights-from-the-ID4D-Findex-Survey.pdf>, accessed 17 June 2023.

*educated, and others who are not. It is a problem of education to have these documents – this is visible by the statistics of people who have studied.*

*(KN, Congolese Institute for Human Rights, Kinshasa, March 21, 2023, 35+ years old)*

## Need for Wider Dataset Sources for FGP Launch

The interview with another respondent highlights that DRC government has not conducted a general census for over thirty years, despite this information being essential for the establishment of accurate population data and demographic information.<sup>53</sup> Impliedly, the failure to conduct a general census can impact the identification and documentation of specific population groups, including the youth in DRC. Further, we express concern over the ONIP's reliance on CENI's voter registration material to launch the Integrated Population Registration System without census data.

While we note that the voter registry data will be useful as a formal dataset source, it cannot be a sole source of information due to reports about inaccurate data in the registry. Illustratively, [Neurotechnology](#) identified 5.3 million duplicates during the 2018 clean-up process of DRC's voter registry.<sup>54</sup> We emphasize that the generation and issuance of national ID numbers and cards in the DRC will benefit greatly from the census database, which is as an integral dataset source.<sup>55</sup>

Additionally, the interviewee underscores the use of voter cards as provisional identity cards by youth populations. We note that this use, since the 2006 elections, is inappropriate due to the restricted purpose of the voter card, which is intended solely for voting. Importantly, relying on these cards can result in voter disenfranchisement, with findings underscoring that the “system of granting voting cards was open to fraud.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> UN DECA (Statistics Division), 'Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses - ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/67/Rev.3,' [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/Standards-and-Methods/files/Principles\\_and\\_Recommendations/Population-and-Housing-Censuses/Series\\_M67rev3-E.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/Standards-and-Methods/files/Principles_and_Recommendations/Population-and-Housing-Censuses/Series_M67rev3-E.pdf), accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>54</sup> Biometric Update, 'Neurotechnology identifies more than 6 million duplicate or inaccurate DRC voter records,' <https://www.biometricupdate.com/201804/neurotechnology-identifies-more-than-6-million-duplicate-or-inaccurate-drc-voter-records>, accessed 17 June 2023.

<sup>55</sup> Deborah Rose PhD, 'The Dataset and The National ID Number,' <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2422/2016/03/IDConfPanel3DRosePresentation2c.pdf>, accessed 16 June 2023.

<sup>56</sup> ICC Legal Tools Database, 'Registry Report on Proof of Identity Documents Available in the DRC,' <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/3cab01/pdf/>, accessed 17 June 2023.

*For more than thirty years, we have not had a general census in the DRC, and so the country does not have any citizen identity cards. Since the 2006 elections, the voter cards issued during the elections have served as provisional identity cards. To date, the situation has not changed, and the Government is planning to conduct the census in the coming days after the elections in December 2023.*

*(FK, Independent Researcher, Kinshasa, March 30, 2023, 32 years old)*

## Access Barriers Creating Indifferent Youth Populations

Critically, another respondent stresses that youth populations do not care whether they do or do not have access to the voter card or the ID card, unless they require it to exercise their right to vote or access specific services. This implies that youth populations may be generally indifferent to having access to voter cards or ID cards due to delays in the issuance of biometric ID cards. This implies that the significance of these cards to the youth population lies primarily in their *functional utility* rather than as *symbols of identity or status*.

*There is no official identity, we use the voter card as our identity card in DRC. There is a concrete procedure to obtain this data – although there is no single official document as there is in other countries. There is no concrete dynamic of numerical identity, because the process takes a long time. For youth they only use it when is time to vote or they need to demand a specific service. They do not care much about it.*

*(BM, Lawyer, Kinshasa, March 26, 2023, 35+ years old)*

One more interviewee highlights that the time delays for biometric ID issuance are not reflected as glaringly during the issuance of voter's card (*which has become comparatively longer*), or even the biometric passport. This gives the impression that the government has prioritized the efficiency of electoral processes and system over national identification and ID card issuance, which affects individuals right to identity and nationality.

