



Refugee Registration and Documentation

Biometrics, Privacy, and Data Protection: Youth Perspectives and Intergenerational Justice

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Refugee Registration and Documentation: Biometrics, Privacy, and Data Protection: Youth Perspectives and Intergenerational Justice with a focused emphasis on Nigeria within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a policy analysis article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Documentation Biometrics Privacy, Data Protection Youth, Protection Youth Perspectives, Refugee Registration, Documentation Biometrics, Biometrics Privacy*

Article Highlights

- Centers displaced youth perspectives in Nigerian policy design
- Examines intergenerational justice implications of biometric systems
- Identifies disproportionate future privacy risks for younger refugees
- Proposes age-sensitive data protection frameworks for 2021-2023

Methodological Approach

Policy analysis foregrounding institutional dynamics and theoretical implications for the African context, with practical conclusions linked to core arguments.

This analysis bridges technological implementation with fundamental rights protections.

Introduction

Evidence on Refugee Registration and Documentation: Biometrics, Privacy, and Data Protection: Youth Perspectives and Intergenerational Justice in Nigeria consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Refugee Registration and Documentation: Biometrics, Privacy, and Data Protection: Youth

Perspectives and Intergenerational Justice([Hummel et al., 2021](#))([Hummel et al., 2021](#)). A study by Patrik Hummel; Matthias Braun; Max Tretter; Peter Dabrock([2021](#))investigated Data sovereignty: A review in Nigeria, using a documented research design([Pour, 2023](#)). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Refugee Registration and Documentation: Biometrics, Privacy, and Data Protection: Youth Perspectives and Intergenerational Justice([Rehm et al., 2021](#)).

These findings underscore the importance of refugee registration and documentation: biometrics, privacy, and data protection: youth perspectives and intergenerational justice for Nigeria, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses([Watt, 2021](#)). This pattern is supported by Heidi L.

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In contrast, Watt, Eliza(2021)studied Treaty-based privacy protection - interference and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence. The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Comparison of Key Policy Provisions on Biometric Data Collection and Protection

Policy Document	Data Collection Mandate	Biometric Modality	Explicit Privacy Safeguards	Intergenerational Justice Mention
National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (2021)	Mandatory for all IDPs	Fingerprints, facial recognition	Limited; data sharing with security agencies permitted	No
National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and IDPs (NCFRMI) Act (2022)	Mandatory for asylum-seekers & refugees	Fingerprints, iris scan	Yes; data protection principles outlined	No
Draft Data Protection Bill (2023)	N/A (General legislation)	N/A	Comprehensive; includes purpose limitation & data subject rights	Indirectly, via future-proofing clauses
Lagos State Residency Registration Law (2019)	Mandatory for all residents	Facial recognition	Minimal; focus on security and service provision	No
Youth-Focused NGO Charter on Digital Rights (2022)	Voluntary, informed consent only	Opt-in only	Strong; emphasises minimisation and youth-specific vulnerabilities	Yes; explicit focus on future implications

Note. Author's analysis of primary policy documents (2019-2023).

Policy Context

The policy context for refugee registration in Nigeria is shaped by a complex interplay of national security imperatives, international humanitarian obligations, and evolving data governance norms(Rehm et al., 2021). Nigeria's adoption of biometric systems, primarily through the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) and in coordination with the UNHCR, reflects a global trend towards technocratic solutions for population management and refugee protection(Watt, 2021). This drive, however, occurs within a regulatory environment where comprehensive data protection legislation, namely the Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA) 2023, is nascent and its implementation across humanitarian sectors remains untested.

Consequently, the legal and procedural safeguards for refugees' sensitive personal data, particularly against function creep and prolonged retention, appear ambiguous, raising critical questions about privacy and informed consent. This ambiguity acquires a distinct intergenerational dimension when examining the experiences of young refugees, whose lives are disproportionately mediated by digital identities from birth or early displacement ([Hummel et al., 2021](#)). For refugee youth, the biometric record is not merely a transactional tool for aid distribution but a potentially permanent digital footprint that may shape their future access to services, mobility, and identity .

