

**Fifth Conference of African Ministers Responsible
for Civil Registration**

Lusaka, 14-18 October 2019

Concept note (draft)

**Theme: Innovative civil registration and vital statistics
systems – the foundation for legal identity management**

Background

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, are rooted in universal rights and inclusive development and driven by the key principle of “leaving no one behind.”, The absence of legal identity for all is the root cause of invisibility, which renders most of the region’s poor unseen by Governments and thus uncounted and excluded. An emphasis on inclusive development is embodied in target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals: “By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration”. This target is a key enabler of 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (namely, Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, and 17) and 67 of the 230 indicators require data from civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems directly or indirectly.¹ Agenda 2063 of the African Union echoes inclusiveness as a prerequisite for the continent’s growth and development, including facilitation of cross-border free movement of people, goods, services and capital, as envisioned in the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. This makes cross-border portable digital identity an imperative for advancing Africa’s development and integration agenda. Fully functioning CRVS systems with universal birth, marriage and death registration are the foundation of a comprehensive, robust and sustainable legal identity system. During the twenty-ninth ordinary session of the African Union Heads of State and Government Summit held in Kigali, Rwanda in July 2016, the Executive Council of the African Union, recognizing the cross-sectoral importance of CRVS systems, declared 2017-2026 as “the decade for repositioning CRVS in Africa’s continental, regional and national development agenda”.²

Legal identity is a fundamental human right, as referenced in several international human rights instruments and conventions.³ For example, the right of everyone to recognition everywhere as a person before the law is stated in article 6 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Furthermore, the right to be registered immediately after birth, the right from birth to a name and the right to acquire a nationality are established not only by article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also by article 24(2) and (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and by article 6 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

CRVS systems, as a foundation for legal identity, play a key role in realizing many of the human rights embodied in the international conventions and declarations. Such universal systems, integrated with national identification management systems, are essential for promoting good governance, creating inclusive societies, protecting human rights, ensuring the proper delivery of public services and tackling inequalities. The civil registry provides individuals with essential legal documents to secure basic human and civil rights, such as the right to a name, identity and nationality, and access to health care, education and social protection. A birth registration certificate, as a legal document with proof of age, helps to prevent violations of the rights of the child, including such phenomena as child labour, the

¹ *Civil registration and vital statistics for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals*, paper prepared for the e-Learning course on CRVS systems, World Bank Group, 2017.

² Executive Council Decision EX.CL/971 (XXIX) on Finance, Monetary Affairs, Economic Planning and Integration.

³ 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, articles 25 and 27; 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, articles 25 and 27; 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, articles 1-4; 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, article 5(d)(iii); 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 24; 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Article 2 (c); 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 7 and 8; 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, article 29; and 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, article 18.

recruitment and use of child soldiers, early marriage, trafficking and statelessness. Building a viable and universal civil registration system is therefore indispensable for granting legal identity to all. By helping to make everyone visible, it protects human rights and addresses inequalities. States are primarily responsible for issuing proof of legal identity, including identity papers, for all residents in their territories. The issuance of proof of legal identity to refugees may also be administered by an internationally recognized and mandated authority.

In addition to their legal and administrative functions, well-functioning CRVS systems have statistical advantages over censuses and sample surveys because they provide continuous, reliable and disaggregated data at any geographical or administrative level and at a relatively low cost. Moreover, vital statistics data obtained through complete and accurate civil registration processes are not subject to sampling errors and contain relatively few response errors. In the context of long-term development, the 2030 Agenda recognizes that innovative and sustainable CRVS systems, integrated with health and national identity management, are powerful drivers for more inclusive economies and a broad range of future development benefits. Comprehensive, accurate and timely vital statistics from universal civil registration systems play an important role in monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals at national, regional and global levels.⁴ The following indicators are directly related to CRVS systems: Goal 16, indicator 16.9.1, on the proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority; and Goal 17, indicator 17.19.2, on the proportion of countries that have achieved 100 per cent birth registration and 80 per cent death registration. Data generated from CRVS and identity management systems are also important for monitoring progress on several other indicators. For example, it is important to compile and disseminate real-time cause-of-death information from civil registration systems in order to monitor and tackle many of the health-related targets of Goal 3, in particular those related to maternal, newborn and child mortality. Vital statistics can also be used to measure progress in other areas, such as Goal 4 on access to quality education and Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Similarly, marriage and divorce statistics are important for a better understanding of family formation and dissolution patterns in a country, and for developing programmes on family welfare and protection of the rights of women and children. Without regular and reliable data on births, deaths and causes of death, as well as fertility and mortality estimates, it would be difficult for any country to measure and carry out human development programmes at the national and local levels.

