

THE ID DIVIDE: HOW OBSTACLES TO IDENTITY DOCUMENTS IMPACT US ALL

APRIL 2025



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Identity documents (IDs) are vital keys necessary to open the doors to so many parts of everyday life. However, there are key system-level failures that create significant obstacles to IDs for many people, causing severe, yet avoidable harm. This infographic highlights the many barriers to obtaining an ID and the unique ways not having an ID impacts different communities. See MAP's [report](#) to learn more about obstacles to IDs, the harms caused from a lack of IDs, and recommendations for improving ID access for everyone.

SYSTEM FAILURES MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO GET OR MAINTAIN ACCURATE ID



Burdensome documentation requirements can be complicated and even impossible—sometimes requiring an ID to get an ID—and not everyone has the resources required to get this documentation.



Needlessly high financial costs for IDs can be prohibitive, especially given that IDs build on one another (e.g., needing a birth certificate to get a driver's license)—meaning these costs can quickly snowball.



Limited availability of ID services can make getting or updating an ID more difficult for people in rural areas, people without reliable transportation, people who cannot afford to take time off work, and more.



Confusing patchwork of policies from one state to the next makes getting or updating an ID difficult, especially for people who move frequently like military families.



Discrimination, whether by individuals or by the law, can prevent or deter people from getting accurate IDs, such as policies that prevent transgender people from updating their name or gender.

These obstacles—which frequently overlap—result in too many people altogether lacking or having mismatched documents, which can lead to further obstacles.

OBSTACLES TO ID CAUSE SEVERE, YET AVOIDABLE HARMS



Can't secure basic needs, such as housing, health care, and employment.



Can't access essential services, such as schools, social safety net programs, banking, and more.



Can't participate in everyday life, from restaurants and recreation to travel, leisure, and more.



Can't participate in civic life, including voting, jury duty, court services, and more.



Undermines public health and safety in many ways, including forcing people into potentially dangerous situations.

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BY THE NUMBERS:

Access to birth certificates

An estimated 6-7% of U.S. adults, or **15-18 million people**, do not have access to documents proving their birth or citizenship.

BY THE NUMBERS:

Who lacks a valid, accurate driver's license?

8% of white people	21% of Black people
12% of all U.S. adults	23% of Hispanic people
21% of people ages 70+	68% of transgender people

IMPORTANCE OF ID ACCESS FOR ALL

The United States has a long history of making it harder for many communities to succeed, and today, the road to health and happiness is becoming more and more narrow. Policies that make it harder to get IDs, when those same IDs are required to access many basic needs and services, only make existing inequalities worse and harm those who are less able to access the right documents.

These documents are essential for allowing us to start new jobs, open bank accounts, find stable housing, enroll in school, participate in civic life, travel, and so much more. Instead of making it harder or even impossible for people to access or update IDs, we should focus on removing barriers and making sure everyone can access these vital resources.

REASONS PEOPLE NEED TO UPDATE THEIR ID

There are many reasons why someone may need to update an existing government-issued identity document like a driver's license, passport, birth certificate, or ID card.



Moving. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average American moves nearly 12 times in their lifetime. In 2021 alone, nearly 42 million people in the U.S.—roughly one in eight people—moved to a new location. Lower-income people, renters, and younger people are all more likely to move more frequently.



Changing Name. Name changes happen for a variety of reasons including marriage, divorce, adoption, gender transition, for religious reasons, or simply to choose a new name or spelling. More than half (54%) of U.S. women have ever changed their name, and a 2015 national survey found that 30% of transgender people have legally changed their name.



Adoption. In addition to name changes for the person being legally adopted, adoptive parents can also be added to their adoptive child's birth certificate.



Change In Citizenship Status. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, over 7.3 million people became U.S. citizens over the past decade. Changes in citizenship status can change eligibility for certain kinds of IDs, such as driver's licenses or Social Security cards, meaning these individuals may need to update or apply for a new ID.



Updating Gender Marker. Many transgender people update the gender marker on their identity documents so that it matches their gender identity, which helps reduce risk of harassment or discrimination when showing ID. A 2015 national survey found that one-third of transgender people have changed the gender marker on at least some or all of their IDs.



Expired ID. Most identity documents have an expiration date, after which they must be renewed. Depending on the length of time since the ID was first issued (or since expiration), additional changes may be needed before renewing, such as meeting new or stricter documentation requirements or updating any personal information that has changed.



Errors. Sometimes simple mistakes are made, such as misspellings of a name. However, even simple misspellings can prevent people from, for example, voting, plane travel, or other activities where an exact match is required.