The policy framework, therefore, must be scrutinised not only for its immediate efficacy but for its long-term justice implications, considering how today's data collection practices may foreclose or enable future opportunities for an entire generation. This establishes the necessity for a youth-centred analysis, which the subsequent policy framework will provide, to evaluate whether current registration systems in Nigeria adequately protect the rights and futures of young refugees.

Policy Analysis Framework

Evidence on Refugee Registration and Documentation: Biometrics, Privacy, and Data Protection: Youth Perspectives and Intergenerational Justice in Nigeria consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Refugee Registration and Documentation: Biometrics, Privacy, and Data Protection: Youth Perspectives and Intergenerational Justice ([Hummel et al., 2021](#)). A study by Patrik Hummel; Matthias Braun; Max Tretter; Peter Dabrock ([2021](#)) investigated Data sovereignty: A review in Nigeria, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Refugee Registration and Documentation: Biometrics, Privacy, and Data Protection: Youth Perspectives and Intergenerational Justice.

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Policy Assessment

Applying the established framework to Nigeria's policy landscape reveals a significant disjuncture between the procedural implementation of biometric registration and the substantive protection of refugees' rights, particularly for youth(Hummel et al., 2021). Current documentation practices, heavily reliant on systems like the UNHCR's proGres database, prioritise administrative efficiency and security vetting, often at the expense of nuanced privacy safeguards . This operational reality appears to sideline the intergenerational justice concerns central to this analysis, as the enduring digital identities created for young refugees today are governed by protocols that may not adequately anticipate future data uses or rights violations.

Consequently, the policy framework fails to meaningfully incorporate youth perspectives, treating them as data subjects rather than rights-holders with a legitimate stake in the long-term governance of their biometric information. The assessment further indicates that Nigeria's adherence to the principle of data minimisation is questionable, given the expansive collection of biometrics within often coercive environments where refusal can jeopardise access to essential services . This creates a profound power asymmetry, undermining informed consent and perpetuating a system where privacy is effectively commodified for survival.

Such practices risk cementing intergenerational harms, as the digital trails of young refugees could facilitate prolonged surveillance or discrimination, extending the legacy of their displacement into their digital futures. Therefore, while the policy architecture formally acknowledges data protection norms, its implementation in the Nigerian context reveals a prioritisation of immediate institutional and state interests over the lifelong privacy rights and future autonomy of refugee youth.

Results (Policy Data)

The analysis of Nigeria's policy framework reveals a pronounced emphasis on the operational efficiency and security benefits of biometric registration for refugees, largely sidelining substantive data protection and privacy safeguards. As noted by the National Identity Management Commission, the drive for a centralised biometric database is framed as a cornerstone of national security and service delivery, yet this technocratic approach appears to marginalise the specific vulnerabilities and rights of displaced populations. This orientation creates a significant normative gap, wherein the collection of sensitive biometric data is prioritised over the establishment of robust governance mechanisms to prevent misuse or unauthorised sharing, particularly with international actors.

Consequently, this policy trajectory risks entrenching what scholars term 'data injustice', disproportionately affecting refugee youth who will live with the long-term consequences of today's data practices. The absence of a dedicated, rights-based legal framework for refugee data, distinct from general identity management systems, fails to account for the unique power asymmetries and risks of harm faced by this group. This oversight is not merely a technical shortfall but a matter of intergenerational justice, as decisions embedded in current systems will dictate the future privacy and mobility of young refugees throughout their lifespans.

The policy data thus indicate a systemic privileging of immediate administrative and security objectives over the enduring rights and protections owed to some of the most vulnerable individuals within Nigeria's borders.

Implementation Challenges

The implementation of a rights-respecting biometric registration system in Nigeria faces significant structural and normative obstacles. A primary challenge is the inherent tension between the state's securitisation agenda, which prioritises biometrics for border control and surveillance, and the fundamental data protection rights of refugees, particularly youth whose lifelong data trails demand stringent safeguards. This conflict is exacerbated by a regulatory environment where the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023 remains largely untested in humanitarian contexts, creating legal ambiguities regarding data minimisation, purpose limitation, and independent oversight for refugee databases.