The World Bank estimated that globally more than 1.5 billion people lack proof of legal identity, about half of whom live in Africa.⁵ As most of the births in the continent are not registered, birth certificates are not issued by a civil authority.⁶ Hence, many children are not recognized or protected by law from the time of their birth. The lack of an official identity disproportionately affects the poorest and most vulnerable groups, including marginalized women and girls, migrants, refugees, stateless persons and people living in remote areas. An integrated and a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics, health information system and identity management is critical to closing the identity gap in Africa and making progress towards target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

⁴ *Principles and recommendations for a vital statistics system*, Series M No. 19/Rev.3. (United Nations publication, 2014).

⁵ *The state of identification systems in Africa: a synthesis of country assessments*, World Bank Group, 2017.

⁶ *Report on the status of civil registration and vital statistics in Africa: Outcome of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems Monitoring Framework*, Economic Commission for Africa, 2017.

Linkages between civil registration and vital statistics systems and national identity management

Well-functioning CRVS systems with complete national coverage lay the basic building blocks for a comprehensive birth-to-death identity management system. One fundamental principle is that civil registration systems should serve as the basis for lifetime identification of individuals, through universal recordings of births and deaths that present ‘entry into’ and ‘exit from’ identity management systems, respectively. Integrated and interoperable civil registration and national identity management systems provide the necessary foundational legal identity on the basis of official documents such as voter registers, social security registers, bank accounts, tax registers and driver license registers. Proper linkages between civil registration and identification management systems enable enrolment at birth and the issuance of identification documents, as appropriate. The registration and certification of deaths, on an ongoing and universal basis, allow deceased persons to be removed from national identity systems while multiple functional registers help to prevent identity theft and fraud, eliminate ghost workers and illegible beneficiaries and also facilitate the updating of electoral rolls. This holistic approach to legal identity systems is critical for the achievement of target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals, as is regularly updating national identity management systems at birth and death.

Interoperability⁷ between CRVS and identity management systems is possible by using the unique identity number assigned to everyone at birth. This number links together civil registration records, national identity management systems and a multitude of functional identity registers throughout the life of an individual. It also serves as a link between population databases belonging to different government ministries and agencies. Harmonized and interoperable civil registration and national identity management systems make for robust and sustainable systems, prevent duplication of effort, save resources and time, and enable efficient public service delivery. To date, only a few countries have made progress in integrating the two systems. They have done so by creating unique identity numbers at birth that link together civil registration and identification records. While many countries have established separate national identity management systems, primarily to provide identity cards for adults, this ad hoc approach is not integrated with civil registration and so does not create an efficient and sustainable identity management system.

