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**Statistical programme of the Economic Commission
for Africa: statutory issues****Report on implementation of civil registration and
vital statistics****I. Introduction**

1. The Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics is a continental initiative that began in 2012 with a view to helping Governments to fast-track improvements to their civil registration and vital statistics systems by providing a systematic and coordinated technical, advocacy and policy framework where needed.

2. The Programme was developed to fulfil the political commitment and policy directive of the ministers responsible for civil registration to reform and improve civil registration and vital statistics systems on the continent. The Programme is guided by a regional civil registration and vital statistics core group led by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in partnership with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the World Bank, the Belgian development agency Enabel, Civipol, the International Organization for Migration, and Vital Strategies.¹ The secretariat of the Programme is based in the African Centre for Statistics at ECA.

3. The Programme is anchored in the following guiding principles:

- (a) Promoting country ownership and leadership;
- (b) Promoting coordinated approaches and partnerships at the subregional and national levels;
- (c) Promoting phased, holistic and integrated approaches;
- (d) Strengthening and building the capacities of national and subregional civil registration and vital statistics institutions;

* E/ECA/STATCOM/10/2026/1.

¹ Vital Strategies is a global public health organization that designs and implements evidence-based strategies to strengthen health systems, prevent disease and reduce injury worldwide.



- (e) Promoting innovation, research and the sharing of knowledge;
- (f) Encouraging the use of register-based vital statistics for evidence-based policymaking;
- (g) Adopting international best practices in Africa.

4. This report provides a summary of statistical activities under the Programme undertaken by the member institutions of the African Statistical System between October 2024 and October 2026. It concludes with a proposed set of recommendations and points for the Statistical Commission for Africa to consider for submission to the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration.

5. The report is structured in line with the guiding principles and strategic objectives or pillars of the Programme, with a focus on the 2017–2026 period, to highlight progress in implementation of the Programme. During the period, numerous activities were undertaken by countries and partners to promote the development of civil registration and vital statistics systems and to strengthen the capacity of African countries in that regard.

II. Foundation for the acquisition of legal rights and privileges and legal identity by all

6. Over the reporting period, the legislative environment for the administration of viable civil registration and identity management systems was improved substantially and harmonized. ECA, in partnership with Vital Strategies, supported the strengthening of the civil registration and vital statistics system of Mozambique, leading to the formal validation and endorsement of that country's first-ever evidence-based situational analysis report at an interministerial meeting attended by permanent secretaries and directors from the ministries of justice, constitutional and religious affairs; communications and digital transformation; finance; the interior; and labour, gender and social affairs, as well as high-level representatives of the ministries of planning and development; health; education; State administration and public service, including the National Institute of Health; and the National Institute of Statistics.

7. That endorsement marked the first time that the Government had brought together high-level officials to conduct a shared, nationally owned diagnosis of systemic gaps and priorities, turning what were once unvalidated strategic plans into actionable tools for coordination, investment and accountability. Building on that foundation, ECA continued to make a difference with targeted technical assistance, including by developing a mobile-based module to enable remote birth and death notifications in hard-to-reach areas and promoting comprehensive systems mapping of electronic civil registration and vital statistics platforms, participatory business process reviews, strategic plan revisions and legal reforms. The aim of all these endeavours is to have routine data use embedded into decision-making, to ensure that no citizen is left uncounted.

8. UNICEF Lesotho, in close collaboration with ECA, provided technical and strategic support to the National Identification and Civil Registry of the Department of Home Affairs of Lesotho in reviewing the country's civil registration and vital statistics strategic plan that ended in 2025. Drawing on a comprehensive analysis of performance variability, stakeholder fragmentation and persistent access gaps in rural areas, it drew up a phased, actionable road map that included the establishment of a high-level steering committee for joint strategic planning, deployment of mobile registration units and community-based models to reach underserved populations, performance management using clear indicators, and transparent accountability for registrars.

9. With technical support from UNICEF for the monitoring and evaluation of the frameworks of Lesotho, ECA ensured that the country's next strategic planning cycle will be customer-centric, evidence-driven and coordinated across ministries, laying the groundwork for universal registration and a legal identity for every citizen.

III. Improved alignment of civil registration practices in Africa with international standards

10. ECA, in partnership with the secretariat of the East African Community, held training workshops to support Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Zanzibar, United Republic of Tanzania, in aligning their national civil registration practices with international standards. The workshop participants were exposed to global perspectives and existing guidelines for the compilation of vital statistics, data management and quality assurance and reviewed existing civil registration records, including against the guidelines set out in the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*, published by the United Nations.

