



Ensuring Inclusive Access: Harmonizing Civil Documentation Practices in Yemen

I. Objective of the Guidance Note

This Guidance Note is anchored in the Centrality of Protection Strategy for Yemen, reaffirming the collective duty of all humanitarian actors to prevent, mitigate, and respond to protection risks. Aligning and harmonizing documentation practices across humanitarian interventions is a tangible step toward fulfilling this responsibility—ensuring that no individual is excluded or marginalized due to a lack of civil documentation.

The note sets out clear criteria to promote flexible, inclusive, and context-sensitive documentation standards. It offers practical alternatives for individuals without valid or complete identification and aims to prevent denial of life-saving assistance. All sectors and partners are expected to apply this guidance in accordance with their protection commitments and to ensure equitable access for all those in need.

All humanitarian actors are expected to apply this criteria in line with their protection obligations. Ensuring consistent implementation across sectors is imperative to uphold the principles of equity, dignity, and non-discrimination in humanitarian response.

II. Context Overview

Access to Civil Documentation in Yemen: Context and Challenges

The ongoing conflict in Yemen has severely disrupted access to civil documentation for millions—particularly displaced persons, marginalized communities, and vulnerable groups including children, women, persons with disabilities, minority groups, and the elderly. The Civil Status and Civil Registry Authority (CRA) faces significant operational constraints such as:

- Limited geographic presence outside major cities
- Shortages in infrastructure and staffing
- Long travel distances, high costs, and lengthy wait times for applicants



These barriers leave individuals without legal identity, which restricts access to humanitarian aid, public services, freedom of movement, education, healthcare, and protection—further increasing vulnerability to exploitation.

Institutional Fragmentation of the CRA

Before 2015, the CRA operated through a central office in Amanat Al-Asimah, with branches in each governorate and some district-level offices. Since the conflict escalated:

- The **CRA in Amanat Al-Asimah**, now under Ansar Allah (AA) authority, retains control over the central system, ID issuance database, and materials (e.g., ID cards, ink).
- The **Internationally Recognized Government (IRG)** designated a new central CRA office in Aden in 2015 to oversee CRA operations in IRG-held areas.

This dual structure has created operational fragmentation:

- CRA branches in AA-controlled areas remain tied to the central system in Amanat Al-Asimah.
- Even in IRG-controlled areas, approvals and materials for ID issuance are still dependent on the AA-controlled central CRA.

Introduction of the Smart ID System

The recent rollout of the Smart ID system in IRG-controlled areas in early 2024 has introduced a parallel and incompatible documentation regime:

- Smart IDs are only valid in IRG-held areas and are **not recognized** in AA-controlled regions.
- IDPs, particularly from northern areas, are unable to obtain recognized IDs in southern regions, limiting their mobility and access to services.
- IDPs residing in areas controlled by the Southern Transitional Council (STC) face further restrictions, as the politicized issuance of Smart IDs compounds existing documentation barriers. The politicization of Smart ID issuance has also created additional barriers for IDPs needing civil documentation to access basic rights and assistance.





Impact on Birth Registration

The absence of birth certificates is a widespread issue:

- It affects all children's access to healthcare, education, and legal identity.
- Refugee and IDP children, particularly those born out of wedlock, face exclusion from the documentation system—posing serious protection risks.
- In some governorates, such as Hadramout, local CRA offices have reportedly refused to issue birth certificates to IDP children, exacerbating their vulnerability and undermining long-term protection outcomes.

III. Legal Framework and Global Commitments

The Governing National Legal System

The CRA is the official body mandated with the civil status registration and documentation. CRA was established by virtue of the Law Number (1) for the Year 1992 Concerning Civil Status and Civil Registry (1991 Civil Status Law)¹. CRA falls under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior.

CRA's functions² include:

- The registration and documentation of vital events including birth, death, marriage, and divorce;
- The issuance of National IDs and Family Booklets; and
- The custody of related registries.

