

Meeting of Experts for the Fifth Conference
of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration
Lusaka, 14-16 October 2019

CRMC5/EXP/2019/29/Rev.1

Report of the Meeting of Experts

Conference theme

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

(UNEDITED VERSION)



APAI-CRVS
Everyone visible in Africa

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

I. Introduction

1. The Meeting of Experts of the fifth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration was held at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre in Lusaka, Zambia from 14 to 16 October 2019. The meeting was organized by the African Union Commission in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Zambia with the support of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB).

II. Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following Member States: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, the Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

3. The following institutions supported and attended the meeting: United Nations (United Nations Statistics Division and the United Nations Legal Identity Expert Group – UN LIEG), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank; Africa Centers for Disease (Africa CDC), Bloomberg Data for Health Initiative, Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, Plan International, ID4Africa, Global Financing Facility, Development Initiative, Paris21 and iCivil Africa, Statistics Sweden and Statistics Norway.

III. Session I: Opening session

A. Opening of the meeting

4. The representative of AfDB underscored that the Bank had been playing a critical role in implementing the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (APAI-CRVS), which was a key part of its overall statistical capacity-building programme for African countries. Noting the progress made over the past decade for the improvement of CRVS on the continent, he highlighted some challenges and commended efforts by all stakeholders to create awareness and knowledge about the importance of CRVS and secure national identity systems for socioeconomic policymaking. The speaker stressed the need for scaling up efforts towards modernizing and digitizing CRVS systems across Africa. He concluded by reiterating the commitment of AfDB to support member States in their efforts to address the remaining challenges that continued to plague CRVS systems on the continent. The speaker reiterated that AfDB would continue to support the secretariat of APAI-CRVS so that it could continue to provide effective technical support to countries.

5. The representative of ECA noted that civil registration was the foundation of legal identity, a universal requirement articulated in Sustainable Development Goal 16, target 16.9, "[to] provide legal identity for all, including birth registration". It was pointed out, however, that in many countries, the identification process was fragmented. The speaker identified two challenges: the lack of coordination between civil registration and identity; and multiple

overlapping and incompatible identity systems. He noted that, according to recent data, improvements for CRVS needed to be done in a coordinated and holistic way, and referred to the expectation that, by 2030, the use of digital identity for authentication would lead to an average potential benefit per country of roughly 6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). He further noted that ECA identified CRVS as an essential administrative system in modern society. In that regard, he highlighted the significant progress registered on the implementation of APAI-CRVS, including: (a) the operationalization of the resolutions of the Nouakchott Declaration; (b) improved staffing levels of the ECA secretariat; and (c) the strengthened commitment across the continent to conducting a comprehensive assessment of CRVS systems in member States. He appealed to development partners and private sector working in CRVS and digital identity management to continue to cooperate and collaborate with APAI-CRVS.

6. The Commissioner for Economic Affairs of the African Union Commission welcomed all participants on behalf of the African Union Commission and stressed that civil registration data were essential for a functional and people-centred integration process that aimed to improve well-being, promote job creation, and market expansion through trade, free movement, and labour mobility. He noted that at the continental level, digital transformation was positioned among the top priorities of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He alluded to the concrete achievements of the implementation of APAI-CRVS, adding that over a third of the world's forcibly displaced persons lived in Africa, and that conflicts, poor governance and natural disasters were the cause of their displacement. In order to ensure universality, African Union member States needed to continue strengthening and expanding ongoing efforts to ensure that forcibly displaced and stateless persons had access to civil registration and were included in national vital statistics systems. He reiterated that the African Union Commission continues to support member States in their efforts for improved CRVS systems.

7. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of the Republic of Zambia, Dr. Liya Mutale, welcomed all participants to the conference. After defining civil registration, she underlined that the development and strengthening of CRVS systems were important for improving the quality of a country's vital statistics and for generating information for evidence-based policymaking. She highlighted the efforts of the Government of Zambia in the implementation of the Integrated National Registration System, through the collection of biometric data and issuance of birth certificates and electronic identity cards, as legal documents. She highlighted the need to link civil registration and legal identity management and emphasized the need to ensure that both systems were well developed. She concluded with the observation that civil registration and digital identity systems were crucial components in efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the ambitions enshrined in Agenda 2063, and to meet the targets outlined in national development plans.