Although birth registration and certification is the ideal process for providing proof of legal identity to the “flow” of newborns and young children within a country, it does not necessarily address the “stock” of older individuals who were not registered at birth but need to be captured when introducing a national identity system into a country. This is particularly important for many countries in Africa where civil registration systems have historically been weak and where countries have invested in parallel identification systems that do not rely on the civil registration system. One of the key challenges for countries seeking to connect their civil registration and identity systems is the lack of proper policies and legal frameworks to link the two systems together coherently. Furthermore, in many countries, CRVS systems are underfunded and largely remain paper-based, while Governments invest in expensive

⁷ Interoperability refers to the ability of computerized systems to connect and communicate with one another, even if they were developed by different manufacturers in different industries or countries. Interoperability increases efficiency and allows multiple stakeholders to leverage the benefits of the identification system, both within a country and across borders. This includes the ability of different databases or registries (such as national identity and civil registration systems) to communicate with each other and exchange information in a timely and low-cost manner, subject to appropriate privacy and security safeguards.

biometric identification systems for every single election. Low birth registration and certification rates, owing to underinvestment in civil registration systems, mean that Governments do not legally recognize millions of children born every year in the continent.

A lack of strong civil registration systems and poor linkage with national identity management and other relevant systems have often led to the proliferation of disconnected functional registers in a country. Constant efforts are therefore needed to maintain such systems, such as enrolling individuals as they reach the eligible age to vote, removing the names of the deceased and minimizing the potential for identity fraud. The failure to maintain well-functioning civil registration systems that are interoperable with national identity systems has led to numerous problems, including perpetuating the exclusion of marginalized and vulnerable population groups. An incomplete and unreliable CRVS system limits the ability of Governments to use the data for planning and service delivery purposes. Investments in systems that are not sustainable beyond a single event, such as an election cycle, are a waste of public resources. Cognizant of the importance of adopting a holistic and integrated approach to national identity systems, the Third Conference of Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, held in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire in 2015, requested States to establish a solid linkage between civil registration and national identity systems with a view to improving governance and service delivery.

Ongoing initiatives to address legal identity

Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and in line with its promise to leave no one behind, significant global and regional efforts are under way that recognize the importance of legal identity for all. For example, the *Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development: Towards the Digital Age*, published by the World Bank Group in 2017, has been endorsed by several United Nations organizations. It sets out principles that apply to all identification systems, including civil registration.

In response to the call by States for more coordinated United Nations engagement, the Deputy Secretary-General established a Legal Identity Group in January 2018 with a mandate to convene United Nations entities “to develop, in collaboration with the World Bank Group, a common approach to the broader issue of registration and legal identity”. This area of collaboration is reflected in the United Nations-World Bank Group Strategic Partnership Framework for the 2030 Agenda.⁸ The Framework recognizes the importance of ensuring legal identity through collaboration with Governments, development banks, civil society and the private sector at the global, regional and country levels. The United Nations Legal Identity Agenda, a joint initiative with the World Bank, aims to advance implementation of target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals by closing the global gap of 1.5 billion people estimated to be without legal identity. System-wide partnerships with the World Bank Group on joint pilot projects at the country level are also being explored.

Closing the identity gap requires a holistic, life-cycle approach to universal civil registration and the production of comprehensive and reliable vital statistics and identity management systems. The United Nations is promoting a fully integrated CRVS and identity management approach to demonstrate the value of a comprehensive birth-to-death legal identity system. Currently, the United Nations Statistics Division is updating its guidelines on the legal framework, which will elaborate on CRVS and identity management systems as the

⁸ For the full press release, see www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/05/18/un-world-bank-group-joint-statement-on-signing-of-a-strategic-partnership-framework-for-the-2030-agenda.

building blocks of an integrated and interoperable system. Africa represents around half of the global population that lacks legal identity.⁹ It is high time that the region focused on closing the current identity gap. The African Union Commission and the Economic Commission for Africa have joined hands to reverse this situation through the African Union-United Nations framework for the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda, which aims to ensure the provision of legal identity in Africa.

The Economic Commission for Africa, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, is engaged in advancing a digital identity agenda for Africa. While there are many interlinked benefits of digital identity, ranging from establishing a legal identity for all to supporting social protection, financial inclusion, governance and digital trade, Africa is yet to harness the potential of digital identity platforms. Ongoing activities to promote digital identity uptake in Africa are aimed at supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in African countries and realizing the aspirations of Agenda 2063. Central to this work is the potential role that digital identity could play in unlocking the benefits of the African Continental Free Trade Area and in driving forward the agenda for accelerated improvement of CRVS systems and legal identity for all on the continent.