The law requires all citizens to apply for a National ID upon reaching the age of 16.³ A National ID is considered a proof of the information it contains, and all government and non-government entities are required to recognise it as a proof of the identity of its holder.⁴ The law also requires a holder of a National ID to always carry it and to produce it in all transactions that require a proof of identity.⁵

A National ID contains the photo of the holder, name, National Number⁶, place and date of birth, blood group type, place and date of issuance, and date of expiration. The

¹ Article 3, the 1991 Civil Status Law.

² Article 4, the 1991 Civil Status Law.

³ Article 49, the 1991 Civil Status Law.

⁴ Article 55, the 1991 Civil Status Law.

⁵ Article 60, the 1991 Civil Status Law.

⁶ A National Number is a unique identifier that is generated from the central system at Central CRA in Amanat Al-Asimah after the processing of a National ID application. It contains 11 digits that signify the governorate that is issuing the National ID, CRA office within the governorate that processed the National ID application, the gender of the applicant. The National Number is intended for all transactions of the citizen during and after his/her life. Reference from CRA website: https://www.cra.gov.ye/index.php?sub=ID_importance





National ID is also a proof of the Yemeni nationality as it is only issued to Yemeni citizens as per Article 49 of the 1991 Civil Status Law.

Additionally, The Law Number (45) for the Year 2002 Concerning Child Rights safeguards the child's right to a name and legal identity registration,⁷ nationality,⁸ human rights and liberties without discrimination on the ground of gender, colour or belief,⁹ and right to proof of filiation.¹⁰

IDPs right to recognition before the law, to legal identity, and documentation, without imposing unreasonable conditions, such as requiring the return to one's area of habitual residence in order to order to be documented.¹¹

With that in mind, the laws appear *prima facie* reasonable; nevertheless, challenges in accessing civil documentation arise from certain legal or administrative requirements that bear unproportionate burden on certain populations groups as referenced hereinafter.

Universal Right to Legal Identity

Under international law, including the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Target 16.9, everyone has the right to legal identity. This right applies to all individuals within a state's territory, regardless of nationality, legal status, or length of stay, and is especially critical for vulnerable populations in Yemen, such as refugees, IDPs, and returnees, who may have lost documentation due to conflict or displacement.

State Responsibility

Both Ansar Allah and IRG authorities in Yemen have a responsibility to recognize all individuals as persons before the law, providing civil documentation without discrimination. Political divisions, however, have complicated standardization of documentation processes, further impeding access for vulnerable groups.

⁷ Article 10.

⁸ Article 11.

⁹ Article 9.

¹⁰ Article 12

¹¹ Principle 20, the Guiding Principles; Articles 33 and 41, the Constitution of the Republic of Yemen; Articles 20 and 49 of the 1991 Civil Status Law; Articles 10, 11 and 12 of the 2002 Child Rights Law; and Articles 1 and 2 of the Documentation, Goal 2 of the 2013 National Policy for Addressing internal Displacement in the Republic of Yemen.





IV. Importance of Civil Documentation

Protection and Access to Services

Civil documentation establishes legal identity and is essential for accessing services, social welfare, education, judiciary system and healthcare. It allows individuals to exercise their rights such as freedom of movement, lawful employment and prevents protection risks such as arbitrary arrest.

Assistance for Forcibly Displaced Persons

For IDPs, refugees, and returnees, civil documentation enables protection, social inclusion, and access to durable solutions. Without documentation, these populations face barriers to accessing essential services, intensifying their vulnerability and isolation. At the moment this guidance is developed, civil documentation is also a requirement to access specific types of humanitarian assistance.

V. Barriers & Constraints

Limited CRA Capacity

The CRA's limited presence in rural areas, compounded by resource shortages, fuel limitations, and unpaid staff, constrains its ability to meet the high demand for documentation. Individuals often face extended processing times, high application costs, and additional transportation expenses.