B. Election of the Bureau

8. The Bureau was elected as follows:

Chair:	Zambia — Southern Africa
First Vice-Chair:	Kenya — East Africa
Second Vice-Chair:	Chad — Central Africa
Third Vice-Chair:	Sierra Leone — West Africa
Rapporteur:	Mauritania — North Africa

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

9. The agenda was adopted without any amendments.

D. Objectives of the meeting

10. A representative of the secretariat gave a brief overview of the objective of the fifth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration. She underlined that the main objective of the conference was 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 implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda, in particular, Sustainable Development Goal 16, target 16.9. She noted that the priority was a strengthened commitment to CRVS systems and to a legal identity for all in Africa.

E. Report on progress pursuant to the ministerial declarations and on the status of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) in Africa

11. The representative of the secretariat outlined the progress made in the implementation of APAI-CRVS over the past two years and the commitments made by the African Ministers responsible for civil registration. Experts were briefed on the following matters: institutionalization of the Conference of African Ministers; establishment of the Regional Core Group on CVRS; promoting collaboration between key actors of national CRVS systems; digitization of CVRS systems; improvement in death registration and mortality statistics; producing vital statistics from civil registration records; support to countries in conducting comprehensive assessments of CRVS systems and the development of strategic improvement plans and promotion of knowledge sharing.

IV. Session 2: Civil registration as the foundation for legal identity systems

12. Five presentations were made on the following topics: (a) UN Legal Identity Agenda; (b) taking a holistic approach to legal identity: good practice from integrating CRVS and identity systems around the world; (c) the importance of CRVS and identity management for durable solutions for refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees; (d) the state of CRVS and national identity management in Africa; and (e) integrating CRVS systems and legal identity management in the digital era.

13. The first presentation provided an introduction to the UN Legal Identity Agenda, launched in May 2019. The premise of the UN Legal Identity Agenda is that everyone is recognized as a person before the law, as enshrined in Article 6 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Article 16 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. The UN Legal Identity Agenda presents a United Nations recommended model of a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics, and identity management. It was noted that, key to the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda and, in particular, Sustainable Development Goal 16, target 16.9, is the commitment to leaving no one behind. In addition, it was noted that the UN Legal Identity Agenda supports Sustainable Development Goal 17, target 17.19 on statistical capacity-building in Africa.

14. The second presentation focused on the importance of sharing experiences in CRVS and identity systems, in order for African countries to take advantage of the progress made and good practices around the world. The presenter underscored the need for a holistic approach to civil

registration as a means to build and operate sustainable identity systems for evidence-based decision-making. It was observed that the Centre of Excellence in CRVS provided a knowledge hub on CRVS and had developed a Compendium of Good Practices on CRVS.

15. The third presentation discussed the relevance of civil registration for refugees, with perspectives provided on ways of dealing with the root causes of displacement, responding to the protection and material needs of this population group, and finding sustainable solutions at the individual, national, regional and continental levels. It was indicated that there were approximately 24 million distressed persons categorized as refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees. It was agreed that it was the sovereign responsibility of the host country to register these population groups.

16. The fourth presentation was on monitoring CRVS activities around the world, focusing on data from household surveys conducted every five years at the national level. It was noted that the sources of such information were not necessarily reliable.

17. The fifth presentation indicated that, in Africa almost half of the continent's population remained "invisible" in the sense that they lacked the documents necessary for them to obtain a legal identity. It was noted that the implication of invisibility of individuals was the exclusion of the poor from the benefits of national development and social welfare protection.

18. The observation was made that the CRVS system was fundamental to the establishment of legal identity, which was crucial to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16, target 16.9. It was emphasized that the identity of an individual should start at birth and be maintained throughout the life cycle from birth to death, including vital events in between such as marriage and divorce. Birth registration and the issuance of birth certificates were identified as a game changer to protect the rights of children and their access to social services such as health, education, employment and eligibility for acquiring a national identity, and for voting when they reach eligible age. It was underlined that a holistic approach to legal identity involved the interoperable system between civil registration, vital statistics and national identification, all of which were linked by a unique identity number issued at birth and used throughout the life of an individual.

