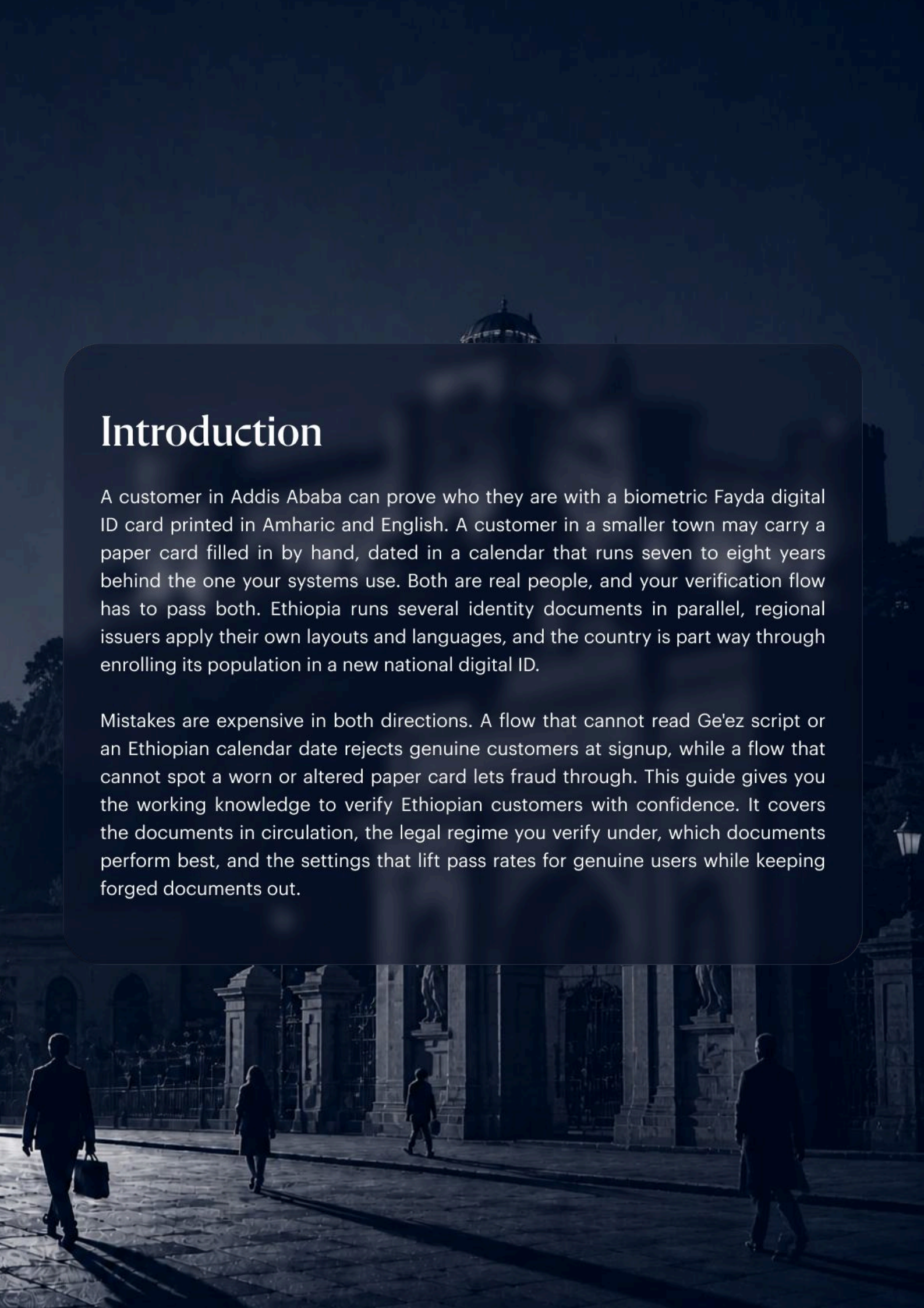


# A Merchant's Guide to Identity Verification in ETHIOPIA



✓ Identity Verified

Real-Time Checks

The background image is a dark, low-key photograph of a city street. In the foreground, several people are walking away from the camera on a paved surface. In the background, there is a large, ornate building with a prominent dome, likely a government or historical structure. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights.

# Introduction

A customer in Addis Ababa can prove who they are with a biometric Fayda digital ID card printed in Amharic and English. A customer in a smaller town may carry a paper card filled in by hand, dated in a calendar that runs seven to eight years behind the one your systems use. Both are real people, and your verification flow has to pass both. Ethiopia runs several identity documents in parallel, regional issuers apply their own layouts and languages, and the country is part way through enrolling its population in a new national digital ID.