Discriminatory Practices in Southern Governorates: In certain southern regions, IDPs face discrimination when applying for national IDs. Local CRA offices often require applicants to submit documents in their area of permanent residence and prioritize local residents over IDPs. This practice contradicts *the 2013 National Policy for Addressing Displacement in Yemen and other national laws*, leaving many IDPs unable to obtain essential documentation and restricting access to critical services. Temporary Identification Cards, issued by CRA offices in areas like Aden, facilitate freedom of movement and offer access to basic services but are not recognized as formal identity documents, compounding the challenges for IDPs.

Smart ID Rollout and Its Limitations: The CRA in IRG-controlled areas has introduced a new electronic Smart ID system, which operates independently from the CRA system in AA controlled areas. This Smart ID is intended to gradually replace traditional National IDs over the next five years. However, due to limited issuance capacity, some areas within





IRG-controlled regions still rely on the traditional National ID. Unlike the National ID, the Smart ID is recognized only in IRG-controlled areas. As a result, IDPs originating from AA-controlled areas are unable to use the Smart ID if they return to their areas of origin, effectively excluding them from achieving durable solutions.

This restriction significantly limits documentation access for displaced individuals and poses serious barriers for IDPs who rely on mobility and access to services across different areas of control.

Smart IDs and National IDs also present specific challenges for IDPs from northern regions who are currently residing in STC-controlled areas (Aden, Lahj, Abyan, and Al-Dhale). These difficulties are particularly acute for IDPs who never possessed a National ID. While those with expired, damaged, or lost National IDs can access Smart IDs or renew their existing documentation, Smart IDs are not issued to individuals who never held a National ID, effectively excluding IDPs without prior documentation. This limits their mobility, access to humanitarian assistance, and prospects for voluntary return. Furthermore, the politicization of Smart ID issuance has added an additional layer of complexity, deepening the vulnerability of IDPs without recognized documentation and further restricting their access to essential services and protection.

Exclusion of Critical Documentation and Inconsistent Humanitarian Practices:

Access to humanitarian assistance—particularly food and cash—is often contingent on the presentation of civil documentation. While efforts have been made to define acceptable forms of ID, in practice, many humanitarian actors apply different standards, resulting in inconsistent and sometimes exclusionary approaches. In several instances, forms documentation such as Temporary Identification Documents (TIDs)—which have been issued to IDPs in IRG-controlled areas since 2018—have not been accepted, raising concerns about equitable access to life saving assistance for the most vulnerable.

Field-level feedback, including from displaced communities themselves, underscores that the challenge does not lie solely with humanitarian actors. Even when NGOs adopt flexible approaches, barriers often emerge during disbursement, particularly with Financial Service Providers (FSPs) who may require formal, government-issued documentation to release cash assistance.

These inconsistencies across the humanitarian response highlight the urgent need for harmonized practices regarding documentation. This Guidance Note seeks to address these gaps by promoting a standardized and inclusive approach, encouraging all actors to recognize a broader range of documentation—including TIDs, expired IDs, and community attestations—to ensure no one is excluded from life-saving aid due to a lack of formal identification.





Lack of Birth Certificates for IDP and Refugee Children: Many IDP and refugee children lack birth certificates, impeding their access to essential services like healthcare and education. This issue is particularly concerning for refugee children

born out of wedlock, as they are entirely excluded from the civil documentation system, impacting both their immediate and long-term protection. In governorates like Hadramout, the CRA's refusal to issue birth certificates to IDP children poses severe protection risks and leaves children without a recognized legal identity.