Recommendations

19. In the light of the discussions, the following recommendations were proposed:

- (a) Encourage Member States to implement the UN Legal Identity Agenda;
- (b) Call upon Member States to establish integrated and interoperable registration and identity linked with a unique identifier number to bring efficiency in the provision of services across different government functions and private sectors;
- (c) Encourage Member States to scale-up investment in digitization to facilitate interoperability of government functions;
- (d) Call upon member States to strengthen the collaboration between national statistical offices and all relevant institutions involved in civil registration and legal identity management;
- (e) Call upon member States to effectively implement the 1969 OAU Convention on Specific Aspects of Refugees in Africa, the AU Convention on IDP and other Human Rights

Laws. These frameworks highlight the primary role and responsibility of the member States, which need to be enhanced. The objective is to reduce their dependency on UNHCR and other partners for protection and assistance, including CRVS of refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees, and particularly children born from single parents;

(f) Request ECA to strengthen its existing online monitoring framework for tracking progress made at national and regional levels regarding civil registration and vital statistics and share the outputs with the African Union Commission and AfDB;

(g) Call upon AUC, in collaboration with ECA and AfDB, including the Core Group, other partners, and the private sector should create a knowledge platform as a priority for sharing experiences and success stories to strengthen their CRVS and identity systems;

(h) Request AUC and ECA to support countries in harmonizing legislations governing the civil registration and digital identity management including interoperability of systems;

(i) Request AfDB to support countries and the APAI-CRVS Secretariat through its financing mechanisms as well as resource mobilization efforts.

V. Session 3: Innovative approaches in CRVS systems improvement

Presentation

20. In this session, representatives of the UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa and the World Bank gave presentations on two items: (a) CRVS digitization and innovation: an Eastern Africa and Southern Africa perspective; and (b) electronic CRVS systems: what countries need to consider in the modernization process. Experts were briefed on assessments that were conducted in seven countries in Eastern Africa and Southern Africa. The meeting also took note of the advantages and disadvantages of using tailor-made software and commercial, off-the-shelf software in managing CRVS systems.

Recommendations

21. In the light of the discussion, the following recommendations were made:

(a) Encourage Member States to apply a process-centric approach to assess, analyse and redesign CRVS business processes to improve overall efficiency, and, where digital solutions are deemed appropriate, to ensure platforms are fit-for-purpose; standards are compliant, locally configurable and administrable, and avoid vendor lock-in; and are financially sustainable with a clear total cost of ownership;

(b) Encourage member States to consider decentralizing registration systems to improve coverage;

(c) Request the African Union Commission, in collaboration with ECA, and other partners to finalize the digital transformation strategy that includes information on cost-effective hosting options such as cloud services and disseminate it to member States.

VI. Session 4: Reviewing progress and implementation challenges

22. Presentations were provided on the sub-items of the agenda, as follows: (a) civil registration in emergencies — recommendations and guidelines for implementation; (b) the CRVS systems improvement framework; (c) guidelines for drafting memorandums of understanding for better coordination among national stakeholders of CRVS systems at country level; (d) a snapshot of CRVS systems prepared for 12 African countries; and (e) integrating mortality surveillance to strengthen CRVS systems.

Recommendations

23. After discussions, the following recommendations were proposed:

(a) Encourage member States to utilize the guidelines for drafting memoranda of understanding to improve the coordination of stakeholders in their efforts to improve CRVS systems;

(b) Request AUC and Africa CDC to provide guidance and support to Member States to mobilize resources for strengthening mortality surveillance systems and CRVS;

(c) Request ECA, the Centre of Excellence and Vital Strategies to finalize the process-centric CRVS systems improvement framework, and pilot in at least two countries, including organizing training workshops to develop capacity;

(d) Request ECA to organize training workshops on the implementation of the guidelines for drafting memorandums of understanding, recognizing the need to upgrade the skills of professionals working in the areas of civil registration and legal identity;

(e) Request ECA and the Centre of Excellence for CRVS to regularly update the online snapshots of CRVS documents in collaboration with respective countries, to keep pace with the changing CRVS landscape and scale up to cover all Member States.

VII. Session 5: Towards accelerated improvement of CRVS systems in African countries

Parallel session 5.1

24. Three sessions were organized under the titles: (a) marriage and divorce registration in Africa: a neglected yet important component of a fully functional CRVS system; (b) potentials of data linkages from CRVS and other systems in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals: the case of road safety; and (c) strengthening linkages between civil registration and the health sector for better health and improved civil registration systems: the case of Liberia and Uganda.