Mistakes are expensive in both directions. A flow that cannot read Ge'ez script or an Ethiopian calendar date rejects genuine customers at signup, while a flow that cannot spot a worn or altered paper card lets fraud through. This guide gives you the working knowledge to verify Ethiopian customers with confidence. It covers the documents in circulation, the legal regime you verify under, which documents perform best, and the settings that lift pass rates for genuine users while keeping forged documents out.

**Six traits of Ethiopian documents that decide whether your automated checks read them or reject them.** Reliable verification in Ethiopia starts with the documents themselves. They mix scripts, calendars, regional layouts, and plenty of handwriting, and the six challenges below cause most failed reads and false rejections.

## 1 | Multilingual Documents

Ethiopia is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world. Passports and the national digital ID pair Amharic with English, Amharic and Tigrinya use the Ge'ez script, and Afaan Oromo and Somali use the Latin alphabet. An OCR engine that reads only one script fails where documents switch between two, so your software must recognise both and match names across them.

**Example:** Haile appears in Latin script on one card and as ሃይለ in Ge'ez on the other.



*Ethiopian passport data page pairs Amharic and English with a machine readable zone.*

## 2 | Complex Script with Vowel Modifications

The Ge'ez script that carries Amharic and Tigrinya is a syllabary, not an alphabet. Each base consonant combines with one of seven vowel orders, so a single consonant appears in seven or more distinct shapes. Shufti's OCR is trained on the full syllabary, so extraction holds up across the script's many forms.

**Example:** Hana ( ) and a slight variation Hanna ( ) differ by a single stroke, and OCR must catch that without a false mismatch.

|        |   |      |      |      |   |      |    |      |     |       |    |      |    |      |      |      |      |       |       |
|--------|---|------|------|------|---|------|----|------|-----|-------|----|------|----|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| U = ha | U | hà   | h    | là   | h | hà   | oo | mà   | u   | sà    | ç  | là   | h  | sà   | ñ    | sà   | q    | qà    | quà   |
|        | U | hu   | h    | lu   | h | hu   | oo | mu   | u   | su    | ç  | ru   | h  | su   | ñ    | su   | q    | qu    |       |
| Y = hi | Y | hi   | h    | li   | h | hi   | oo | mi   | u   | si    | ç  | li   | h  | si   | ñ    | si   | q    | qi    | qui   |
|        | Y | ha   | h    | la   | h | ha   | oo | ma   | u   | sà    | ç  | ra   | h  | sa   | ñ    | sà   | q    | qa    | qua   |
| U = hu | U | he   | h    | le   | h | he   | oo | me   | u   | sé    | ç  | le   | h  | se   | ñ    | sé   | q    | qe    | que   |
|        | U | hafe | h    | lafe | h | hafe | oo | mafe | u   | səfe  | ç  | rafe | h  | səfe | ñ    | səfe | q    | qafe  | quafe |
| Y = hi | Y | ho   | h    | lo   | h | ho   | oo | mo   | u   | sə    | ç  | ro   | h  | so   | ñ    | sə   | q    | qo    |       |
|        |   | bet  |      | tawe |   | ç    |    | harm |     | nahas |    | ñ    |    | 'alf |      |      |      | kaf   |       |
|        |   | ñ    | bà   | tà   | ç | à    | h  | hà   | h   | tuà   | ç  | nà   | ñ  | ñà   | 'à   | h    | kà   | kuà   |       |
|        |   | ñ    | bu   | tu   | ç | cu   | h  | hu   | h   | nu    | ç  | ñu   | h  | 'u   | h    | ku   |      |       |       |
| Y = ha |   | ñ    | b    | t    | ç | ç    | h  | h    | tu  | ç     | n  | ñ    | ñ  | '    | h    | k    | ku   |       |       |
|        |   | ñ    | ba   | ta   | ç | à    | h  | h    | tuà | ç     | nà | ñ    | ñà | 'a   | h    | ka   | kuà  |       |       |
|        |   | ñ    | be   | te   | ç | è    | h  | he   | h   | ue    | ç  | ne   | ñ  | ñe   | 'e   | he   | ke   | kuè   |       |
| Y = he |   | ñ    | bəfe | təfe | ç | əfe  | h  | əfe  | h   | tuə   | ç  | nəfe | ñ  | əfe  | 'əfe | h    | kəfe | kuəfe |       |
|        |   | ñ    | b    | o    | ç | è    | ç  | h    | o   | h     | o  | ç    | n  | ç    | 'o   | h    | ko   |       |       |

The Ge'ez syllabary; each consonant changes shape across seven vowel orders (ha at right).

### 3 | Varying Document Formats Across Regions

Ethiopian identity documents were never fully standardised. Regional administrations issued their own cards, so layout, font, and security features shift from one region to the next, and older rural documents drift furthest from any standard. Verification tuned to a single layout misreads the moment a regional variant appears, so your checks need coverage across formats rather than one golden template. The Addis Ababa and Hayyama licences shown here make the point.