Information Gaps and Lack of Awareness: A significant yet often under-addressed barrier to accessing civil documentation is the **lack of awareness and information** among affected populations. UNHCR has specifically identified limited knowledge as a key factor hindering access to **birth certificates for refugees and asylum seekers**, but this challenge extends more broadly. Many individuals—particularly IDPs, refugees, persons with disabilities, and members of marginalized communities—are not aware of **documentation requirements, application procedures, or their legal rights** to civil documentation. In some cases, misinformation or fear of repercussions further discourages individuals from approaching civil authorities. This gap in knowledge compounds other structural barriers, including cost, geographic inaccessibility, and discriminatory practices, and must be addressed through targeted outreach, legal awareness campaigns, and coordinated communication strategies.

VI. Most Impacted Groups

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

IDPs face distinct and often compounded barriers to accessing civil documentation, which directly affects their ability to receive humanitarian assistance and public services. These challenges are particularly acute for IDPs residing in informal settlements or displacement sites, where individuals often lack supporting documents to prove residence in their area of displacement—an issue reported notably in areas like Aden. The requirement to return to their place of origin to obtain or renew documentation further restricts their ability to regularize their status. In STC-controlled areas, the transition to Smart IDs has introduced additional complications, limiting mobility for IDPs originally from northern regions and reducing their access to essential services in their current locations.

Women and girls

Women and girls are also disproportionately affected as they are often required to be accompanied by a male guardian (Mahram). For those whose Mahram is unavailable, this requirement effectively denies them access to legal identity documents.





Refugees ,Asylum Seekers, and Migrants

Refugees and asylum seekers in Yemen face significant bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining and renewing civil documentation, which restricts their legal status and limits access to essential services. The absence of birth certificates for refugee children — particularly those born out of wedlock — further entrenches their exclusion from the civil documentation system and critical public services.

Many migrants in Yemen similarly lack legal documentation recognized by the authorities. Those who travelled with identity documents from their countries of origin often report that these were lost or destroyed during the migration journey. Migrant women and girls face a heightened risk of sexual violence, including rape, and children born as a result of such violence are frequently unregistered in the national civil registry.

Partners of the Refugee and Migrant Multi-Sector Cluster do not apply documentation requirements as a condition for assistance to migrants, asylum seekers, or refugees. Instead, they have adopted flexible arrangements to facilitate the issuance of documentation and have developed alternative approaches to support legal recognition.

Orphans and Unaccompanied Minors

Children without parents, guardians, or supporting document struggle to obtain documentation, affecting their access to child protection services, education, and healthcare. The absence of birth certificates for IDP children remains a significant barrier.

Persons with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities face additional challenges in acquiring documentation that recognizes their condition, hindering access to specialized services.

Marginalized Communities (Al Muhamasheen)

Marginalized groups like the Al Muhamasheen face systemic discrimination and high costs when seeking documentation. A 2023 assessment revealed that 40% of this group cited cost as a major barrier, while 29% lacked information on the application process. In March 2024, a survey conducted by the NRC highlights that the Muhamasheen, a marginalized and vulnerable community, are disproportionately affected. Among Muhamasheen respondents, 78% reported lacking a Yemeni national ID owing to lack of economic means, lack of knowledge of the importance and the requirement/procedures, and/or inability to meet the requirements.





VII. Specific Context in Certain Southern Governorates

Permanent Place of Residence Requirement for National and Electronic IDs

New National/Smart ID Applications

In southern governorates controlled by the STC (Aden, Lahj, Abyan, and Al-Dhale), IDPs are often unable to access regular identity documents due to discriminatory practices requiring them to apply for National IDs in their area of permanent residence, and requiring holding a National ID to access Smart ID. This practice, driven by concerns over demographic changes, contravenes the 2013 National Policy for Addressing Displacement and other relevant laws, leaving many IDPs unable to obtain essential documentation.

The Legal Aid Technical Working Group (LATWG) under the Protection Cluster successfully negotiated with the CRA Central Office in Aden the access of IDPs with damaged, expired, or lost national IDs to Smart IDs. Effectively, IDPs who had a National ID in the past would now be able to access Smart IDs.