11. Countries and partners endeavoured to fully implement the recommendations of expert group meetings and ministerial conferences with a specific focus on thematic areas in which African countries are lagging, in particular marriage, divorce and death registration and cause-of-death reporting, and production of vital statistics from such events. Accordingly, a technical working group was set up to develop Africa-wide marriage and divorce registration guidelines to be considered for further review, adoption and implementation.

IV. Reliable data and vital statistics

12. Efforts were made to harmonize the production of vital statistics from civil registration data through the development of standards, concepts and methods.

13. The Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics helped to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders in African States to systematically clean, edit and analyse their civil registration data through guided customization of reproducible analytical pipelines to fit their contexts. In so doing, they would have data that were appropriate for analysis and in line with the guidelines and template of the United Nations for the production of vital statistics reports. Over the reporting period, ECA facilitated in-country capacity strengthening in the production of vital statistics reports for 11 countries: Burundi, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zanzibar, United Republic of Tanzania.

14. Through the Programme, ECA launched a structured virtual training course entitled "Using R programming language for basic administrative data management" that was focused on reproducible analytical pipelines for civil registration data records. The course was designed specifically for learners with no prior computer programming experience, to guide them from foundational R programming language concepts through to intermediate techniques relevant for administrative data workflows.

15. Notable improvement was made in the availability of vital statistics produced from civil registration data, including cause-of-death data. In that connection, ECA, supported by funding from the Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative, collaborated with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and Vital Strategies to organize a civil

registration and vital statistics research forum held from 30 March to 1 April 2026 in Bangkok, in hybrid format. The event offered major research, information-sharing, and capacity-building opportunities for 39 participants from Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Countries that successfully completed their research presented their findings at the event, along with policy briefs that had been prepared for dissemination. The material on display represented a clear demonstration of available vital statistics across the continent derived from operational, implementational and system-wide research.

16. ECA continued to support 10 countries in the analysis of their population census datasets to measure inequalities in civil registration, and provided both technical and methodological guidance to ensure the effective performance of that critical task.

17. ECA conducted continent-wide research as part of the Demographic and Health Surveys programme of the United States Agency for International Development and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys programme of UNICEF. It published a paper entitled “Leaving no one behind for civil registration in Africa: Inequality in birth registration in African countries”² that contributed to efforts to identify barriers hindering the attainment of target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals and helped to identify the children who were being left behind in birth registration, with the aim of formulating targeted actions.

18. ECA and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific launched a civil registration and vital statistics applied research workshop in 2024 to help countries to strengthen their capacity to design and implement sustained monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms. The workshop was in response to the continent-wide lack of research capacity, insufficient use of national civil registration and vital statistics data for evidence-based policymaking and scarcity of peer-reviewed papers and published research that provide insights into and recommendations for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics data systems. Three cohorts were enrolled in the 2024, 2025 and 2026 editions of the workshop. They conducted operational research in low- and middle-income countries making use of datasets from registration records, produced policy briefs and peer-reviewed research papers to help to improve knowledge management and the sharing of research findings, best practices and tools.

19. The main thematic research areas included birth, cause-of-death and death registrations, systems improvement and verbal autopsies. The participating countries were as follows, with their number of researchers indicated in parentheses:

(a) cohort of 2024 with 18 researchers: Burkina Faso (1), Burundi (1), Chad (1), Côte d'Ivoire (1), Ghana (5), Kenya (2), Lesotho (2), Rwanda (2), Somalia (2) and Uganda (1);

(b) cohort of 2025 with 15 researchers: Cameroon (1), Ghana (1), Kenya (3), Malawi (1), Mozambique (1), Rwanda (1), South Africa (3), Uganda (2), Zambia (1) and Zimbabwe (1);

(c) cohort of 2026 with 27 researchers: Benin (1), Cameroon (1), Congo (2), Ethiopia (2), Gambia (1), Ghana (1), Kenya (3), Lesotho (1), Namibia (1), Rwanda (2), Seychelles (1), Sierra Leone (2), Somalia (1), South

² https://apai-crvs.uneca.org/sites/default/files/resourcefiles/Leaving%20no%20one%20behind%20for%20civil%20registration%20in%20Africa_English.pdf.

Africa (1), Sudan (1), Uganda (3), United Republic of Tanzania (1) and Zimbabwe (2).