**Example:** A driver's licence from Bahir Dar can differ in layout and font from one issued in Addis Ababa, even though both serve the same purpose.



Specimen of a bilingual Addis Ababa driving licence.



A Hayyama licence in Afaan Oromo and Amharic.

### 4 | Dual Dates of Birth from Two Calendar Systems

Ethiopia runs on its own calendar. It has thirteen months and sits roughly seven to eight years behind the Gregorian calendar the rest of your systems use, and documents often print the date of birth in both. A verification system that reads the Ethiopian date as Gregorian fails an age check or flags a false mismatch against records the customer supplied elsewhere, so date handling has to convert between the two calendars correctly.

**Example:** A person born on Tahsas 25, 1986 in the Ethiopian calendar was born on January 3, 1994 in the Gregorian calendar.



An Ethiopian Digital ID card prints its dates in both calendars.

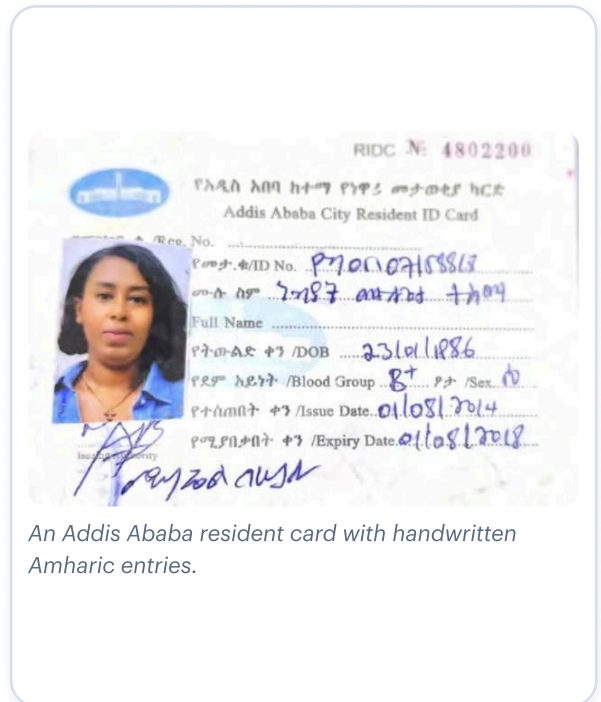
## 5 | Handwritten Documents

Many Ethiopian documents carry handwritten entries. Older national ID cards, driver's licences, and local residency cards were often filled in by hand, in Amharic, by different clerks with different handwriting.

**Variability in handwriting.** The same letter takes many shapes, and weak OCR misreads names, dates of birth, and other critical fields.

**Older documents.** Handwritten entries fade and smudge under lamination, cutting contrast exactly where accuracy matters most.

**Cultural naming conventions.** A full name strings together the given, father's, and grandfather's names rather than a fixed surname, and clerks abbreviated these differently, so matching must tolerate the variants.



## 6 | Document Wear and Tear

Wear is a fact of life for Ethiopian documents. Paper cards and older licences live in wallets for years, and frequent handling fades text, scratches surfaces, and blurs the handwritten details and security features a check depends on. The Addis Ababa resident card and older driver's licences show this most. A verification flow that only accepts pristine captures rejects a large share of genuine holders, so the goal is software that reads degraded documents accurately while still catching real signs of tampering.

# A Merchant's Guide to Identity Verification in Ethiopia

**The legal regime you verify under, the documents you can accept, and how each one performs.** Identity verification in Ethiopia now sits under the Personal Data Protection Proclamation No. 1321/2024, the country's first dedicated data protection law, with the Ethiopian Communications Authority supervising compliance. Anti money laundering duties come from Proclamation No. 1176/2020, with the Financial Intelligence Service as the financial intelligence unit and the National Bank of Ethiopia setting customer due diligence directives. The digital ID has its own base, the Ethiopian Digital Identification Proclamation No. 1284/2023, which established the Fayda number.

**Compliance and conversion are the same problem in practice.** A flow that asks for the wrong documents or stalls at capture loses customers mid-signup, so a compliant check that still passes genuine users first time protects both your regulatory standing and your completion rate.

## 1 | Verification Modes

### ONSITE VERIFICATION

The end user completes verification inside your flow through Shufti's iFrame or Verify component, submitting proofs directly and getting real-time guidance during capture. Results arrive in the Back Office portal or the API. This mode suits consumer signup, where guided capture prevents the blurry photos that sink first-attempt pass rates.

### OFFSITE VERIFICATION

You collect the proofs from your customers and submit them to Shufti for verification. Results come back through the same Back Office portal or API response. This mode suits businesses that already hold customer documents or run verification in batches.