To mitigate this, CRA offices in Aden issue Temporary Identification Cards specifically designated for IDPs. Although these cards provide limited access to basic and humanitarian services, they are not considered formal identity documents.

National ID Renewal Process

IDPs are generally able to access renewal of National IDs which are expired, damaged, or lost.

VIII. Protection Cluster Guidance: Reducing Documentation Barriers in Humanitarian Aid Delivery

To ensure inclusion and reduce barriers to assistance, especially for vulnerable populations lacking formal identification, the Protection Cluster recommends a flexible, context-adapted approach to civil documentation. This approach aims to maintain accountability and coordination while preventing exclusion of at-risk individuals.

Flexible Civil Documentation for Inclusive Humanitarian Assistance

Humanitarian actors are encouraged to accept a wide range of documentation types to verify identity and household composition, including:





- National ID / Istibyan
- Family Card / Booklet to verify household identity
- Passport
- Temporary Identification Documents (TIDs) issued by the CRA , particularly in IDP contexts in southern governorates controlled by the STC.
- Primary Identification Pages (PIP) or Factsheets pending issuance of a National ID
- Expired IDs or outdated documents should be accepted as temporary identification until individuals can renew their documents.
- **Election Cards** or community-based certificates, such as Social Security Cards or Birth Certificates, as secondary forms of identification

This flexible approach aligns with the current CCY consortium procedures, which allow for multiple document types in beneficiary verification processes.

Self-Identification and Community-Based Verification

In cases where individuals lack all formal documents, implementing partners may issue a Self-Identification Form, validated by a witness who can attest to the identity of the individual. In line with inclusive protection principles:

- Witnesses may include not only family members but also trusted community members (e.g., Aqel al hara or community leaders), especially in areas with limited CRA presence.
- Statements from local leaders, supported by district or sub-district authorities, can serve as temporary verification when formal documents are unavailable.

This reflects the approach currently implemented by the CCY consortium and supports inclusion without compromising verification integrity.

Duplication Prevention and Coordination

To uphold accountability, a strong duplication prevention mechanism is essential. The following measures are recommended:

- Pre-distribution coordination with actors working in Cash for Protection covered areas; **Coordinate in advance with other actors distributing assistance in the same area to avoid overlaps**
- Cross-checking beneficiary lists against a master database





This ensures that the inclusion of undocumented individuals **does not compromise the integrity** of the response or increase duplication risks.

A similar system is already in use within the CCY consortium and enables the inclusion of individuals without IDs while ensuring transparent and coordinated delivery of aid.

This guidance reaffirms that the **CCY consortium's approach is consistent with the Protection Cluster's standards** for inclusive humanitarian assistance. By maintaining structured verification while allowing for flexibility, CCY is ensuring that vulnerable individuals are not excluded from vital services due to documentation barriers.

IX. Actionable Recommendations on Civil Documentation and Inclusion

To CRA and Authorities

- **Strengthen and Expand Access to Civil Documentation Services:** Enhance the reach and functionality of the Civil Registry Authority (CRA) by increasing the number of issuing centers and deploying mobile units to underserved and remote areas—particularly those with high concentrations of IDPs. Bolster CRA operational capacity through sustained funding, targeted staff training, and improved technical infrastructure to reduce delays, lower documentation costs, and ensure timely, equitable service delivery for vulnerable populations.
- **Streamline and Depoliticize Documentation Processes:** Ensure that documentation processes are impartial and accessible to all, irrespective of region, displacement status, areas of origin, nationality or demographic background. This includes removing discriminatory practices in STC-controlled areas and ensuring that IDPs from northern areas are not marginalized in documentation processes.
- **Facilitate Birth Registration for All Children, Including IDPs and Refugees:** Take proactive steps to issue birth certificates to all children, especially those from IDP and refugee backgrounds, regardless of parental legal status. Address resistance within certain governorates, such as Hadramout, to ensure that IDP children are not denied this fundamental right.
- **Allow for Flexible ID Issuance, Including Smart and National IDs:** Establish a flexible policy that permits IDPs to retain or obtain both National and Smart IDs where needed, to maintain mobility and access to essential services. This flexibility is particularly important for IDPs in STC-controlled areas who may face restricted access to services under the new Smart ID system.