Recommendations

25. In the light of the discussions, the following recommendations were proposed:

(a) Encourage Member States to ensure that civil, customary, and religious marriages and divorces are registered;

(b) Encourage Member States to publish routinely vital statistics from the civil registration records of births, marriages, divorces and deaths including causes of death, even if incomplete, and this should be adopted as a strategy for strengthening CRVS systems;

(c) Member States are encouraged to establish functional mechanisms for the harmonization of data to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3, target 3.6, aiming to halve the number of deaths from road traffic accidents by 2020;

(d) Call upon member States to strengthen the collaboration with stakeholders involved in the collection of road traffic data, in particular in regard to CRVS, the health sector, police, judiciary, and civil societies;

(e) Call upon Member States to institutionalize the link between the agencies in charge of civil registration and, health sector to ensure that births and deaths are officially registered.

Parallel session 5.2

Presentations

26. During this parallel session, member States and representatives of the secretariat gave presentations and discussed the following sub-items: (a) vital statistics from civil registration records and their relevance in monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals; (b) good practices in linking CRVS and identity management systems: case studies from around the world; and (c) an evaluation of the completeness and quality of civil registration systems and the production of vital statistics reports.

Recommendations

27. Following the discussions, experts proposed the following recommendations:

(a) Call upon Member States, with the support of AUC, ECA, and other development partners to sustain capacity-building at all levels to improve the production and dissemination of vital statistics from civil registration systems;

(b) Member States are encouraged to finance the production and dissemination of vital statistics, with a view to ensuring sustainability;

(c) Call upon Member States to develop a holistic identity system that uses the civil register, including all vital events as the source of identity data for issuance of identification credentials and identity management;

(d) Encourage Member States to strengthen training of lower administrative civil registration officers to improve quality and coverage of civil registration and produce vital statistics;

(e) Encourage Member States to provide good quality civil registration-based vital statistics in support of Agenda 2063, the 2030 Agenda and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD@25).

Parallel session 5.3

Presentations

28. The following sub-items were the areas of focus of this parallel session: (a) digitization of CRVS: towards information and communications technology assets for CRVS in Africa; (b) the iCIVIL technological solution; and (c) the electronic birth and death registration system in Egypt.

Recommendation

29. In the light of the discussions, experts proposed the following recommendation:

Member States are encouraged to share lessons and experience among themselves when embarking on a digital system to improve their CRVS systems.

Parallel session 5.4

Presentations

30. This session centred on the discussion of three sub-items: (a) assessing and strengthening medicolegal death investigation systems to improve accuracy and completeness of vital statistics; (b) pathways to obtaining good-quality cause of death information in Africa; and (c) death certification curriculum and infographic tutorials for physicians.

Recommendations

31. In the light of the discussion, the following recommendations were proposed:

(a) Encourage Member States to develop a plan to implementing ICD 11 using WHO guidelines;

(b) Encourage Member States to develop a roadmap to a high quality Cause of Death infographic tool prepared by WHO and adapt it where possible into country contexts;

(c) Member States are encouraged to improve the recording of deaths and causes of death to a public health imperative, to monitor progress on the Sustainable Development Goals;

(d) Request AUC to work with Member States and development partners to build capacity in order to produce mortality and cause of death information in support of Africa CDC Mortality Surveillance Programme.

Parallel session 5.5

Presentations

32. During this parallel session, organizations and member States shared their experiences on three agenda sub-items: (a) from legal to service-oriented identity: building identity ecosystems for development; (b) CRVS for better migration data; (c) UN Legal Identity Agenda: fulfils promise to leave no one behind.

Recommendations

33. In the light of the discussions, experts proposed the following recommendations:

- (a) Encourage member States to develop a holistic identity system that uses the civil register as a foundation for up-to-date legal identity characteristics;
- (b) The AUC, with the support of Statistics Sweden, Statistics Norway, and other development partners, should provide technical assistance to member States, regional economic communities and African Union Organs for the improvement of the registration of the migrants in the civil registration system;
- (c) The African Union Commission should encourage cooperation between member States for the improvement of the registration of the migrants in the civil registration system;
- (d) Request the UN Legal Identity Task Group to support the implementation of the UN Legal Identity Agenda, which ensures a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics, and identity management;
- (e) Request ECA to scale-up efforts by increasing the number of current pilot countries participating in the UN Legal Identity Agenda programme, in order for all countries in Africa to benefit from it in the shortest time possible taking into account equitable geographical distribution.