20. UNFPA, ECA and the Economic Community of West African States supported a capacity-strengthening workshop on civil registration and vital statistics data analysis and reporting held in Saly, Senegal, from 19 to 23 November 2024. The overall objective of the workshop was to enhance the capacity of government officials and other civil registration and vital statistics stakeholders in West and Central Africa to produce high-quality, timely and comprehensive vital statistics reports from civil registration data that met national and international standards. The workshop was attended by 50 participants from national statistics offices and UNFPA country offices.

21. As part of the effort to promote the use of vital statistics produced from civil registration data, ECA worked in partnership with the secretariat of the East African Community to provide training to Rwanda and Burundi to support them in turning their vital statistics into crucial tools for the formulation of national policies and to track the performances of their systems. The training sessions were held in December 2025 and January 2026, respectively. The training helped both countries to strengthen their capacity for civil registration and vital statistics communication, messaging and public engagement through the production of such material as statistical bulletins, factsheets and infographics. Similar training will be provided to other countries in East Africa for the harmonization and effective communication and messaging of vital statistics in the subregion.

V. Improved governance and public administration

22. At the continental level, ECA and partners secured a political commitment to civil registration and vital statistics across the continent through the organization of annual expert group meetings for registrars general of civil registration and vital statistics.

23. One such meeting was held in Malabo from 25 to 27 June 2025, and another in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, from 17 to 21 July 2026. Participants at both meetings noted the critical importance of high-level political commitment to advancing the civil registration and vital statistic agenda in Africa and called for the holding of the sixth session of the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration at the earliest possible opportunity. The participants also made recommendations for States and partners to help accelerate implementation of civil registration and vital statistics commitments.

24. The 2026 meeting was especially important for the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics because it gave the participants an opportunity:

(a) To take stock of the implementation of the resolutions of the fifth Conference of Ministers responsible for Civil Registration and the recommendations from the 2025 meeting, with a view to determining whether the technical and political commitments had translated into tangible action;

(b) To review progress made and lessons learned from the 2023–2027 strategic plan of the Programme and to see how those lessons could be used as guidance for the plan for the upcoming decade (2027–2036);

(c) To present the final outputs of the African Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Shared Asset initiative as a continental resource package comprising design principles, data standards and functional requirements to guide digital transformation efforts;

(d) To set an agenda for the next civil registration and vital statistics decade with a clear, country-owned action plan, establish a unified, practical

and country-owned action plan centred on integration, decentralization and digitalization, and secure the future of civil registration and vital statistics in Africa;

(e) To understand how to secure the civil registration and vital statistics future and advocate the transition from project-based and donor-funded civil registration and vital statistics systems to sustainable, nationally budgeted systems that function as foundational digital public infrastructure for the continent.

25. Pan-African organizations and development partners cooperated to implement civil registration and vital statistics in Africa. One of the primary objectives of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics is to ensure a coordinated approach to the implementation of initiatives to improve civil registration and vital statistics across the continent, including by ensuring that the initiatives of partners and the support that they provide to countries are holistic, sustainable and properly coordinated and that resources are adequately used. In that connection, a core group of partners was formed to provide technical assistance for civil registration and vital statistics initiatives. They provided guidance and support in the form of guidelines, manuals and other technical resources, such as templates for data analysis, training of national staff and direct financial assistance to complement national resources. The Programme secretariat continued to convene meetings of the core group, providing good opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and information. Integrated multisectoral coordination efforts and technical mechanisms were also strengthened and sustained at the national level.

VI. Development of the strategic plan of the Programme for the 2027–2036 period

26. With the conclusion of the period 2017–2026, the Programme secretariat, supported by partners from the core group, will formulate a consolidated action plan for the period 2027–2036 based on the findings from the evaluation of the current period. In the plan, they will outline priority actions, resource mobilization strategies and monitoring frameworks for the next ten years, ensuring that they are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2063, the Africa We Want, of the African Union and national development plans.

VII. Modernization of civil registration and vital statistics systems

27. Substantial efforts were made to support countries in enhancing their capacity to undertake or improve the digitalization of their systems.

28. The African Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Shared Asset initiative was developed as a digital public good to address common challenges to the development of digital solutions across Africa, such as fragmented digital infrastructure, limited technical capacity and duplication of effort. The initiative is governed by an advisory board of civil registrars general from 11 African countries and provides a framework, with reusable components and based on common principles and standards, for the provision of technical guidance and support for consistent, efficient and sustainable digitalization of civil registration systems across Africa. The framework can be adopted in full by any country that has no existing system or in part by any country that has a system that needs to be improved. In 2026, the initiative will be piloted in six countries: Angola, Benin, Kenya, Rwanda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

29. At its 2025 meeting, the expert group of registrars general on civil registration and vital statistics encouraged countries to cautiously leverage emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, to enhance their civil registration and vital statistics and legal identity systems, while ensuring the institution of strong legal and ethical safeguards, adherence to international standards, robust protection of data and mitigation of security risks.

