

THE HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL ID

Mandatory Digital ID:

A Common Position by the Human Rights for Digital ID (HR4ID) Coalition

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ID4Africa 2026

hr4id.org/common-position



Three Types of Digital ID Systems That Raise the Stakes

01
—

Digital ID system = Foundational / Multi-Purpose

Population-scale infrastructure. Designed for multiple purposes, interoperable with public and private actors. Susceptible to function creep.

02
—

Digital ID system linked to nationality / legal Identity

May limit enrolment based on proof of nationality. Linked to birth registration systems. Can make inferences about citizenship and entitlements.

03
—

Digital ID system requiring biometrics

Require or repurpose biometric data — fingerprints, iris, facial recognition. Immutable. Capable of consolidating data into invasive multi-purpose infrastructure.

Example: Aadhaar — fingerprints, iris scans, facial recognition

The Core Question: when does digital ID become mandatory?

Mandatory enrolment — required to register in a specific digital ID system

Mandatory use — digital ID required to access services, spaces or processes

MANDATORY IN LAW

- ✓ Statute or regulation requires enrolment
- ✓ Digital ID legally required to vote, access healthcare, obtain a SIM card
- ✓ Government policy ties services to a specific ID number

MANDATORY IN FACT

- ✗ Digital ID made default; alternatives made inconvenient or inaccessible
- ✗ Paper-based or legacy IDs withdrawn or de-supported
- ✗ Private actors allowed to impose digital ID requirements
- ✗ Required data fields (nationality, gender) not mandated in law — but system won't register without them

Both cause harm. Neither is 'safer'.

The Four Principles

1

Mandatory digital ID requirements negatively impact human rights and human life, particularly for those who are marginalized or vulnerable.

2

Public institutions should not require mandatory enrollment in a digital ID system.

3

Public institutions should not require mandatory use of a digital ID system to access public services or privately provided public services.

4

If digital ID system already exists or is in development, the State must guarantee equal, adequate, and accessible alternatives — including non-digital options — for those not enrolled or not using the digital ID.

From Principle to Practice:

Respond on Slido — your input will be used to shape the workshop on Day 4

SCAN

*{Insert Slido
QR code here}*

1 In your country, is digital ID mandatory in law or in practice?

Yes · No

2 Is a birth certificate or previous paper ID required to enrol in a digital ID system?

Yes · No

3 Is digital ID required to access healthcare, social protection, or education?

Yes · No

4 From our common position and 4 principles - what would you most want to unpack further?

Alternatives · Legal safeguards · System design · Accountability · Grievance & redress

From Principle to Practice:

States

- Do not mandate digital ID in law or practice
- Legislate purpose limitation and guarantee alternatives
- Invest in non-digital systems and infrastructure

Development Actors

- Do not fund systems without human rights safeguards
- Require human rights impact assessments
- Fund inclusion, not just infrastructure

Tech Providers

- Design for failure and for exclusion scenarios
- Build systems that allow exceptions and alternatives
- Refuse harmful deployments

INVITATION TO WORKSHOP · Track 5 DPI & Identity · Session 3 · 15h30 · Nawa Hall — This call-to-action is the 'why'.
The workshop is the 'how'.