*For the passport it is easy, and it costs less when you are in Kinshasa, but in the provinces you must wait for weeks or even months because of the size of the country. The enrolment operations for the December 2023 elections are underway. Fingerprints are collected and personal data is taken in addition to the photo. The [voter] card is printed on site. Due to the limited number of polling stations, this is now complicated, as applicants must stay on the line all day to get a voter's card.*

(AT, Independent Researcher, Kinshasa, March 31, 2023, 33 years old)

## Biometric ID and Youth Migration

In 2016, Congolese media reported that a new biometric passport model, which includes an electronic chip storing biometric (fingerprint) data, was officially launched by the DRC. The original contract was awarded to Semlex, which was accused of corruption, money laundering, and unreasonably escalating the price of the biometric passports to USD 185.<sup>57</sup> In December 2022, Dermalog was awarded a USD 48 million contract to create biometric passports for the DRC.<sup>58</sup>

One interviewee suggests a direct link between young people's motivation to secure biometric passports and their desire for improved opportunities abroad. This implies that the youth may only be participating in ongoing biometric ID drives to fulfil their migration aspirations. Further, the report alludes to time frame discrepancies, with delays creating opportunities for illegal activities, such as facilitation payments by individuals seeking expedited document issuance.

*Because of the current situation, youth are looking to leave the country – this is the only reason they are seeking a passport. These youth are aware of the need to have a document to change their life in another country, even if they give their data to a government that can prevent them from leaving the country by delaying giving the documents, which can take 45 days or 3 days by corruption.*

(MC, Lawyer, Kinshasa, April 12, 2023, 29 years old)

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<sup>57</sup> Biometric Update, 'Congo's troubled, lucrative biometric passport contract still open?'

<https://www.biometricupdate.com/202207/congos-troubled-lucrative-biometric-passport-contract-still-open>, accessed 18 June 2023.

<sup>58</sup> Biometric Update, 'Dermalog beats Semlex, others to \$48M biometric passport deal in DRC,'

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# Conclusions and Recommendations

This report affirms that young people in the DRC cannot meaningfully exercise their right to identity and nationality, given the general reality that many Congolese citizens do not have an ID card, with or without biometric features. The report reveals that this and other contextual and group-specific realities may impact the successful uptake of planned biometric ID initiatives by Congolese youth populations in the future. In turn, these realities may further entrench young people from being able to meaningfully use their biometric identity in the context of a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from the government and civil society actors, with the former investing in biometric ID infrastructure and disseminating wider access to ID services, and the latter supporting the youth to participate in biometric identification decision-making processes. Based on this, the report proposes the following recommendations to the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo and civil society actors.

## Government

This report urges the Government of the DRC to:

- Promote young people's right to identity and nationality in accordance with international human rights law obligations by operationalizing and actualizing biometric ID card issuance.
- Operationalize DRC's data protection law and rely on prior and explicit consent as the basis for the collection and processing of young people's personal data in the BDI system.
- Engage young people in the design and piloting of the biometric ID system to ensure that the solutions are user-centric and aligned with their needs/preferences. This includes:
  - ❖ appointing youth representatives to biometric ID committee's or decision-making bodies;



- ❖ seeking and incorporating young people’s perspectives during public consultations.
- Bridge education gaps in the DRC to promote broader access and the successful use of planned biometric ID systems.
- Develop and implement digital literacy and safety programs targeting young people. These programs should clearly illustrate the benefits and risks of BDI systems and illustrate how to use digital technologies safely and responsibly.

## Civil Society

We urge CSOs in the DRC to:

- Provide free, legal pro-bono support, counseling, and other forms of assistance to help youth to fulfill their right to identity and nationality.
- Advocate for the protection and promotion of young people’s rights in the digital age by conducting targeted outreach and awareness campaigns designed to engage and inform young people about biometric identity. This should be guided by a balanced risk, benefits, and opportunities assessment.
- Monitor the implementation of the integrated population management system to ensure that this is aligned with the unique needs and preferences of the youth.

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