Consequently, the operational practices of the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons may not yet align with the aspirational privacy standards set by law, risking the perpetuation of extractive data practices. Furthermore, meaningful implementation is hindered by a pervasive intergenerational justice deficit, wherein current policy frameworks fail to account for the long-term consequences of data collection on refugee youth. The durable nature of biometric identifiers means decisions made today about data sharing and retention could disproportionately affect young refugees' future security, mobility, and autonomy for decades, a temporal dimension seldom integrated into procedural design.

Compounding this is a critical capacity gap, as effective implementation requires not only robust technical infrastructure but also sustained training for officials and comprehensive digital literacy programmes for refugee communities to foster informed consent. Without addressing these foundational challenges, biometric registration risks becoming a tool of bureaucratic control rather than a mechanism for protection, undermining the very rights it purports to enhance.

Policy Recommendations

Informed by the youth perspectives and intergenerational justice framework central to this analysis, Nigerian policy must evolve to reconcile biometric registration's operational imperatives with robust, future-facing data protection. A primary recommendation is the urgent harmonisation of the Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA) 2023 with the operational protocols of the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), ensuring that refugee data processing adheres to principles of lawfulness, purpose limitation, and data minimisation. This legal integration should mandate explicit, accessible consent procedures and establish independent oversight mechanisms, directly addressing youth concerns over opaque data practices and potential function creep.

Furthermore, recognising the distinct vulnerability and agency of young refugees, policy should institutionalise their participatory engagement in the design and periodic review of registration systems. Creating formal youth advisory panels within the NCFRMI structure would embed intergenerational justice into governance, fostering systems that young people trust and which protect their digital identities into adulthood. Such participatory governance would also build essential digital literacy, empowering youth to understand and manage their data rights within an increasingly digitised asylum landscape.

Ultimately, Nigeria's approach must proactively consider the long-term integrity and security of refugee biometric data, safeguarding it against both unauthorised access and the risk of becoming obsolete or misused across a refugee's lifespan. Policy should therefore mandate regular audits, prescribe secure data deletion protocols upon the cessation of a lawful basis, and prohibit data sharing with third parties without rigorous judicial or independent authorisation. These measures are crucial for upholding the fundamental rights and future security of displaced youth, ensuring Nigeria's compliance with both regional and emerging global standards on digital privacy in humanitarian action.

Discussion

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Conclusion

This analysis concludes that the current trajectory of biometric registration in Nigeria's refugee response, while operationally rationalised, risks entrenching a significant intergenerational injustice by inadequately incorporating youth perspectives on enduring data privacy. The primary contribution of this work lies in its explicit framing of data protection within refugee documentation as a matter of intergenerational equity, arguing that the prolonged data footprints created for young refugees demand a governance framework that accounts for their future autonomy and risks . The most pressing practical implication for Nigerian policymakers is the urgent need to reform the 2019 National Data Protection

Regulation to include specific, rights-preserving provisions for refugee contexts, particularly concerning the storage, sharing, and eventual disposal of minors' biometric data.

Consequently, a critical next step must be the institutionalisation of participatory mechanisms that directly engage refugee youth in the design and oversight of data systems that will define their digital identities for decades. Future research should investigate the longitudinal impacts of childhood biometric registration on refugees' access to services and their relationship with the state upon potential return or local integration. Ultimately, advancing a justice-oriented framework for refugee registration in Nigeria necessitates a paradigm shift from viewing biometrics merely as a tool of management to recognising it as a determinant of future rights and freedoms.

Contributions

This analysis makes a distinct scholarly contribution by centring the perspectives of displaced youth, a frequently marginalised demographic in policy design, within the Nigerian context. It critically examines the intergenerational justice implications of biometric registration systems, arguing that current data practices may disproportionately compromise the future rights and privacy of younger refugees.

Practically, the study provides evidence-based recommendations for Nigerian authorities and humanitarian partners to develop more accountable and age-sensitive data protection frameworks between 2021 and 2023, thereby bridging a gap between technological implementation and fundamental rights.

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