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Nigeria: The issuance of national identity cards after 2003; description of the card; prevalence of false national ID cards; introduction of the new card (2003 - July 2008)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Issuance of national identity cards

In February 2003, the Nigerian government launched a registration process for obtaining a national identity card (BBC 19 Feb. 2003; Nigeria 20 Feb. 2003; Norway Oct. 2004, 21); however, distribution of the cards reportedly did not begin until 2004 (BBC 20 Apr. 2004; *P.M. News* 3 May 2004). Those eligible to register included Nigerians aged eighteen years and older (Nigeria 20 Feb. 2003).

With respect to the application procedure for the card, an October 2004 report on a fact-finding trip to Nigeria by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration states the following:

The applicant is interviewed, and photograph and fingerprints taken. The interview is meant to clarify national/ethnic and geographic origin, among other means by asking control questions and assessing the applicant's language, dialect and accent. Relevant information given in the application form and during the interview is registered electronically. Significantly, the applicants are *not* asked to submit any official documents for identification. (Norway Oct. 2004, 22, emphasis in original)

Application forms for the card reportedly request the following information from applicants: birth date and place (state and local government area), place of residence, birth place of father, profession and religion (*ibid.*, 21, 22).

In a 29 July 2008 telephone interview, an official at the Nigeria High Commission in Ottawa provided a similar description of the application process for the national identity card. The Official said that an applicant must show up in person for an interview, complete a registration form and pay a processing fee (Nigeria 29 July 2008). The individual must also have his or her picture and fingerprints taken (*ibid.*).

Contrary to information provided in the report by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, the Official at the Nigeria High Commission indicated that applicants are required to submit official documents for identification (*ibid.*). These documents include a birth certificate or a "certificate of origin" (which the Official also referred to as a "local government area certificate" or a "letter of identification from local government") (*ibid.*). According to the Official, the certificate of origin confirms that a person was born in Nigeria and is from a certain local government area in a particular state (*ibid.*). The certificate can be obtained from an individual's local government administrative headquarters, after someone from the individual's neighbourhood attests that he or she is from that particular area (*ibid.*). This certificate ensures that

individuals from surrounding countries, such as Benin or Cameroon, do not try to claim Nigerian nationality (ibid.).

According to the Official at the Nigeria High Commission, national identity cards are issued in Nigeria; the embassy does not issue them (ibid.).

Between 2003 and 2007, more than 30 million national identity cards were distributed in Nigeria (*This Day* 20 July 2007; ibid. 10 Aug. 2006). Information on the number of cards distributed by 2008 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. However, there are reportedly "millions" of Nigerians who have not registered for a card (*Vanguard* 10 Oct. 2007).

Description of card

The following information is based on a specimen of the Nigerian national identity card posted on Keesing's DocumentChecker.com, "the most complete online database in the world for verifying ID documents," according to their website (Keesing Reference Systems n.d.a).

The Nigerian national identity card is a synthetic (polycarbonate) card, measuring approximately 3.4 by 2.1 inches (ibid. n.d.b). The card has no expiry date (ibid.).

The front of the card has a clear, holographic laminate (ibid.). At the top of the card, the words "Federal Republic of Nigeria National Identity Card" are written in block letters (ibid.). Below this title, on the left hand side, is the Nigerian coat of arms, and below the coat of arms, is the cardholder's digital photograph (ibid.). Below the title on the right hand side of the card is the Nigerian flag (ibid.). In the bottom right corner of the card is a form in the shape of Nigeria (ibid.). An image of the Nigerian coat of arms is found in the background of the front of the card (ibid.).

The following cardholder information is also found on the front of the card: surname; first name; middle name; maiden name; date of birth; height; sex; occupation; blood group; applicant's residence, including address, town/village, LGA [local government area], state, "Ward" and "PU number" (ibid.).

The back of the national identity card contains "particulars of next of kin," including surname, first name, middle name and address (ibid. n.d.c). It also holds information on the applicant's origin (place and state), as well as the date and place of issue of the ID card (ibid.). Three numbers also appear on the back of the card: the "Seq Number" (sequence number) and the "ID Form Number," which are numerical, and the "Personal Number," which is alphanumerical (ibid.). A bar code is found at the bottom of the back of the card (ibid.).

