

# Integrating social registry with ID systems

PMT-based social registries

## OVERVIEW

Social registries cannot replace providers of legal identity, such as national ID systems. On the other hand, their roles are complementary, and therefore they should, ideally, be closely linked. This note, third in our series, focuses on



making the link between the two—first by making the case on why such a link is needed, and following up with practical tips on implementing them.

## Functional and foundational registries

Before moving on to integrating ID systems with our social registries, it might be helpful to clarify the difference between **functional** and **foundational** identities.

In simple terms, functional identity or functional register refer to maintaining a register of citizens (or other relevant persons) for a single, well-defined purpose. For example, a medical insurance card, together with a register of beneficiaries, is needed to enable the beneficiaries to access healthcare. An electoral roll, together with a voter ID card, will serve the purpose of conducting a vote.

Conversely, foundational registers are by definition multi-purpose; many national ID card systems could be indeed classified as foundational.

Throughout this paper, while speaking of integration of social registries with ID systems, we will focus on the foundational ID systems, such as national ID card databases.

## Different scenarios

When starting the development of a social registry, we may be face with three different scenarios dependent on the degree of development of the national ID ecosystem. These include:

**The lack of any foundational ID.** In this scenario, the country does not have an official ID system. Different functional registers coexist without maintaining interoperability and exchanging data with one another. This is the situation that the teams building social registries in Djibouti or the Philippines had to face. In this case, the best approach would involve:

- Making sure that the biographic information of household members listed in the registry is accurately registered, including family tree-style information (names of father/mother) and other information that could make identifying an individual easier (such as date and place of birth);
- Considering whether the social registry could be augmented with biometric data if the social safety net programs making use of the registry require such authentication at the point of service;
- Examining whether the social registry, if universal, could become the “launching pad” for the development of a foundational ID system (Djibouti is an example of a country embarking on such a strategy).

**A single foundational ID system.** At the other end of the scale, some countries will have a single, officially endorsed foundational ID system, linked to the civil registration system and to the issuance of identity documents. In this case, the team responsible for the development of the social registry should:

- Examine interoperability procedures of the national ID system and, if needed, recommend their amendments to fully utilize the links between the social registry and the ID system, and to prevent duplication;
- Prioritize accurate registration of ID numbers
- If there are significant parts of the population that are not covered by the national ID system, consider whether the registration exercise for the social registry could be used to bridge the national ID coverage gaps.

### **Multiple competing foundational registries.**

Finally, some countries, where legal mandates are convoluted or not properly executed, experience multiple systems that act in parallel as de facto foundational identity registries (driver licenses, national insurance cards, birth certificates). In this case, implementing the social registry should involve:

- Collecting the information from household members on every ID token in their possession and ensuring that the information is accurately recorded. For example, if driver license, voter card and birth certificate are the three main “competing” ID standards in the country, the social registry questionnaire should contain fields for all three—and if all three are present in the household, all three should be recorded. This will result in the social registry being the missing link that can be utilized if the government decides to harmonize the ID systems.
- Deciding on the hierarchy of ID systems in case of discrepancies. The operations manual for the social registry should specify which system takes precedence if the personal information provided by one system differs from what is listed in another system.

While developing the social registry in Bangladesh, the team had to face the third scenario—although the country has an official National ID card system linked to a database, many citizens use their birth certificates as their identity tokens. Consequently, the questionnaire used for data collection asks for two numbers: the National ID number and the birth certificate number. If there are discrepancies between the information provided by the National ID database and the birth registration database, the National ID database prevails.

### **At data collection**

The key moment for managing successful integration between the social registry and the ID system is the data collection phase. It is vital to accurately register the ID numbers to facilitate the linkage. Several techniques can be utilized to improve accuracy:

- **Double entry.** If the questionnaire uses traditional pen-and-paper techniques, the fields where the ID numbers are filled in can be duplicated, so that the enumerator can enter them twice. If this solution is chosen, it is better to print the “duplicate” field to the right of the original field, rather than below it.
- **Machine readable zones.** ICAO-compatible ID cards and travel documents feature a machine-readable zone at the bottom of the page. Using a smartphone application or a special scanner allows them to be entered into the system without the need for typing them out manually.
- **Barcodes.** An alternative to the use of machine-readable zones are barcodes printed on documents (PDF417 being their most common format). The ID number, name and date of birth are among the fields most commonly encoded.
- **Online verification.** Some of the countries provide an online ID verification service that can be used to determine whether the number given by the respondent is accurate.
- **Checksums.** Some ID numbers contain checksum digits that can be “plugged into” an algorithm that will help determine if the number given is a correct ID number.

## After data collection

Once the information system supporting the social registry is operational, the linkage between the registry and the ID system should be included among its functions. In order for the link to work, the ID system’s MIS should provide an API allowing to retrieve records of a citizen after providing the ID number. It is a standard practice to implement the API as a Web Service using the SOAP technology, which should simplify the development process.

Ideally, the national ID system should proactively “message” the social registry informing about the recent changes in personal details of individuals (such as a change in address or marital status). Unfortunately, while such architecture, based on a “push notification” model, has been implemented in many developed countries, such as the

Netherlands or Sweden, it is rare to find it among less developed ID system. These tend to offer “pull-only” architecture, where the information about changes in citizen’s details can only be retrieved after an explicit request from the other system’s side. In this case, it might be beneficial to select an interval (for example one year) and configure the system so that for every citizen, the updates are pulled from the ID system according to that interval.

## Policies

In addition to creating the technical links, it is important to emphasize the role of the linkage across the policies and operational procedures of the social registry. Ideally, the basic biographic information stored in the ID system should take precedence, which effectively means that the social registry should aim not to collect the data that are already collected by the ID authority, in accordance with the “ask-only-once” principle. If the household members want to change any of that core information (which will probably include the name, date of birth, gender, address), they should be directed to the ID authority.

Those policies should also include the requirements for using the “main” national ID number as the key value identifying personal records in the social registry. Although, on technical grounds, there will be a need for the MIS supporting the social registry to assign “internal” ID numbers to its records, creating a new ID number (such as a “beneficiary ID”) and disclosing it to the public, let alone requiring the household members to remember it and use it instead of the “foundational” ID number, is something to be avoided.

## Life events

Life events such as birth, death, marriage or divorce play an important role for social registries. All of them typically change composition of the household. Many of them would affect the PMT score (for example, the PMT scores in Bangladesh model treats single female household heads differently). Moreover, they most definitely affect the eligibility of the household for various social safety net

payments—for instance, birth of a child will make the household eligible for child benefits or a nutrition program.

If life events are registered in the main ID database, it is important to create a robust protocol for synchronizing between the two. If a separate civil registration system is maintained, it should be similarly linked with the social registry.

### **Gaps in coverage**

Inevitably, among some households listed in the social registry, some or all members will not have a national ID number. To minimize exclusion, the social registry should not refuse to register them. However, the ID authority should be informed about the gap in coverage, so that the registration processes could be initiated for the “unidentified” population.

Ideally, the national ID registration should be initiated by the social worker responsible for the social registry. An application form could be submitted on the household’s behalf, upon receipt of which the ID authority could generate a “case number”. When the identification document is finally issued, the case number can be replaced by the final ID number.