



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

CRMCS/2019/5

Progress made pursuant to the Ministerial Declarations

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. Introduction

1. The Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) is being implemented on the basis of the policy and programmatic guidance provided by the African Ministers responsible for civil registration through the resolutions adopted at the previous three Conferences of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration. At the First Conference of African Ministers, held in Addis Ababa in 2010, the Ministers recognized CRVS as a development imperative for Africa and made clear commitments to improving it in their countries. At the Second Conference, held in Durban, South Africa, in 2012, the Ministers recommended specific and practical steps for achieving complete and efficient CRVS systems. They tasked the three pan-African institutions, namely, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank (AfDB), with supporting APAI-CRVS and called upon other development partners to take part in the regional initiative. The Third Conference was held in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire on 12 and 13 February 2015. The African Union Commission, with the support of ECA, AfDB and Mauritania, organized the Fourth Conference in Nouakchott, Mauritania, on 7 and 8 December 2017.

2. At the four Conferences of African Ministers, African experts deliberated and made recommendations to the Ministers on various issues pertinent to the improvement of CRVS systems on the continent. Some of those issues included the need for capacity-building; coordination among national stakeholders; partnership with the health sector; improved accessibility; review of the legislative CRVS framework; adequate human and financial resources for CRVS programmes; monitoring and evaluation of the regional initiative and country programmes; the need for research on specific subjects, in particular on how to improve death registration and the collection of cause-of-death information in Africa; and the use of information and communications technology solutions.

3. The present report reviews the progress made in the implementation of APAI-CRVS over the past two years against the commitments made by the African Ministers responsible for civil registration. The actions taken or initiated in response to the declarations made at the previous Conferences are summarized in annex I. These are intended to draw attention to emerging issues.

II. Key achievements and progress made

Institutionalization of the Conference of African Ministers

4. The Conference of African Ministers was institutionalized as a standing forum of the African Union Commission and was approved during the nineteenth ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, held in Addis Ababa in July 2012, on the recommendation of the Joint Annual Meetings of the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the African Union Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance. In line with the recommendations of these high-level bodies, the Third Conference of African Ministers was held in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, on 12 and 13 February 2015, on the theme of "Promoting the use of civil registration and vital statistics in support of good governance in Africa". It was the first to be held under the auspices of the African Union Commission. The Fourth Conference of Ministers was held under the theme: "Accelerating a coordinated improvement of civil registration and vital statistics for implementation and monitoring development in Africa: review of progress and

the way forward". The Conference was supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Health Organization (WHO), Plan International, INDEPTH Network, Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century and the secretariat of African Symposium on Statistical Development. The Fifth Conference, in addition to convening all African Ministers responsible for civil registration, will also invite Ministers of Health, in accordance with resolutions adopted at the Second Ministerial Conference, which was attended by Heads of Civil Registration Offices and Heads of National Statistics Offices, representatives of regional and international organizations, including United Nations agencies, and representatives of selected non-governmental organizations. To date, the various Conferences have discussed possible ways of making strategic shifts to move APAI-CRVS to the next level of maturity by taking stock of its achievements so far and the challenges encountered.

Regional Core Group on civil registration and vital statistics

5. APAI-CRVS is supported by the Regional Core Group on CRVS, formed by key actors on the continent (i.e., pan-African institutions, agencies of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations), working together under a common framework. Established in 2011, the Regional Core Group is intended to harmonize approaches, harness synergies and thus help to avoid duplication of effort, as well as providing technical and financial support to APAI-CRVS. The Group arrangement is being formalized through a memorandum of understanding that will ensure more sustainable engagement by partners in the implementation of the continental programme.

6. The following organizations are members of the Regional Core Group: the African Union Commission, ECA, AfDB, the secretariat of the African Symposium on Statistical Development, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, UNHCR, the Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative, INDEPTH Network, Plan International, and Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century.