30. ECA, in collaboration with Vital Strategies under the Bloomberg Data for Health Initiative, provided technical assistance to the civil registration services of Kenya in the digitization of the country's death registration system, a critical step towards universal civil registration and evidence-based public health monitoring. ECA remains an indispensable partner in ensuring that the new system is not only technically sound, but also sustainably embedded in the country's broader civil registration and vital statistics modernization agenda.

31. Over the reporting period, there was increased appreciation of the need to promote interoperability of civil registration and vital statistics with other systems at the continental, subregional and national levels.

32. At its 2025 meeting, the expert group of registrars general identified three elements to drive progress towards the implementation of Agenda 2063 and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, namely, interoperability, decentralization and digitalization. These are not independent elements but mutually reinforcing components of a modern, resilient and inclusive civil registration and vital statistics ecosystem. Three inter-institutional technical working groups were put in place to develop technical papers for the operationalization of the three elements, scale them to practical dimensions, illustrate them with country examples and identify tools and approaches for closing persistent implementation gaps.

33. In Lesotho, ECA championed smart digitization and interoperability through a mobile offline solution for community registration, for integration of civil registration with district health information systems for automated health facility notifications and for positioning of the civil registry as a foundational digital public infrastructure.

VIII. Sixth session of the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration

34. The sixth session of the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration is scheduled to be held in November 2026 and hosted by the Government of Zimbabwe. Building on the discussions and priority recommendations of the 2026 expert group meeting, the ministers are expected to endorse the consolidated action plan for the period 2027–2036; adopt the African Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Shared Asset initiative as the continental framework for digital civil registration; endorse the Africa Observatory on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics; make a renewed commitment to providing legal identity to all, with a view to achieving target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals; make a commitment to sustainable domestic financing for civil registration and vital statistics and to integration, decentralization and digitalization; and discuss new and emerging developments, such as digital identity systems, as well as challenges, including the handling and management of systems during humanitarian crises.

IX. Conclusion

35. Although Africa has made clear progress under the Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in enhancing the capacity of national civil registration and vital statistics stakeholders, implementing policies and developing systems, it is still lagging when it comes to demonstrable improvements in registration completeness rates. It is therefore imperative to identify strategic measures that are achievable, evidence-based and sustainable and that will enable the continent to make strides in the coming years.

36. National statistics offices should be commended for and encouraged to continue the efforts they have made to produce vital statistics from civil registration systems over the past 10 years, making a critical contribution to the good functioning of the systems.

X. Points for consideration by the Statistical Commission for Africa

37. National statistics offices are called upon to strengthen their role in transforming civil registration and vital statistics data into timely, reliable and policy-relevant information. To that end, they should:

(a) Institutionalize collaboration with civil registration authorities, health ministries, identity management agencies, education ministries, the judiciary and other relevant institutions;

(b) Participate actively in multisectoral civil registration coordination committees and advocate formal data-sharing agreements between themselves, civil registration authorities, health ministries and identity management institutions;

(c) Establish national statistical standards and validation procedures for statistics derived from civil registration and quality assurance mechanisms, and conduct regular quality assessments of completeness, timeliness, consistency, accuracy and geographic coverage of civil registration data;

(d) Promote interoperability, data integration and comparability with national statistical systems to ensure that civil registration data are linked using unique identifiers and harmonized geographical codes, where legally and ethically appropriate, with censuses, household surveys, health information systems, education systems and population registers;

(e) Strengthen the production of vital statistics based on civil registration data by establishing or reinforcing mechanisms for the routine compilation of birth, death, marriage, divorce and cause-of-death statistics from civil registration systems, and move gradually from survey- and census-dependent vital statistics to the continuous production of statistics based on administrative data;

(f) Produce regular disaggregated vital statistics and improve their dissemination by publishing regular vital statistics reports, dashboards and analytical briefs;

(g) Support the use of civil registration data for planning by providing them to policymakers, planners, researchers and the public, while fulfilling data protection and confidentiality requirements, and ensure the use of such data for monitoring, accountability and evidence-based decision-making by using the data to support reporting on Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals, health targets and education planning, social protection and legal identity initiatives;

(h) Support any initiatives by civil registration offices to position civil registration and vital statistics as foundational digital public infrastructure within national digital transformation strategies, and strengthen interoperability between civil registration and vital statistics systems, including by supporting the harmonization of forms and data tools to enable such interoperability.