The focus of this digital identity agenda is to advocate for the harmonization and implementation of digital identity platforms in Africa in order to facilitate trade in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area and enhance inclusion in a sustainable and efficient manner. To drive this initiative forward, an African centre of excellence will be established at the Economic Commission for Africa Headquarters in Addis Ababa to provide the required technical inputs and substantive analysis. The African Union and its member States will also receive capacity-building support for the design and implementation of a harmonized digital identity framework for the continent.

Current global and regional initiatives on legal (digital) identity agenda should build on the regional institutional mechanism established through the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) and should promote holistic and integrated CRVS and digital identity initiatives at the national and regional levels. It is important to modernize and harmonize civil registration and digital identity systems, which are foundational to legal identity ecosystems. Vital statistics systems that enable member States to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 should also be strengthened.

Innovation and technological solutions

Advances in technology present an important opportunity for the digitalization of CRVS systems, through which the strategic benefits of legal identity for all to Africa's development can be harnessed. Digital technology, including the extensive use of mobile devices in Africa, provides an incomparable opportunity for interoperability and real-time data sharing through interconnected systems across public and private sectors. Inclusive and trustworthy civil registration and digital identity systems are also crucial components for accelerating progress towards many of the Sustainable Development Goal targets relating to poverty, good governance, social protection, financial inclusion, gender equality, migration and universal health coverage. Furthermore, digital identity integrated with civil registration systems can be instrumental in protecting statelessness, managing forced displacement and

⁹ *The state of identification systems in Africa: a synthesis of country assessments*, World Bank Group, 2017.

enhancing the efficiency of delivering humanitarian assistance. This combination helps to improve the lives of millions of people while also boosting national capacities to register vital events and produce vital statistics. When digital identity systems are recognized across borders and used online, they can be a powerful platform for innovation and for fast-tracking the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

In recent years, while many African countries have come to embrace new digital identity technology, they do not have the proper legal frameworks in place to support and regulate modern identity management systems. Different technology suppliers have therefore sprung up in the region with disconnected digital identity systems that are not harmonized within a country, let alone across countries in the region. Many of these digital initiatives also bypass the civil registration infrastructure, the foundational identification platform for affordable and sustainable legal identity systems. The disconnected, fragmented, costly and unsustainable nature of these initiatives will have a detrimental impact on countries and on the regional economic integration agenda. Questions will also be raised about the sustainability and cost effectiveness of digital identity systems, unless people can be included in and removed from such systems throughout the course of their lives.

While digital identity provides many valuable opportunities for Africa regional economic integration, it also brings risks associated with cybersecurity and personal data protection. The challenge of managing and controlling digital data will become more difficult as the digital economy expands rapidly. Major challenges include the lack of policy and regulatory frameworks for linking civil registration and identity management systems; weak governance and institutional capacity; poor information and communications technology infrastructure and connectivity; and vendor lock-in risks without the requisite local institutional capacity or expertise to manage, control, protect and use the data generated through vital events registration and identity management systems.

Implementation of the African Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics: progress, challenges and the way forward

Progress and achievements

The Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, institutionalized as a standing regional forum of the African Union, convenes every two years to provide policy directions for the transformation and accelerated improvement of CRVS systems in the continent. Four such Conferences have been held over the last eight years since 2010. The first took place in August 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; the second in September 2012 in Durban, South Africa; the third in February 2015 in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire; and the fourth in December 2017 in Nouakchott, Mauritania. These Ministerial Conferences have provided policy guidance to the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS). They have also passed a number of critical resolutions and recommendations to strengthen and accelerate the improvement of CRVS systems in the region.

