

A holistic approach to solving the identity challenge

IDENTITY

POSTED ON 06.08.18

While providing a legal identity to all is increasingly becoming a priority for governments around the world, many countries still face difficulties to roll out an approach that effectively embraces and solves every aspect of the identity challenge.

At IDEMIA we believe that the identity challenge can be solved solely by taking a holistic approach through integrated identity management ecosystems. Looking beyond ring-fenced solutions, we focus on managing and updating identity of individuals, linking both functional and foundational registries.

The identity challenge

The identity challenge refers to effectively managing legal identities of all individuals, valid from birth and throughout life, satisfying the needs of its main stakeholders – governments and citizens.

Citizen needs

One of the fundamental needs of any individual is to have a legal identity, no matter their origins or social status. However, despite the fact that legal identity is a fundamental human right and should be available to all, World Bank statistics show a staggering 1.1 billion people currently without any form of state-recognized legal identification, either paper-based or digital. This issue disproportionately affects women and children from poor, rural areas in Africa and Asia.

Thanks to legal identity, individuals can access rights and benefits such as education, healthcare, financial services, welfare benefits and elections. Therefore, legal identity needs to be THE robust unique source of attributes from which the public and private sector can source further credentials in both the digital and physical worlds. Legal identity should then be seamlessly and reliably verifiable everywhere so that citizens can be recognized by both public and private sectors in person but also online.

Finally, access to legal identity should be affordable for all.

Government needs

Legal identity is a way for a government to recognize its citizens and to grant them the associated rights and benefits. It also provides governments and policymakers with the opportunity to collect reliable data, which can be used to improve citizens' quality of life. This is especially true for the public health sector. By analyzing vital statistics such as mortality data, policymakers can identify cause-of-death trends and emerging health threats and respond accordingly. Moreover, legal identity is a key element of trust. Governments must ensure its uniqueness and trustworthiness through its design, implementation and use – whether in person or online – especially with regard to data security, personal data protection and privacy.

This is a core mission for governments that needs to be cost-effective and sustainable over time, as well as tailored to

the country needs and existing infrastructure.

Learning from the past

Many initiatives have been launched to overcome the identity challenge. However, they all focus on specific registries such as civil, welfare or voter.

We can categorize them as follows:

- *Solutions focused on 'foundational' registries (e.g. civil registry) separated from 'functional' registries.*
  This type of solution aims at building a strong legal identity to be recognized across the rest of the registries. The main limitations are that the update of attributes is not synchronized in the other databases and identity usage is not seamless – foundational identity is not automatically recognized by all the registries, especially online.
- *Solutions focused on a 'functional' registry only (e.g. voter registry).*
  This type of solution is the pragmatic response to the absence of a foundational registry or to its unreliability. The main limitations are that the identity is linked to a specific use, hence not legal/foundational, coverage is limited as the registry targets selected groups rather than the entire population comprehensively (e.g. voter or vaccination registration) and finally attributes are quickly obsolete.

An integrated identity ecosystem in answer to the identity challenge

The lesson we can draw from the above-mentioned initiatives is that ring-fenced solutions do not meet all requirements. Indeed, the identity challenge is a complex problem that can be solved only when the different foundational and functional registries are integrated and synchronized.

Today there is a need for a mindset shift in favor of a more holistic approach to identity solutions: the integrated identity management ecosystem, a utility infrastructure capable of delivering a unique legal identity from birth and valid throughout life by bridging foundational and functional registries. Indeed, such an approach allows attributes to be distributed across relevant registries while being constantly up-to-date and recognized by all parties.

At IDEMIA, we believe integrated identity ecosystems are the only viable solution to an effective legal identity management solution, covering all individuals, even those previously excluded. The end goal is there, the vision is set: the path to reach this ideal now needs now to be defined for each country.