



**Fifth Conference of African Ministers Responsible  
for Civil Registration**  
Lusaka, 14-18 October 2019

CRMC5/2019/17

**Issue paper from the East and Southern Africa Regional Office  
of the United Nations Population Fund**

**Vital statistics from civil registration records and their relevance  
to monitoring Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and  
the Sustainable Development Goals**

**Conference theme**

*Innovative Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems:  
Foundation for Legal Identity Management*



**APAI-CRVS**  
Everyone visible in Africa

**Decade for Repositioning  
of Civil Registration and  
Vital Statistics in Africa  
2017-2026**



## I. Background

1. Millions of people in the world today cannot prove who they are. They therefore lack the legal identity needed to access services and facilitate their movement. Only 73 per cent of children under 5 years of age have had their births registered. In Africa, excluding North Africa, fewer than half of such births (46 per cent) have been registered. The coverage rates for deaths are much lower, and for marriage and divorce registration these are even worse. The adoption of target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals: “By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration”, is key to advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commitment to leave no one behind. Equally relevant is target 17.19 of the Goals, on support to statistical capacity-building in developing countries, monitored by indicator 17.19.2: “Proportion of countries that have achieved 100 per cent birth registration and 80 per cent death registration”. The First Ten Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063 (2013–2023) has also identified an indicator on birth registration, namely the proportion of children whose births are registered within the first year. Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, 12 require civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) data to measure their indicators and 67 of the 230 Goal indicators could be completely or partially calculated using data from CRVS systems. Hence, the unique nature and positioning of CRVS systems, which provide legal advantages for individuals and administrations as well as statistical benefits for most of the sectors within the countries.

2. In order to address the challenges of legal identity and close the “identity gap”, countries have introduced different forms of identity management systems, such as national identity cards and integrated identity cards. Most of these systems are however, not linked to the core vital register, resulting in fragmented approaches and an inability to achieve universal coverage of the population. Solving the legal identity and identity gap problem requires a holistic approach to universal civil registration; the production of regular, comprehensive and reliable vital statistics; and identity management system. Such an approach must ensure full inclusion in countries’ legal and financial frameworks.

3. The need for a coordinated approach to CRVS is explained by the fact that several departments and stakeholders are involved, including ministries of the interior or home affairs, ministries of health, ministries of justice, national civil registration authorities (departments) and national statistics offices. Unlike many other information generation systems, civil registration needs interventions with a long-term vision and well planned, integrated and targeted results that will last for generations to come.

4. In African countries, there have been concerted efforts to improve the coverage and completeness of civil registration systems. However, these efforts have not yielded the desired results and levels of completeness of registration of vital events, including births, deaths, marriages and divorces, are currently still below 40 per cent.

5. The Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) emerged from the need to consolidate the continent’s various initiatives into a common policy and advocacy framework. It was developed based on international standards, principles and recommendations of CRVS and following the political commitment and policy directives of ministers for a holistic and integrated approach on the continent. The overall objective of APAI-CRVS is to provide management and programmatic guidance to the regional agenda of reforming and improving CRVS systems.

## II. Role of civil registration and vital statistics

6. Civil registration, the administrative recording of vital events as they occur, has profound implications for development and human rights. Civil registration is a major and critical element for establishing the essential rights and privileges of individuals. Vital events recorded through civil registration systems are the source of identity certificates that are used for most administrative functions; they are conventional sources for compiling vital statistics. Vital statistics are a set of data crucial for policymaking. The production and dissemination of vital statistics include causes of death, fertility, mortality and nuptiality rates. The data are essential for planning, implementing and monitoring national and international development agendas. Currently, most developing countries use sample surveys and censuses to produce vital statistics but these have limitations, especially in relation to statistics on deaths and causes of death.

7. Vital statistics generated from civil registration systems and complemented with denominators from censuses are conventional data sources for the measurement of fertility and mortality estimates on a continuous and permanent basis. The provision of current population estimates and projections also depends on the availability of comprehensive and complete civil registration systems. A complete civil registration system can provide the size and structure of the population (including its characteristics) on a continuous and permanent basis, not only at the national level but also at the local level.

8. Civil registration also goes beyond statistical purposes, in cases where records of births, deaths, marriages, divorces and contemporary notations provide official sources of evidence of the occurrences of events and characteristics of the persons concerned. The same records can serve government administrations in establishing universal identity and identification systems to facilitate transactions involving individuals and service-rendering institutions. Such records can be used to establish unique identification numbers, process citizenship, issue passports, maintain electoral lists, ensure national security and supply the intelligent branch with basic data. Various private and public services therefore depend on the availability of these official records.

9. Civil registration is the conventional data source for measuring and monitoring the majority of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goal indicators. More directly however, CRVS is a target in its own right (Goal 16); it is necessary for monitoring key outcome indicators (such as maternal mortality and non-communicable diseases related deaths); and it is a key strategy in affecting progress in others (such as social protection, social inclusion, access to education, reduced inequalities and the promotion of peace, justice and strong institutions).

10. In recent years, population censuses in African countries have been challenged for their timeliness, their accuracy at the lower level and their coverage and comparability with previous census enumerations, estimates and projections. Most national statistics offices are unfortunately hampered by a lack of dependable vital statistics that could be used to compare census figures, coverage and completeness.

11. As few countries are currently analysing and publishing their annual reports, greater efforts are needed in terms of the strengthening of capacities, the allocation of financial resources, the establishment of coordination mechanisms and the incorporation of annual vital statistics into the strategic plans of the national civil registration authorities. There is therefore

a need for standard tools, methods and innovative ways to generate vital statistics in timely, robust and accurate manner.

### **III. Objective of the session**

12. The main objective of the session is to reiterate the importance of generating regular (annual) vital statistics based on civil registration records, even in countries that continue to have low registration coverage and completeness. The session should focus more on best practices and lessons learned within the continent. Countries will be encouraged to begin compiling and disseminating annual vital statistics reports based on their civil registration records. Selected countries (Egypt, Kenya, Namibia and Senegal) that have made strides to generate annual reports are expected to identify successes and the key challenges and barriers that they face to produce and disseminate vital statistics from civil registration systems; in addition, they will be expected to identify key actions that countries need to take to effectively tackle those challenges, and to suggest recommendations that will be presented for the ministerial meeting. Their recommendations will be useful for other countries that intend to start generating reports, the APAI-CRVS secretariat, the Regional Core Group and other development partners.

### **IV. Issues for discussion**

(a) What measures can countries take to improve national coordination mechanisms, strengthen collaboration, improve advocacy for resource allocation and enhance working arrangements among key CRVS stakeholders, in particular civil registration offices, national statistics offices and health information systems, as partners in the production of civil registration-based vital statistics?

(b) How can countries improve the quality of their civil registration records and vital statistics, including with regard to timely registration, the accuracy of vital records and the transmission of records to national statistics offices or offices generating vital statistics?

(c) What policy and legal framework reviews are required to institutionalize the regular production and dissemination of vital statistics from civil registration systems?

(d) How could information technology and innovations help to improve the compilation and dissemination of vital statistics, including statistics on deaths and the causes of death and information on marriages and divorces, to meet the requirements of many of the health-related indicators of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 targets, in particular those that require an emergency response?

(e) How would countries integrate their annual production and dissemination of vital statistics into, and provide support for, national strategies for the development of statistics?

(f) What types of technical support, capacity-building efforts and country support, in the spirit of South-South cooperation, should the APAI-CRVS secretariat facilitate for countries in their efforts to move more quickly to improve the production and dissemination of vital statistics from their civil registration systems?

---