At the First Conference, Ministers recognized the importance of CRVS systems for Africa's development agenda and laid the foundation for securing much-needed political commitment at the continent and national levels. They also took note of the multi-sectoral nature of CRVS systems and the need for a holistic and coordinated approach to strengthen the systems in African countries. They further called upon the African Union, the Economic

Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank to coordinate and support the initiative in partnership with United Nations agencies and other international organizations. The Regional CRVS Core Group, established in early 2011 and comprising the aforementioned three institutions, several United Nations agencies and other development partners, provides technical and financial support to the regional programme and to member States.

The Second Conference launched the regional framework known as APAI-CRVS. The secretariat of APAI-CRVS, established under the leadership of the Economic Commission for Africa, coordinates and provides programmatic guidance for the regional agenda to reform and improve CRVS systems in Africa. At the Second Conference, Ministers recommended that countries undertake comprehensive assessments and develop costed action plans for the improvement of their national CRVS systems. They also recognized the importance of interlinkages and coordination between the health sector and CRVS systems for accelerated improvement of birth and death registration.

The Third Conference covered various technical aspects of CRVS systems, such as the use of information and communications technology, the recording of causes of deaths, and interoperability between civil registration and identity management. Following the declaration of 2017-2026 as “the decade for repositioning CRVS in Africa’s continental, regional and national development agenda”, the Regional CRVS Core Group developed the APAI-CRVS costed strategic plan 2017-2021 to serve as a guiding framework for CRVS systems improvement during the first half of the African CRVS decade.

At the Fourth Conference, Ministers recommended that the APAI-CRVS costed strategic plan 2017-2021 should be implemented with appropriate support from African Union member States and partners; that a subcommittee responsible for CRVS should be established under the relevant Specialized Technical Committee; that the staffing of the APAI-CRVS secretariat should be increased in order to enhance its technical capacity; and that civil registration coverage of internally displaced persons and refugees should be improved. The Economic Commission for Africa, as the secretariat of APAI-CRVS, was recommended to lead the development of common information and communications technology assets in support of effective CRVS systems across Africa, which included promoting interoperability among civil registration, health and identity management systems. Lastly, August 10 was declared African Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Day and member States were advised to observe the day every year.

APAI-CRVS has now completed its sixth years of implementation and has made significant progress in harnessing political commitments for improvements in systems at the highest levels of governments. It has also made significant progress in promoting country ownership and leadership; promoting systematic and coordinated approaches at the regional and country levels; building the capacity of CRVS system functionaries; and developing several guidelines, tools and resources for uses by countries. Key achievements are highlighted below.

(a) Biennial Ministerial Conferences and ongoing implementation of APAI-CRVS have increased awareness about the multi-sectoral importance of CRVS systems and the implementation and monitoring of national, regional and global development agendas, including the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

(b) This increased awareness, coupled with political commitments made at the regional and national levels, has resulted in a paradigm shift (from a fragmented and ad hoc

approach to the application of holistic and coordinated efforts for the improvement of national CRVS systems).

(c) The policy guidance and leadership provided by the Ministerial Conferences has helped to secure and sustain political commitments at the regional and country levels and has helped to build significant momentum towards the improvement of CRVS systems (with Governments taking leadership and ownership to strengthen their respective CRVS systems).

(d) Some countries have passed new laws for the provision of national civil registration systems. Others have revised outdated laws from the colonial period and have aligned them with current international standards and principles.

(e) Nearly all countries have created government agencies with civil registration offices responsible for national civil registration systems. While regular budgets and human resources have been allocated, in most cases these are inadequate for the permanent and continuous registration of vital events.

(f) The Regional CRVS Core Group has developed a number of resources for use by countries.¹⁰ These include comprehensive assessment guidelines and tools; strategic planning guidelines; a guidebook on digitizing CRVS; a template and guidelines for the development of vital statistics reports; a strategy on mortality statistics in Africa; and a comprehensive e-Learning course on CRVS systems. A guidebook on a comprehensive CRVS systems improvement framework is currently under development.