7. There are ongoing efforts to establish a committee of African Registrars General, aimed at strengthening and supporting the work of the Conference of Ministers. There is a need for an intergovernmental process to sustain the momentum and accelerate progress in the development of CRVS statistics. This process, which would entail deliberating on important related issues and working with APAI-CRVS, can be achieved by establishing a committee of representative governmental institutions entrusted with the registration of vital events in the countries – namely, a committee of African Registrars General. The establishment of an intergovernmental body based on the noble commitment to change CRVS in Africa will have many benefits. Such a committee will ensure that Africa has a common voice and position in determining civil registration issues and that government officials work with other key stakeholders in addressing common challenges. The committee, working with APAI-CRVS, will ensure the implementation of recommendations of the Conference of Ministers. It will also advise on the strategic direction of the work of pan-African organizations regarding the development of CRVS systems and the implementation of related activities. It will also serve as a forum to discuss new innovations and technologies and emerging issues. Equally, a Task Force Meeting on the Establishment of the Commission of African Registrars General was held from 17 to 20 October 2017 in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. The Meeting was organized by the Regional Core Group on CRVS.

Promoting collaboration between key actors of national civil registration and vital statistics systems

8. Following the recommendations of the Conferences of African Ministers, one of the guiding principles of APAI-CRVS is to promote systematic and coordinated approaches and partnerships at the national and regional levels.

9. The Third and Fourth Conferences of African Ministers, held in Côte d'Ivoire and Mauritania in 2015 and 2017, respectively, were attended by the Ministers of Health of several member States and contributed to strengthening the partnership between the civil registration offices and Ministries of Health.

10. In order to encourage the formalization and sustainability of these collaborations, in September 2013, ECA wrote to all countries recommending them to establish a high-level coordination committee to provide oversight for all CRVS systems assessment and improvement planning exercises, and also thereafter at the time of implementation. To date, most countries (at least those that have conducted or are conducting assessments) have established these committees and technical working groups to oversee their national CRVS systems improvement programmes. ECA has also conducted the monitoring and evaluation of the CRVS systems in the countries and this has been presented in the form of a report.

III. Capacity-building

Digitization of civil registration and vital statistics systems

11. The African Regional Core Group has continued to carry out its mandate of providing technical guidance and building the capacities of African countries in the management and operation of CRVS systems. Following the declaration of the third Conference of African Ministers, APAI-CRVS prioritized the need for comprehensive guidelines to support countries intending to digitize their CRVS processes. The CRVS Digitization Guidebook has been developed by the Regional Core Group under the technical leadership of Plan International, supported by ECA and AfDB in collaboration with country experts in Africa. Jembi Health Systems from South Africa provided technical support as the consultant organization. The Guidebook is intended to remain a living resource, including reusable assets and case studies that will continue to evolve and expand over time, and is available online (www.crvs-dgb.org). The Guidebook will be used to train country experts on digitization. Training was held in Cape Town, South Africa, from 28 August to 1 September 2017. ECA, in partnership with the World Bank, also organized CRVS training of trainers for Francophone countries at a workshop that took place from 16 to 25 July 2018 in Dakar, Senegal.

Improvement in death registration and mortality statistics

12. African countries face considerable challenges in developing health interventions and building health systems, measuring and monitoring mortality and reporting against national and global development mortality goals and targets. Death registration levels in most African countries are abysmally low, and the recording and compilation of causes-of-death is almost non-existent. At their Third Conference, held in February 2015, African Ministers took note of the situation and called upon WHO and pan-African organizations to take urgent steps to support African States in establishing real-time death registration and cause-of-death information systems. ECA and WHO have jointly developed an Africa mortality statistics

strategy (2016–2020) to directly deal with this ministerial call for action. The overarching objective is to make readily available continuous, harmonized, quality mortality and cause-of-death data and statistics for African countries, guiding the development of better planned, designed and integrated mortality systems. Following a meeting on development of the strategy, held in Addis Ababa in August 2015, a meeting of experts on mortality statistics was held in Cairo, Egypt to discuss the five-year mortality statistics strategy for systematic improvement of regional and country mortality registration and statistics in Africa, especially in the context of improving CRVS systems and developing a pool of experts on the improvement in mortality statistics as part of the CRVS initiative.