VIII. Session 6: Interim Committee of Registrars General: updates on activities

34. The Chair of the Interim Committee of Registrars General requested the African Union Commission to provide an update on the operationalization of the Sub-Committee on Civil Registration within the relevant Specialized Technical Committee, in accordance with the existing Rules of Procedures of the African Union.

35. It was noted that the Department of Economic Affairs was working closely with the Office of the Legal Counsel for an effective implementation of the Sub-Committee within the overall legal framework of the African Union. The meeting further sought clarifications as to whether the Specialized Technical Committee on Finance, Monetary Affairs, Economic Planning and Integration is the relevant Specialized Technical Committee to accommodate the Sub-Committee on Civil Registration.

Recommendations:

36. Following the discussions, the recommendations proposed were as follows:

- (a) The meeting requested the Department of Economic Affairs to table the issue of the Sub-Committee on Civil Registration to the fourth Specialized Technical Committee on Finance with a view to accelerating its full operationalization;
- (b) Member States encouraged the AUC and ECA to continue working for the implementation of the existing programmes, strategies as well as the decade on repositioning CRVS in Africa waiting for the operationalization of the Sub-Committee;

(c) Urge ECA to continue to support the work of the Interim Committee of Registrars General pending institutionalization of the Sub-Committee under relevant STC.

IX. Session 7: Leveraging partnerships in CRVS systems improvement initiatives

37. Presentations were made by representatives of AfDB, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, Centre of Excellence for CRVS and the Global Financing Fund.

38. It was noted that AfDB is the main financial sponsor of statistical capacity in Africa, particularly in the areas of data collection, CRVS, production of tools and guides, and technical assistance to countries. AfDB reiterated its commitment to support the improvement of CRVS systems across the continent.

39. The representative of UNFPA confirmed that the Fund was committed to strengthening its support for the improvement of vital statistics in Africa. With regard to the data for development nexus, its engagement was reaffirmed to support data development through the registration and analysis of marriages and divorces. UNFPA announced that it will host an event in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development in Africa, to take place in Nairobi from 12 to 14 November 2019. This event will be an opportunity to discuss the issue of CRVS improvement.

40. The representative of UNHCR recalled the mandate of UNHCR to contribute to the development and dissemination of statistics of refugees, returnees, forcibly displaced peoples, and stateless people. The speaker expressed the willingness on the part of UNHCR to continue supporting member States to improve their CRVS systems and recalled the development in 2019, in collaboration with the World Bank, of a data centre on forced displacement data.

41. The representative of UNICEF stated, as an active member of the APAI-CRVS Core Group, that the institution would step up its support to member States in the area of the registration of births and deaths, with the objective of improving identity management systems. The speaker also emphasized the importance of the health sector in maintaining an interoperability system. The importance of domestic resources to support the improvement of CRVS was also identified as key to sustainable CRVS systems.

42. The representative of WHO observed that an improved CRVS system was key to promoting health. A commitment to support member States was made in the areas of death registration and the registration of causes of deaths. The speaker described the launch of guidelines, in collaboration with UNICEF, on the contribution of the health sector in the improvement of CRVS systems.

43. The representative of the Centre of Excellence reiterated the commitment of the Centre to being a global hub of knowledge generation and delivery in the area of CRVS. The speaker provided insights into the current development of a knowledge product to enhance CRVS systems.

44. Recalling the commitment to improve the registration of preventable deaths of women and children, the representative of the Global Financing Fund highlighted the financial support it was providing to 10 countries for building improved CRVS systems. The support included technical assistance and coordination, alignment between partners, development of knowledge

products and capacity-building on CRVS. The speaker noted that there was a need for member States to allocate specific funds and invest in CRVS systems at the national level.

Recommendation

45. In the light of the discussions, the following recommendation was proposed:

Urge development partners to continue supporting improvement of CRVS and national identity systems in Member States, regional, and continental levels.

X. Session 8: Conclusions and adoption of the report

46. The report of the Meeting of Experts was adopted with amendments.

XI. Closing of the meeting

47. In the closing session, Experts requested AUC and ECA to conduct a mid-term review of the implementation of the adopted recommendations

48. In her closing remarks, the Chairperson of the Experts' Meeting thanked participants for their fruitful contributions. She reminded that the resolutions should be seriously considered and implemented to the extent possible. She declared the meeting closed.