To the HCT

- **Ensure inclusive documentation practices to ensure inclusion:** The HCT takes the lead, with the support of the National Protection Cluster, that remove barriers posed by documentation requirements. It champions flexible verification methods that recognize a broad range of identification—including Temporary Identification Documents (TIDs), expired IDs, community attestations, and locally issued certificates—and ensures access to services even without formal documentation. By leveraging its convening power, the HCT enforces harmonized standards, fosters accountability among partners, and prioritizes tailored solutions for the most vulnerable populations.
- **Ensure Universal Birth Registration for IDP and Refugee Children:** The HCT to lead efforts, with the support of the National Protection Cluster and AoRs, to guarantee birth registration for all children, including those from IDP and refugee communities, regardless of their legal or parental status. This includes prioritizing joint advocacy with authorities, mobilizing partner support, and addressing barriers in underserved areas such as Hadramout.

To Humanitarian Actors

- **Prevent Exclusion by Applying Flexible Documentation Standards:** Humanitarian actors must ensure that no individual is excluded from assistance due to lack of formal civil documentation. In line with Protection Cluster guidance, actors should implement alternative and inclusive verification strategies outlined in this guidance (under Section VIII) that accept a broad range of documents—including Temporary Identification Documents (TIDs), expired IDs, community attestations, and locally issued certificates. Where documentation is entirely lacking, services must still be accessible through community-based or witness verification, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.
- **Support Accessible Birth Registration and Awareness:** Humanitarian actors are urged to collaborate closely with authorities and communities to facilitate birth registration for IDP and refugee children. They should actively raise awareness on the importance of birth documentation and provide practical support to overcome barriers, ensuring registration services are accessible in challenging contexts.
- **Expand Targeted Support and Partnerships to Reduce Documentation Barriers:** Facilitate direct and tailored support for vulnerable individuals who face challenges in obtaining civil documentation. This includes covering costs related to documentation fees, transportation, and access to CRA services. In coordination with local authorities, expand mobile documentation services to reach remote or underserved areas. Partner with protection actors to identify and assist individuals at heightened risk of exclusion—such as marginalized groups, or those facing discrimination—and ensure access to legal assistance where required including through referrals to protection partners.



To the Donor Community

- **Guarantee Access Regardless of Documentation Status:** Ensure that lack of civil documentation does not prevent vulnerable individuals from receiving humanitarian assistance. All actors should apply inclusive and flexible verification approaches as outlined in this guidance so that no one is excluded from life-saving support due to documentation barriers
- **Invest in CRA Capacity Building and Infrastructure:** Recognize the critical role of civil documentation in providing access to services, and allocate funding to enhance CRA's operational capacity. This includes investments in CRA office infrastructure, expanding service locations, and ensuring adequate staff training, especially in areas with high displacement.
- **Support Advocacy for Inclusive Documentation Policies:** Collaborate with the Protection Cluster and humanitarian actors to advocate for documentation practices that are inclusive of IDPs, refugees, and marginalized groups. Donors can support initiatives that address barriers to civil documentation, particularly those that facilitate birth registration and flexible ID issuance for IDPs.
- **Monitor and Mitigate Against Politicization of Civil Documentation:** Support advocacy efforts that promote a non-politicized approach to documentation issuance. Engage authorities to ensure equal access to IDs and documentation processes across regions, thereby safeguarding against exclusion based on displacement status or place of origin.

This Guidance Note provides a standardized, inclusive approach to civil documentation in Yemen, aiming to ensure that all affected populations can access essential services and humanitarian aid without exclusion due to documentation barriers

END

