The pain, headache of collecting National ID

The delays have raised concerns about service delivery by NIRA, particularly given the importance of the National ID in accessing essential services.

BY SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

A short text message alerting one that their National Identification (ID) card is ready for collection would ordinarily signal relief, but for many applicants, it marks the start of a frustrating search.

Across the several collection points countrywide, applicants are grappling with delays, unclear communication, and in some cases, abrupt relocations, forcing many to make multiple journeys in a bid to collect the critical document.

For instance, a February 19 internal update from the Nation Media Group (NMG)-Uganda on the two-day National ID renewal by its staff on May 29 and 30, indicates that part of the confusion stems from how the IDs were distributed after production, with many cards dispatched to the applicants respective residential sub-county offices rather than their registration or renewal points.

Also, there was no clear communication on which of the 156 IDs had been completed, with only a mention of 30 that had not been fully printed yet, leaving hundreds of other applicants uncertain about when and where to collect theirs.

The National Identification and Registration Authority (Nira) is mandated to create, manage, maintain, and operationalise the National Identification Register of all citizens of Uganda, non-citizens lawfully resident in Uganda, births and deaths, assigning a unique, national identification number to every person registered.



A NIRA official (right) interacts with a man while preparing to distributo printed National ID cards ready for issuance in Mbale City on October 27, 2025. PHOTO/FILE

Applicants speak out

"I received a message in January that my ID was ready, but every time I come to Lukuli-Makindye offices, I'm told it is not available. This is not my first time; I have come back several times and still left without it," Robert Tebandeke said.

Others say they are navigating the process blindly, without any form of communication from the authority ever since registration.

"I had not received any message, but I decided to come and check for myself because it has been a while since I registered in September, and some critical activities need this document in my possession. When I got here, I found long queues and no clear guidance on whether my ID is even ready," an applicant at Wakiso NIRA offices said.

For others, the repeated disappointments have led to resignation.

"At this point, I have decided to stick to my old ID since it is still valid. I'm tired of being sent back and forth every time I come to collect the new one. This business of sending us ID-ready pick-up messages, yet the IDs aren't there, should stop," a frustrated Ssembatya said at Kampala Central Division offices.

Similar frustrations are reflected online where applicants continue to share mor experiences.

"I have walked to the NIRA Gulu office for more than two months now trying to get mine. But they keep telling me that my ID is probably mixed up in a different box. It is really frustrating and no one is giving any clear information, yet their system shows my ID is ready for pick up," wrote James Abala.

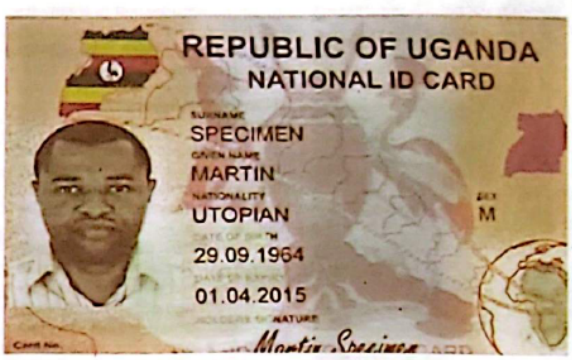
Another applicant, Andrew Atuheire, said: "I applied for renewal on November 13, 2025. Today, March 31, I'm told the card is not printed, but when will it be printed? I'm just here feeling disgusted."

"Accessing registration centres can be difficult in rural areas, with some residents spending heavily on transport just to create or renew IDs," noted Dennis Aura.

Questions have also been raised about the functionality of some newly issued IDs.

"How come the IDs you issued aren't activated yet? I picked up mine, but can't use it to open a bank account or even register a line," another user identified as Ahebwe posted.

Applicants turning up at the Kampala Central Division office on Lumumba Avenue since Friday last week have been redirected to Kololo after the cards were moved there in a bid to scale up issuance and manage the high numbers, according to Nira officials, a shift many said was not communicated in advance and has proved costly.



A sample National ID card. Applicants are grappling with delays, unclear communication. PHOTO/FILE

"I received a message that my ID was ready, but when I came, I was told it is not here, and I should go to Kololo. This is my third time coming back. I have taken time off work and travelled long distances, only to be told to incur another cost to a different location, which is expensive," Tom Mbalinda said.

At Kololo, long queues and slow-moving lines have become a reality, with dozens waiting for hours to be served.

The delays have raised concerns about service delivery by the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA), particularly given the importance of the National ID in accessing essential services such as banking, employment, SIM card registration, and voting.

NIRA explains mix up

In an interview with *Daily Monitor*, the NIRA communications officer Peter Okwalinga, attributed the challenges to the high demand and operational adjustments following the end of mass enrolment.

"Previously, we had started issuing national IDs at the sub-county level during the mass enrolment exercise. When that exercise ended, we had to scale down and return issuance to the district offices," he said.

"Just yesterday (Tuesday), we issued about 1,500 cards at Kololo. Two days ago, we issued around 41,000 cards countrywide. So while the process may appear slow, it is because the numbers are high, but many people are being served," he explained.

Mr Okwalinga said the concentration of applicants at fewer collection points, particularly in Kampala, has led to long queues.

"For Kampala Central, we have had very many applicants, and the lines became extremely long. To improve service delivery, we shifted issuance to Kololo airstrip, where there is more space to properly manage and attend to people," Mr Okwalinga said.

On concerns about ID functionality, he said the agency has already upgraded its systems and they are working with partner institutions to ensure compatibility.

"Our third-party interface was ready by mid-March, and we asked all connected agencies, including telecoms, NSSF, and banks, to test on their side. Some institutions have already set up particular centres where the new IDs can be used, though there may have been gaps in communication," he said.

Regarding complaints about applicants receiving collection messages yet failing to find their IDs, Mr Okwalinga said such cases need individual verification.

"It would be important to handle those cases one by one by checking the message against our system. It would not be accurate for us to generalise without reviewing specific cases. If a message was available, it would be prudent for us to look at that particular message against the system, and then we advise," he said.

Application errors

Mr Okwalinga added that some delays are caused by errors made during the application.

"In some cases, applicants provide incorrect information or apply under the wrong category, which causes delays when the system flags inconsistencies because it is automated," he said.

"The system has greatly improved, and turnaround time is faster if applicants use the correct details and apply under the right category. If your ID is lost, apply for replacement, not renewal. If you want to change particulars, don't apply as a first-time applicant," he explained.

MPS DEMAND ANSWERS

The Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Internal Affairs on Tuesday met officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and NIRA, where lawmakers raised concerns over delays in ID issuance. Ms Rose Kisembo, the Nira executive director, said although the agency had planned to issue 17 million IDs, only 15 million will be printed. So far, about 12 million cards have been printed and 10.5 million distributed to districts, but only about 3 million have been collected. Lawmakers, including Kagoma County North MP Brandon Kintu, and Lwemiyaga County MP Theodore Ssekikubo, also decried persistent challenges experienced in accessing their own IDs. The legislators tasked Ms Rose Kisembo to clarify the circulating ID-ready alerts, which seem unconfirmed, and improve communication with field officers. Ms Kisembo cited staffing challenges, noting that the agency has only 418 staff tasked with distributing more than 12 million cards, meaning each staff member is effectively responsible for serving more than 10,000 citizens. With this, she noted it is causing a lot of frustration within the officers and the population. Concerning corruption allegations, she noted that many victim applicants fail to follow up through proper channels after experiencing difficulties, making investigations difficult. She said the agency plans to resend collection messages to all applicants whose IDs are ready.

CamScanner