(g) Several regional training workshops have been conducted on various aspects of CRVS systems to train experts in civil registration, vital statistics and health information systems as part of capacity-building efforts in the region. Capacity-building training includes workshops on training the trainers of CRVS e-Learning courses; compiling and producing vital statistics; the digitization of CRVS systems; medical certification of causes of death and verbal autopsy methods; and analysis of cause-of-death data quality and mortality statistics.

(h) Thirty countries (more than half) undertook assessments to detect gaps, barriers and bottlenecks in their CRVS systems, and 28 countries developed strategic improvement plans based on the results. An additional 10 countries have initiated the process to conduct assessments and planning exercises in the near future.

(i) The APAI-CRVS costed strategic plan 2017-2021 was approved by the Fourth Conference of Ministers as a guiding framework for the improvement of regional and national CRVS systems during the first half of the African CRVS decade.

(j) Nearly three-quarters of the participating countries have constituted high-level coordination bodies to oversee and guide a cross-sectoral collaboration between government agencies and development partners for well-coordinated national CRVS system implementation and improvement efforts.

(k) Some of the countries have started implementing their systems improvement action plans. A few countries have made progress in improving vital events registration, specifically birth registration coverage through outreach campaigns to remote and underserved populations and through close collaboration with the health sector.

¹⁰ See www.apai-crvs.org/resources/apai-crvs.

(l) States observed the first African CRVS Day on 10 August 2018 by performing different advocacy campaign and awareness creation activities under the theme, “Promoting Innovative Universal Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems for Good Governance and Better Lives”.

(m) Several countries are combining civil registration and identity management functions or adopting unique identification numbers for interoperability between the two systems.

Challenges and lessons learned

The ultimate goal of establishing well-functioning CRVS systems is to achieve universal coverage and complete the registration of four vital events – births, deaths, marriages and divorces – with the priority given to births and deaths. Such systems are also important for the production of reliable vital statistics that support evidence-based development planning and the monitoring of many targets of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063.

Despite the remarkable progress achieved in reforming and improving CRVS systems in Africa over the past few years, most countries do not have well-functioning CRVS systems and are still far below achieving adequate levels of coverage and completeness of vital events registration. Only a few countries have managed to maintain a compulsory and universal registration system that meets international standards and allows them to achieve nearly complete births and deaths registration rates. The lack of robust civil registration systems and proof of identification renders most of the region’s poor invisible and marginalized, which in turn limits their access to socioeconomic benefits of their country.

A number of persistent barriers remain major challenges to the improvement of CRVS systems. These are mainly related to the inaccessibility and poor quality of civil registration services and inadequate awareness about and demand for vital events registration and certification among the general population. Supply-side barriers include high direct and indirect costs to users, complex legal and administrative requirements, and inefficient and time-consuming paper-based registration system. Geographic constraints include remote, isolated and sparse settlements of populations. Moreover, CRVS systems are passive, with the onus largely on citizens to register events as opposed to the system taking active steps to ensure registration of vital events. There is also insufficient interlinkage and coordination with the other sectors of government that have knowledge on the occurrence of vital events (such as the health sector for births and deaths). Regarding demand for registration, many people have no awareness about the importance of vital events registration for the protection of human and civil rights and its implications for access to essential services. Some cultural norms and practices are also barriers for community members to register vital events within the time limits set for registration.

Some of the key challenges hindering the implementation of APAI-CRVS at the regional and country levels are listed below.

(a) Some countries do not have in place comprehensive civil registration laws aligned with international standards. In many countries the existing laws are outdated and do not consider the digital nature of modern registration systems with respect to efficient recording, storage and interoperability with identity management systems.

(b) Despite a high-level political commitment to the coordinated improvement of CRVS systems in Africa, some country-level support from development partners remains uncoordinated, highly fragmented and duplicative.

(c) Although many countries have established national CRVS system coordination mechanisms for compressive assessments and improvement strategies, coordination remains ineffective and unsustainable beyond collaboration on assessment in most countries.

