



LEGAL IDENTITY

UNDP'S GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK FOR DIGITAL LEGAL IDENTITY SYSTEMS

Advancing a rights-based and future-ready "ID for all" agenda



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IN BRIEF

Digital Legal Identity is a foundational enabler of inclusive development, effective service delivery, and a key pillar for robust digital public infrastructure. Yet, when poorly governed, digital ID systems can deepen exclusion, erode trust, and expose individuals to significant rights and privacy risks.

UNDP's Governance Framework for Digital Legal Identity Systems helps countries navigate the legal, institutional, accountability, and inclusion challenges that accompany digital ID reforms, and translates complex governance principles into practical, sequenced, and actionable recommendations.





THE CHALLENGE

Everyone has the right to be recognized as a person before the law, as enshrined in Article 6 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet, according to recent estimates published by the World Bank, approximately 850 million people globally do not have official proof of identity.

Without legal identity, individuals face systemic barriers to services and economic participation—and their rights are at risk of being eroded.

Against this backdrop, and as countries increasingly transition towards digital technologies, the governance challenge of a “Legal ID for All” agenda becomes more complex. Digital ID reforms involve multiple institutions, private sector actors, sensitive personal data, and fast-moving technologies that can outpace legal safeguards and oversight mechanisms.

Without a robust governance framework, digital ID systems risk:

- ▶ Leaving behind the most vulnerable—including non-citizens and historically marginalized populations
- ▶ Undermining data protection and data privacy
- ▶ Fragmentation across institutions and vendors
- ▶ Weak oversight, accountability, and appropriate grievance and redress mechanisms
- ▶ Loss of public trust in digital government reforms

Many governments recognize these risks and are committed to reform. Yet, promoting rights-based principles into concrete institutional arrangements remains a persistent challenge.

THE TOOL

UNDP's Governance Framework for Digital Legal Identity Systems responds directly to this challenge. It provides governments with a systemic approach to assess and strengthen the governance of digital legal identity systems across their full lifecycle—from legal and regulatory frameworks to institutional coordination, safeguards, and user value.

The framework helps countries to:

- ▶ Take stock of the current “state of play” of digital legal identity governance.
- ▶ Identify critical gaps, risks and opportunities.
- ▶ Align digital ID reforms with human rights, gender equality and “leave no one behind” principles.
- ▶ Translate diagnostic findings into a clear roadmap of interventions to help strengthen the governance of digital legal identity systems.

The service is adaptable to different country contexts—from early-stage digital ID initiatives to advanced systems undergoing reform or expansion.



UNPACKING THE DIGITAL LEGAL IDENTITY GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

▶ **EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

Assesses whether digital legal identity systems proactively prevent exclusion and discrimination, including for women, persons with disabilities, non-citizens, refugees, and stateless persons.

▶ **LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK**

Reviews the coherence, clarity, and enforceability of laws and regulations governing identity management, data use, and safeguards.

▶ **CAPABLE INSTITUTIONS**

Assesses institutional mandates, coordination mechanisms, resourcing, and capacity across ministries and agencies responsible for digital legal identity.

▶ **DATA PROTECTION AND PRIVACY**

Evaluates safeguards for personal data, proportionality, data minimization, impact assessments, and compliance with data protection standards.

▶ **ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE RULE OF LAW**

Examines oversight arrangements, grievance and redress mechanisms, judicial review, and accountability for both public and private actors involved in digital ID systems.

▶ **USER VALUE**

Focuses on whether digital legal identity systems deliver tangible value for users and avoid creating barriers to accessing services.

▶ **PROCUREMENT AND ANTI-CORRUPTION**

Assesses procurement frameworks, vendor management, interoperability standards, and risks of lock-in.

▶ **PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

Reviews transparency, public communication, stakeholder engagement, and access to information about digital ID systems.

Together, these dimensions provide a holistic governance lens for navigating the technical, legal, and political economy complexities of digital legal identity reforms.

KEY FEATURES OF THE TOOL

- ▶ Rights-based, people-centered, grounded in international human rights standards.
- ▶ Practical and action-oriented, translating governance principles into implementable reforms.
- ▶ Adaptable and modular, applicable across diverse country contexts and reform stages.
- ▶ Low transaction costs, leveraging existing data and institutional platforms.



KEY PARTNERS

UNDP's Governance for Public Goods & Services (GPGS) team works closely with:

- UNDP Digitalization, AI and Innovation teams
- UNDP's Gender Team and Disability Inclusion experts
- Sister UN agencies (UNHCR, IOM, etc.), development partners, and civil society organizations

THE FRAMEWORK IN PRACTICE

Digital ID: **Namibia** and **Somalia**

In both Namibia and Somalia, UNDP's support has helped governments to clarify institutional roles, strengthen legal and regulatory frameworks, embed data protection and accountability safeguards, and ensure that digital legal identity systems advance inclusion rather than exacerbate existing inequalities. The governance lens has proven critical in aligning digital ID reforms with broader public sector transformation and state-building efforts.

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT?

To roll out the tool, UNDP can provide the following support:

- ▶ Governance diagnostics and institutional assessments
- ▶ Facilitation of stakeholder engagements and consultations, including civil society organizations and the private sector
- ▶ Technical support to operationalize reform recommendations
- ▶ Capacity development and training for public institutions
- ▶ Knowledge exchange and South-South learning





Learn more at governance4id.org
undp.org/governance/legal-identity

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