13. One of the key challenges facing countries in Africa is the lack of guidance on how to improve death registration, in particular when the majority of deaths occur outside medical institutions. In order to deal with this issue, ECA, with the support of the Regional Core Group, has undertaken the development of a practical guide to design and implement the most appropriate business processes for death registration. This would cover the entire CRVS value chain, beginning from notification of death and ending in compilation and dissemination of death statistics. A workshop was held in Lusaka, Zambia to seek input from African countries and validate the proposed structure of the guide.

14. In addition to the practical guide on the improvement of death registration and cause-of-death processes, it was realized that there is a need for further in-depth research in the form of country case studies on current practices in death registration and cause-of-death processes. The result of this research should complement the guide in presenting good practices and giving examples of bottlenecks in the death registration and cause-of-death processes in various settings, and contribute to guiding countries in developing a business process best suited for their specific settings. Both a practical guide and a research template are under development. A workshop on the operation of CRVS and identity management systems and the production of vital statistics reports, for the Eastern Mediterranean region countries, Casablanca and Morocco, was held from 19 to 23 March 2018.

Producing vital statistics from civil registration records

15. A regional training workshop was held from 2 to 6 October 2017 in Nairobi, Kenya to strengthen the capacity of member States to produce vital statistics from civil registration systems and assess the quality of data and statistics of civil registration systems using guidelines and templates for vital statistics reporting.

IV. Supporting countries in conducting comprehensive assessments of civil registration and vital statistics systems and the development of strategic improvement plans

16. At the Second Conference of African Ministers, specific recommendations were made requesting all African countries to urgently undertake comprehensive assessments of their CRVS systems and to develop national action plans to improve or strengthen those systems on the basis of the findings of the assessments. The Ministers also called upon the Regional Core Group to provide the technical and financial support necessary to countries. In response to this call, the Group developed a set of resource documents to guide countries in conducting their assessments and developing their action plans. The documents include a comprehensive assessment tool for the CRVS system, guidelines on how to undertake CRVS comprehensive

assessments, a guideline for strategic planning and a facilitator's handbook for strategic planning. These documents are already available online for use by countries (see www.apai-crvs.org/resources) and will continue to be updated regularly on the basis of inputs received from users.

17. Owing to the differences between CRVS systems in English and French-speaking countries, the ECA Subregional Office for West Africa in Niamey was requested to lead the French-speaking countries in the implementation of APAI-CRVS. Technical CRVS materials were translated and aligned to suit the French pattern of CRVS statistics for effective implementation of the process in French-speaking countries. A Subregional Core Group, made up of the same institutions and based in the Subregional Office, was created in 2013 to serve the specific needs of French-speaking African countries. A regional support group for francophone countries was officially established in February 2015. The Subregional Core Group has carried out CRVS rapid assessments in Cameroon, Chad, Madagascar, Mauritania and Senegal. Comprehensive assessments have also been carried out in Cameroon and Madagascar. Presently, Senegal is undertaking its comprehensive assessments.

18. In a 2019 survey conducted on the status of CRVS in countries, 31 countries had conducted their comprehensive assessments while nearly 65 per cent had in one way or another implemented their strategic plans. The Regional Core Group has contributed immensely to this process by supporting the development of the resource materials required and helping Governments to find funding for the various components of the assessment and planning processes.

19. A workshop entitled “Bloomberg data for health regional orientation and training workshop on enterprise architecture: process mapping for strengthening civil registration and vital statistics design” was held in Kigali from 21 to 23 June 2016. The workshop, co-hosted by the Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative, the Ministry of Health of Rwanda and ECA, trained participants from the Data for Health Initiative countries throughout the African region and was facilitated by experts from the Initiative's implementing partners (Vital Strategies, the University of Melbourne and the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute). During the workshop, participants were introduced to the basic principles of enterprise architecture and business process mapping and acquired the skills needed to apply this system analysis approach to CRVS systems. Business process mapping is proving to be a very effective and efficient tool in facilitating the discussion on the improvement of CRVS systems, not only as an essential step in the assessment process, but also during the planning and implementation of the CRVS reform. Given the usefulness of this approach, it has been decided that business process mapping and enterprise architecture processes should be integrated into the APAI-CRVS process in a more systemic and systematic way. A strategy is being developed in this regard.