(d) Inaccessible registration offices, legal and administrative hurdles, and the direct and indirect costs of registration and certification remain major barriers to users, particularly the poor, people living in remote rural areas, persons with disabilities and hard-to-reach populations.

(e) There is a persistent lack of capacity for the implementation of strategic plans in a number of countries owing to financial constraints and insufficient staff with adequate technical knowledge. In more than two-thirds of the countries, the government budget for civil registration systems was stated as either inadequate or allocated irregularly.¹¹

(f) At the regional level, the APAI-CRVS secretariat is currently understaffed and under resourced and cannot provide the much-needed support required by countries.

(g) Civil registration systems in many African countries remain paper-based while countries move towards digital identity for national identity systems. Many initiatives for digital identity systems bypass the civil registration infrastructure, the foundational identification platform for affordable and sustainable legal identity systems.

(h) The use of innovative methods and modern information technology for the integrated improvement of CRVS systems is either minimal or non-existent. In most cases, CRVS systems are not interoperable with such government functions as national statistics, the health-care system, national identification management and electoral services.

(i) A lack of proper policy and regulatory frameworks to ensure individual privacy and data protection, weak governance and institutional capacity, poor information and communications infrastructure and connectivity, and vendor lock-in risks are all major challenges that need to be addressed in order to tap into the potential of modern information technology to link together CRVS and identity management systems.

Objectives

The main objective of the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration is to provide strategic and policy guidance on pathways towards holistic, innovative and integrated CRVS and digital identity management systems in order to close the identity gap in Africa and thus contribute to the achievement of the target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Fifth Conference will include discussions on new and emerging initiatives: the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda and the digital identity initiative in Africa, both of which rely on a functioning and efficient CRVS system.

¹¹ *Report on the status of civil registration and vital statistics Systems in Africa: Outcome of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems Monitoring Framework*, Economic Commission for Africa, 2017.

Specifically, the objectives will be to chart the way forward by:

- (a) Identifying key challenges in the implementation of APAI-CRVS at the regional and national levels and proposing solutions.
- (b) Reconfirming the commitment of government and development partners to CRVS and identity management through a holistic approach that strengthens institutional mechanisms for accelerated improvement of civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems in the continent.
- (c) Reviewing and sharing best practices from African countries on CRVS and identity management system digitization processes, using appropriate information technology infrastructure and improving innovative business processes to ensure that universal CRVS statistics systems are interoperable with national identity management and various government functions.
- (d) Reviewing progress and providing guidance on the establishment of a subcommittee responsible for CRVS systems under the relevant Specialized Technical Committee of the African Union.

Expected outcomes

- (a) Strong support and commitment from countries and development partners, including adequate funding and technical support at the regional and country levels, for the continuous strengthening of CRVS systems as the foundation for robust and sustainable legal identity systems (with a view to closing the identity gap in Africa and contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063).
- (b) Reaching an agreement on the strategic direction for a comprehensive legal framework, adopting technological innovations, improving interoperability and strengthening institutional capacity and coordination across ministries and agencies for the integrated improvement of CRVS and identity management systems.
- (c) Government declarations of their commitment to ensure that integrated CRVS and digital identity management systems reach their full potential (in terms of measure progress on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for all by 2030 and the Africa We Want, by 2063); and the proposal to establish a country experts group on CRVS and digital ID integration.
- (d) Suggested approaches for improving vital events registration and providing identification to refugees, internally displaced persons and hard-to-reach and underserved populations (through well-integrated and efficient civil registration and identity management systems and the effective implementation of decisions by Heads of African Governments on their protection).
- (e) Proposals on how the CRVS community, both countries and development partners, can be more engaged with the APAI-CRVS secretariat of the Economic Commission for Africa in meeting information and capacity-building needs and contributing to achieving the goals of the CRVS decade.

(f) Support for the work undertaken by the Regional CRVS Core Group and other partners in improving the CRVS landscape and encouraging such coordinated activities at the country level.