



**Fifth Conference of African Ministers Responsible
for Civil Registration**
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Civil registration in emergencies – recommendations and guidelines for implementation

Conference Theme: Innovative Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System: Foundation for Legal Identity Management



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



**CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
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I. Introduction

1. The African continent is currently hosting more than a third of the world's displaced populations, including millions of refugees and asylum seekers and an even greater number of internally displaced persons. To draw attention to these ever-growing challenges, which are primarily linked to protracted or sudden emergencies, the African Union has declared 2019 the "Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa".¹ The aim is to bring African member States and partners together for long-lasting solutions.

2. In almost all emergency situations, such as armed conflict, natural disasters, human-made hazards and mass population displacements, basic government systems become dysfunctional, poorly operational and, in extreme cases, collapse completely. This includes civil registration and service delivery systems. Often underfunded and lacking resources, in times of crisis civil registration services become even less able to provide quality services at the desired scale, especially to vulnerable population groups. Furthermore, population groups exposed to emergency situations tend to lose birth and death certificates and other identity credentials, such as national identity cards, and entire archives may be destroyed during or in the aftermath of a crisis.

3. Functional registration systems established in the context of the emergencies, such as refugee registration systems, even when biometric, are often not systematically linked to civil registration as a foundational legal identity system. In such situations, refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees can be left without any government-recognized credentials to prove their identities and the administrative system can fail to record and register vital events. This leads to a backlog of unregistered women and children and an absence of reliable cause-of-death information.

4. In the Yamoussoukro Declaration, endorsed at the Third Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, held in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire on 12 and 13 February 2015, the Ministers requested development partners to support the development of guidelines and recommendations for maintaining and managing civil registration and vital statistics in conflict and emergency situations as well as special circumstances by making use of experiences from countries having gone through such situations.² Draft guidelines were subsequently developed as part of an inter-agency and consultative process with member States at both regional and country levels under the leadership of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Africa Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Core Group and the secretariat of the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics.

¹ See www.achpr.org/news/2019/05/d378/.

² See www.apai-crvs.org/sites/default/files/public/Yamoussoukro%20Declaration_Eng_0.pdf.

II. Main issues

5. Over the years multiple emergencies have occurred in Africa, with dire consequences arising for the population as a result of conflicts, climate change and natural disasters. The region is affected not only by protracted conflicts, such as in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and South Sudan, but also by new types of emergencies that cut across boundaries and severely affect a number of countries, such as in northern Nigeria and the Sahel region.

6. Emergencies and displacement create major challenges for the continuity of civil registration systems and the provision of registration services. In many conflict situations, civil registration records are attacked and destroyed, while in some cases they are even used to target certain population groups, thereby violating one of the core principles of civil registration – the confidentiality of individual records. Such situations risk causing individuals to lose trust in their Governments. People may be unwilling to register vital events if there are suspicions about how the information will be used.

7. Another challenge created by conflict and emergency situations is the backlog of unregistered children, namely children not been registered by the legal deadline or registered through late registration procedures. In such situations, the administrative system does not manage to capture vital events, and so they remain unrecorded. After an emergency, there is a high demand for civil registration services and these may not perform well. In such circumstances, it is vulnerable people, such as the poor, children and women, who suffer the most, including population groups living in hard-to-reach areas.

8. To date, even in stable countries, many civil registration and vital statistics systems lack State ownership, effective coordination and integration into broader government systems. Despite such challenges, civil registration system must continue to be maintained, even in crisis and emergency situations, as people continue to be born and die. Weak civil registration systems impede progress towards achieving national development plans and the global Sustainable Development Goals. They also interfere with the right of individuals to be known and planned for by their own Governments, obstruct their access to fundamental opportunities and services, and hamper their ability to claim their rights and participate in the governance process.

9. There has only been limited research carried out to determine the impact of emergencies on civil registration systems and services in the African region. No guidelines are available on how to prepare and maintain effective civil registration service delivery in times of emergency or how to reconstruct lost or destroyed records. In response to this knowledge gap, the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Core Group has been working with member States to produce the necessary recommendations and guidelines. These include practical recommendations, covering a wide range of examples, for the effective organization of civil registration in emergency and humanitarian settings.

III. Issues for discussion

A. Recommendations for the organization of civil registration services during and in the aftermath of conflicts, crises and emergencies

10. Based on the research done and evidence gathered at the regional level and through in-country technical consultations with representatives of African Union member States, United Nations agencies and other development partners and donors, recommendations have been developed for the effective organization of civil registration in emergency and humanitarian settings. These recommendations include:

(a) Improving the preparedness and resilience of civil registration systems and services in fragile States and countries facing emergencies in order to ensure the universal registration of vital events;

(b) Protecting and securing records and archives;

(c) Improving coordinated action to re-establish and maintain civil registration in times of emergency through collaborative arrangements among key stakeholders.

Panelists are invited to comment on the above recommendations by relating them to their country situations.

IV. Guidelines for the implementation of recommendations

11. Practical guidelines have been developed to support the implementation of recommendations in emergency contexts. These cover the following topics:

(a) How to improve universal registration in emergencies;

(b) How to protect and secure archives and reconstruct records;

(c) How to ensure effective coordination of government actors and partners, including with humanitarian response mechanisms.
