



**Fourth Conference of African Ministers  
responsible for Civil Registration  
Experts meeting  
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## **Vital Statistics from Civil Registration Records**

**Issue paper**



**APAI-CRVS**  
Everyone visible in Africa

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



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## I. Background

1. Civil registration is an essential administrative system in modern society. The civil registry provides individuals with the essential legal documents required to secure their basic human rights to name, identity, nationality and civil rights and access to social services. A well-functioning civil registration system is crucial for creating inclusive societies, ensuring proper delivery of public services, protecting human rights and tackling inequalities. The civil registration system not only equips individuals with the legal documents of vital events, it is also a source of data essential for good governance, policy planning and monitoring on national and subnational levels. Comprehensive, accurate and timely vital statistics are also important for monitoring and reporting regularly on the progress towards achieving the globally agreed 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and implementing the regional Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, which calls for a united, prosperous and peaceful Africa.

2. A complete and accurate civil registration system is the most preferred source of vital statistics for estimating annual changes in population size and structure, and for planning and monitoring social programmes, such as health, education and population interventions. Most countries with no civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems rely on infrequent and expensive population censuses and sample surveys as sources of vital statistics. Although population censuses provide data at the lowest possible administrative areas, they are only conducted every 10 years or so in all African countries. They are also expensive, compared with other data sources. Sample surveys have limited value when it comes to obtaining data disaggregated by lower administrative units. Birth and death data compiled continuously from the civil registration system are used to determine population estimates during the intercensal period and for population projections. Health intervention programmes cannot be efficiently planned and implemented unless there are data on how many people are dying, where and of what diseases. Information on how many children are born in each village and town is required in order to plan and carry out school education programmes.

3. Compiling and analysing vital statistics from the civil registration system is also crucial for the improvement of the registration system itself. These vital statistics data help to advance the CRVS improvement agenda on various levels. For local registration offices, the vital statistics report informs their daily activities by evaluating completeness and quality of their registration records. At national level, it provides data about the state of civil registration systems nationwide and it is useful for advocating for more resources or attention, which can go towards improving the systems at the highest level. This is why, at the third session of the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, the African ministers recommended countries to “analyse and disseminate statistics from civil registration regardless of the level of completeness as a means to establish the state of the system and its development”.<sup>1</sup> The production and availability of vital statistics from civil registration systems are key steps in building capacity in the countries, while also accelerating and informing the improvement of the whole system. Accordingly, there is a need to initiate the process, even with the registration level of many countries still not allowing for the production of high-quality statistics for a few years to come.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, *Yamoussoukro Declaration*, p. 4. Available at [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/crvs/Global\\_CRVS\\_Docs/news/ThirdConf\\_resolutions.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/crvs/Global_CRVS_Docs/news/ThirdConf_resolutions.pdf).

4. Notwithstanding the numerous advantages of producing and disseminating vital statistics from civil registration records, only a few countries in Africa regularly produce and publish vital statistics reports based on civil registration data. The results of the regional monitoring system of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registrations and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) indicated that only in half of the countries, the civil registration law defines the responsibilities for processing and transmitting vital events records to the office entrusted with compiling national vital statistics. Out of the 39 countries that have completed monitoring forms, 25 reported to have compiled birth and death statistics, but only 15 countries published their annual vital statistics report regularly. Only 10 countries compiled statistics from their marriage and divorce registrations. In general, there is a wide variation among countries: some have started compiling vital statistics but have not published reports, a few publish their annual vital statistics reports, while others have not started compiling vital statistics from their civil registration systems. Statistics on deaths and causes of death are lagging behind in the region. Only a few countries compile cause of death in their vital statistics as many of the countries perform poorly on medical certification of cause of death.

5. The most important reasons for not publishing and disseminating a vital statistics report include the low level of registration completeness, lack of coordination between civil registration offices and national statistics offices, and delayed transmission of records to the office compiling vital statistics.

6. Some African countries lack statistical skills, which brings about the technical challenge of implementing vital statistics data management and analysis, and evaluating the quality of civil registration records. To strengthen the capacity of African countries to produce vital statistics from their civil registration records, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in collaboration with the Regional Core Group, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and Statistics Norway, developed the “Guidelines and template for developing vital statistics report”. In addition, ECA and its partners developed a trainers’ manual on the production of vital statistics from civil registration records, and conducted capacity-building training workshops.

7. Recently, a regional training workshop on vital statistics was conducted from 2 to 6 October 2017, in Nairobi, to strengthen national capacity in producing and disseminating vital statistics and evaluating the quality of national CRVS systems based on the above-mentioned guidelines and template. There were 27 participants from eight countries<sup>2</sup> attending the training workshop, which was an opportunity for them to create country-level collaboration between civil registration offices and national statistics offices, and for sharing country experiences. The participants acknowledged that each country had various levels of experience; some had already produced vital statistics reports, while others had limited experience in analysing their civil registration data for statistical purposes. Participants from more advanced countries provided support to those countries with less experience. The workshop was, therefore, successful as it helped to strengthen South–South cooperation.

8. The training is part of a broader programme that includes two sequential hands-on and output-oriented training workshops and follow-up technical support with trainees and participating countries over several months. The aim is to build the sustainable capacity of member States to equip them with essential methods and tools to produce vital statistics reports

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<sup>2</sup> Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

from civil registration records. The ultimate goal is for countries to publish annual vital statistics reports regularly.

## **II. Objective of the session**

9. The objective of the session is to reiterate the importance of generating regular vital statistics based on civil registration records, even in countries that continue to have low registration coverage and completeness. Countries will be encouraged to begin compiling and disseminating annual vital statistics reports based on their civil registration records. Participants will be expected to identify key challenges and barriers that countries may 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. The recommendations are useful for the APAI-CRVS secretariat, the Regional Core Group and other development partners to provide countries with technical support on vital statistics.

## **III. Issues for discussion**

10. In the light of the above, the following questions should be used as the basis of discussions:

(a) What measures can countries take to improve national coordination mechanisms, to strengthen collaboration and working arrangements among key CRVS stakeholders, in particular the civil registration office, national statistics office and health information system, in the production of civil registration-based vital statistics?

(b) How can countries improve the quality of civil registration records and vital statistics, including timely registration, accuracy of vital records and transmitting records to the national statistics office?

(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 would information technology and other innovations help to improve the compiling and dissemination of vital statistics, including statistics on deaths and causes of death information to meet the requirement 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 support) National Strategies for the Development of Statistics?

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

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