Promotion of knowledge-sharing

20. The Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration has recognized the multidisciplinary and multisectoral dimension of CRVS systems and has called for improved partnership efforts at regional and country levels for this purpose. In response to the call, the Regional Core Group has drafted generic guidelines on drafting memorandums of understanding for better coordination among key stakeholders at the country level. These will

accompany existing APAI-CRVS tools and guidelines and help countries to put in place appropriate formal arrangements for sustainable coordination mechanisms.

Establishment of a monitoring framework

21. Responding to the call of African Ministers made in the declaration of their Second Conference in Durban to “develop results-based monitoring and evaluation systems and tools to monitor and report on progress on civil registration and vital statistics”, the APAI-CRVS secretariat developed a framework to document and monitor the progress made by member States in improving their CRVS systems. The monitoring form, to be filled in by a designated focal point from the civil registration office and submitted through the official website, is intended as a tool for annual review of progress on CRVS. Each review will assist in systematically taking stock of the implementation of the CRVS action plan, identifying bottlenecks and taking the corrective measures necessary to accelerate the pace of reform. The review process is envisaged to be consultative in nature, involving the main stakeholders in each country. This monitoring exercise was launched on the APAI-CRVS website in October 2016, and a consolidated annual report will be shared with all civil registration offices at the forthcoming Ministerial Conference. The information will also be used to develop a regional dashboard that will present a more detailed status of progress on various aspects of CRVS in Africa.

V. Challenges

22. Funding for APAI-CRVS, sourced largely from development partners, has been inadequate and ad hoc in nature. The unpredictability of resources has affected its smooth implementation, including sustaining the human resources required to run the APAI-CRVS secretariat. The availability of such funding has critical implications for the success of the regional initiative. It is therefore pertinent for the Ministers to deliberate on this issue and provide strategic guidance.

23. At the country level, the funding for implementing APAI-CRVS should come from Governments, and some countries will require catalytic funds to kick-start implementation.

24. Many African Governments and regional economic communities have embarked on the establishment of national identification systems, including a commitment of substantial resources. Even though national identification systems are indispensable to good governance, their sustainability and robustness can be easily compromised if they are not organically linked to civil registration systems. These systems should essentially be the primary source of breeder documents on birth, death and marriages for national identification systems, which current approaches on the continent fail in large part to recognize and apply. The risk is that Governments and their development partners may divert resources and attention towards building national identification systems without building efficient and complete civil registration systems, which can provide quick solutions but are impossible to sustain in the long term. Under these circumstances, the coordination of donor and development partner interventions is even more important in order to avoid a duplication of efforts and waste of resources.

25. Many countries lack the mechanisms and capacity to routinely monitor the performance of their civil registration systems, and they cannot therefore adequately report on the improvements emerging from their interventions. APAI-CRVS has now put in place a monitoring mechanism at the country level that will ensure the ability to monitor progress on the regional CRVS initiative. Although few countries are participating in the review presently, the mechanism provides the opportunity to conduct an annual review of progress in each country in order to support and inform the ongoing implementation of improvement plans.

26. The country-led process of assessments helps countries to develop their capacities throughout the continent, as there is a need to build a more systematic approach in this regard while integrating new components such as business process management. The Regional Core Group is therefore planning to develop a strategy and action plan, in collaboration with other relevant institutions, for a more sustainable approach to CRVS capacity-building on the continent.

27. Now that more than half of the countries have conducted their assessments and many have developed their plans, it is crucial to support and guide countries in the implementation of their plans and ensure that the plans adopted can bring about real sustainable change. CRVS, by its nature, is multidisciplinary and different types of support are required to accelerate the implementation of the reform of various parts of the system. The Regional Core Group has developed guidance on key areas (such as digitization, mortality statistics and vital statistics). Nevertheless, more support and capacity-building is needed, including building a pool of specialized experts.

28. Analysis of the business processes of CRVS systems was not always properly conducted during the assessment, owing mostly to limited guidance and tools. To deal with this issue, a strategy to determine how to incorporate methods of business process improvement into the APAI-CRVS assessment guidelines and tools is being developed.