## 2 | Document Types Selection

Ethiopian customers can prove identity with several documents, each offering a different level of security and machine readability. Shufti accepts the following; specimen images for each appear beside the challenges in section 01 and in the performance table.

**ID Card.** The new national ID (Fayda), issued under Proclamation No. 1284/2023, captures fingerprints, iris, and facial image and carries a twelve-digit number, printed in Amharic and English with dual-calendar dates. The Addis Ababa City Resident Card proves residence in the capital; older versions carry handwritten Amharic entries.

**Driver's License.** Widely recognised as valid ID, in distinct regional variants: the standardised Addis Ababa licence and the Afaan Oromo Hayyama licence, which often carries handwritten details.

**Passport.** The strongest document for high-assurance checks. It pairs Amharic and English text, carries a machine readable zone, and follows international standards. Ethiopia introduced its first electronic passport in 2025, and older machine readable passports remain in circulation.

**Credit and Debit Cards.** Payment cards prove possession of an account, not identity, with no photo, biometric anchor, or issuing-authority attestation. Do not accept them as identity proof.

### 3 | Document Type Preference and Performance

Different Ethiopian documents produce different verification success rates. Here is how each performs in practice.



#### ID Card

The national ID card's clean bilingual layout gives OCR a strong base, and Shufti's extraction reads the Amharic and English fields along with the dual calendar dates.

**Format:** e-document, physical, handwritten on older versions.

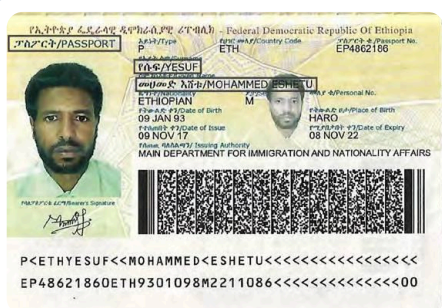
**Extraction:** name, date of birth, issue date, document number, expiry date, nationality.



#### Driver's License

Licences perform well on the standardised Addis Ababa layouts and less predictably on older regional cards with handwritten fields. Shufti's OCR is trained on both, which keeps reads reliable across the licence mix.

**Format:** physical, handwritten on older versions. **Extraction:** name, date of birth, issue date, document number, expiry date, nationality.



#### Passport

The passport's security features, such as holograms and microtext, defeat weaker OCR. Shufti's OCR captures and verifies every field, including the machine readable zone, which keeps processing fast and dependable.

**Format:** physical document. **Extraction:** name, date of birth, issue date, document number, expiry date, nationality.

### 4 | Preferred Document for Identity Verification

Shufti recommends the national ID card as the preferred document for identity verification in Ethiopia, with the passport as the strongest option where high security matters most. The national ID card leads because of its role across everyday services and its clean bilingual layout, and that lead grows as Fayda registration spreads. Shufti's OCR is tuned to both, so extraction stays quick and accurate whichever one the customer presents.

# Verification Settings

**Five configuration choices that decide your pass rate in Ethiopia.** The documents are half the picture. These five settings decide how well your Ethiopian verification flow performs in production.

01

## Verification Mode (Onsite vs. Offsite)

Onsite verification is the better default for Ethiopia. Guided real-time capture with biometric checks gives you stronger control over authenticity than reviewing files a user gathered elsewhere, which matters where worn and handwritten documents invite tampering.

02

## Data Extraction

Turn on OCR extraction. Ethiopian documents mix Ge'ez and Latin scripts, printed and handwritten text, and dates in two calendars. The engine must recognise both Ethiopian and Gregorian dates and convert between them where manual keying introduces errors.

03

## Identity Document's Backside Proof

Switch on the backside proof requirement. Ethiopian documents often carry important information on both sides, including addresses, expiry dates, and additional identifiers, and a front-only check misses data your compliance record needs.

04

## Allowed E-Documents

Allow e-documents. Ethiopia's electronic identification rollout means more customers can present electronic documents, and accepting them directly makes verification faster and more secure without printing or re-photographing anything.

## 5 | Real-Time Proof Capture vs. Proof Upload

Ethiopian documents can be verified through two flexible proof routes, and users pick whichever suits them.

**Real-time capture.** Shufti's auto-capture detects the document and photographs it without user fumbling, the fastest, most reliable route for physical documents.

**Proof upload.** Users can also upload pre-captured images, which suits those who already hold clean images, including electronic documents.

Merchants control both routes through the **Allow Online** (real-time capture) and **Allow Offline** (proof upload) options in the Verification Settings tab. Offering both keeps completion rates high across Ethiopia's mix of new digital IDs and older paper documents.

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## Global reach, local precision

Shufti verifies identities across 240+ countries and territories and reads each market's documents with local accuracy. In **Ethiopia** that means the old paper RG, the blue CPF card, every CNH format, and the new national identity card are all handled correctly, so you onboard real people fast and keep fraud out.

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