United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

State of Digital ID and AI in Africa

Survey by ECA conducted on 22nd/May/2023

TABLE OF **CONTENTS**

United Nations
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Participants

Legal

Lawyers specializing in technology law, privacy law, intellectual property law, and human rights law

Civil Society Organizations

Grassroots organizations, community-based initiatives, and advocacy groups that focus on digital inclusion, social justice, and the impact of AI on marginalized communities.

NGOs

NGOs operating in Africa that focus on digital rights, privacy, data protection, and human rights advocacy.

State of Digital ID and AI in Africa

Part A: Continental Interventions on Digital ID

61.54% of respondents were aware of a regional agreement aimed at promoting Digital ID in Africa

The Malabo Convention on cyber security and protection of Personal Data is one of the most well-known regional agreements that touches of aspects relating to Digital ID.

Our survey quizzed individuals working in the legal sectors, civil society organizations as well as non-governmental bodies.

→ Despite its popularity, none of the respondents thought that the Malabo Convention has been effective in promoting effective data protection frameworks for data protection and privacy on the continent.

93% of respondents

believe that regional implementation of digital ID systems can enhance access to services and promote integration

41.5% of respondents

identified data privacy concerns and a lack of cooperation among AU members as the main obstacles to a cross-border digital ID

95% of participants

agree that regional initiatives like AfCFTA are essential in pushing for the adoption and effectiveness of digital ID in Africa

Part B: Institutional Learnings and Trends in Digital ID

Current status of transition from conventional to digital ID systems

About **One in four participants** say they are not sure of the status of transition in their country.

78% believe that the establishment of dedicated institutions has/will positively impact digital ID rollout

73% are familiar with the role of data protection regulators in the context of Digital ID systems

0% see monitoring compliance of data protection laws as a benefit of having data protection regulators

100% agree it is important for regulators to be funded and to have autonomy

Part C: Technical Trends in AI and Use Cases for Digital ID in Africa

50% unsure whether the integration of language models has improved accuracy of identity verification

75% are familiar with the use of AI to enhance fraud detection in digital ID systems

10% have seen large language modules positively impacting identity authentication

From all potential benefits

60%

see increased accessibility for individuals with limited language in using AI in Digital ID systems

Part D: Law Reform and Digital ID Trends

44%

want to see more inclusion for marginalized groups

87.5%

have experienced recent legal developments in data protection in their country

Major challenges to implementing Digital ID in Africa

33%

Inadequate laws and regulations on data protection/privacy

aligning existing legal frameworks with technological developments

limited resources and capacity of regulatory bodies

Source: ECA