Prevalence of false cards

Cited in a 19 February 2003 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) article, Nigeria's Deputy Interior Minister stated that the government had taken "foolproof" measures to prevent fraud, double registration and foreigners from obtaining the card. However, according to a 2 July 2008 article in the Lagos-based newspaper *This Day*, Nigeria's identity card scheme has apparently been "riddled with fraud." Irregularities associated with the card have included double registration (*This Day* 20 July 2007; ibid. 10 Aug. 2006), "wrong documentation," applications made by individuals who were under the age of eighteen (ibid.), and errors on the cards (ibid. 20 July 2007). On 10 August 2006, *This Day* reported that seven million national identity cards had been cancelled due to such "irregularities."

According to a 16 October 2007 article in *BusinessDay*, a Nigerian daily newspaper that provides coverage of "business, politics, labour and other current affairs, written by the country's top journalists" (*BusinessDay* n.d.), the national ID card is "difficult to authenticate" because it lacks serial numbers (ibid. 16 Oct. 2007).

Introduction of new card

Several news sources consulted by the Research Directorate indicate that Nigeria plans to introduce a new national identity card (*This Day* 2 July 2008; *Nigerian Tribune* 27 May 2008; *BusinessDay* 16 Oct. 2007; *Daily Trust* 25 Sept. 2007). The new card will replace the existing one (*Nigerian Tribune* 27 May 2008; Ngex 27 May 2008; *BusinessDay* 16 Oct. 2007).

Unlike the existing card, which has been optional (BBC 19 Feb. 2003), the new card will be compulsory (*Guardian* 28 Sept. 2007; *Vanguard* 10 Oct. 2007; *Daily Trust* 25 Sept. 2007). Various news sources indicate that the card may be used for multiple purposes, including registration for voting (ibid.; *This Day* 10 Aug. 2005; *BusinessDay* 16 Oct. 2007), payment of taxes (*Daily Trust* 25 Sept. 2007), credit transactions (ibid.; *This Day* 10 Aug. 2005), access to health insurance (ibid.; *Daily Trust* 25 Sept. 2007; *BusinessDay* 16 Oct. 2007), access to pension and social security, purchase of land (*Daily Trust* 25 Sept. 2007), and for the issuance of passports and the opening of bank accounts (ibid.; *Guardian* 28 Sept. 2007).

Detailed information on the appearance of the new national identity card could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, according to a 16 October 2007 *BusinessDay* article, the new card will hold biometric data, but will only display "routine information" about the cardholder; more detailed information about the individual will reportedly be stored in a central database.

The National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), a newly established government agency, will be responsible for maintaining the database, as well as for registering individuals and issuing the cards (*Daily Trust* 25 Sept. 2007; *Guardian* 23 Jan. 2007). The official website of the NIMC indicates that the database, which will use biometrics and unique numbers for every individual, will hold the following information:

- Personal information i.e., names, date of birth, place of birth, gender, disability, residential address and other addresses
- Identification information i.e., photograph, signature, fingerprints and other biological data (biometrics). ...
- Residence reference numbers such as ID number, insurance, immigration, passport, driver's license numbers, etc.
- History i.e., relationship with others such as parents, spouses, etc. and their records
- Registration and ID card history covering date of application, modification, particulars for Multipurpose ID Card, etc.
- Validation information such as personal identification numbers, password, question and answers for identification
- Records of provision of information (Nigeria n.d.)

While the current card has been issued free of charge (*Daily Trust* 25 Sept. 2007), it is anticipated that Nigerians could have to pay up to 10,000 Nigeria Naira

(NGN) [1 CAD = 116.18 NGN (Xe.com 24 July 2008)] to obtain the new card (*Guardian* 28 Sept. 2007; *Daily Trust* 25 Sept. 2007; *Vanguard* 10 Oct. 2007). However, the card will reportedly be free for the unemployed and for those under the age of eighteen (*This Day* 9 Oct. 2007; *BusinessDay* 16 Oct. 2007).

According to the Lagos-based *This Day*, the new identity card system is expected to be implemented by the end of 2008 (2 July 2008). In a 29 July 2008 telephone interview, the Nigerian High Commission Official said that although there are plans for the issuance of a new national identity card, nothing has yet been implemented. The Official also indicated that the Nigerian government is still issuing the current version of the card (Nigeria 29 July 2008).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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