

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

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## Ethiopia: Marriage and divorce registration and the issuance of related civil status certificates

### *Introduction*

The following note describes marriage and divorce registration in Ethiopia as well as the application and issuance procedure for marriage and divorce certificates issued by the Civil Registration and Residency Service Agency (CRRSA). The note also describes the layout of the related certificates.

The note is based on information obtained during a fact-finding mission to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in May 2018 and October 2024, as well as open-source information.

### *Administrative level*

In August 2012, a decree was passed stating that civil registration in Ethiopia should be mandatory and systematised.<sup>1</sup> The general point was to have a federal, regional and local body in charge of civil registration and the issuance of civil status documents.<sup>2</sup>

At the federal level, the Vital Events Registration Agency (VERA) was established in August 2016 with the responsibility of creating awareness of the need for national registration of vital events.<sup>3</sup> Today, the agency changed name to the Civil Registration and Residency Service Agency (CRRSA). CRRSA is responsible for the registration of seven vital events: birth, adoption, marriage, divorce, death, paternity by acknowledgment, and judicial paternity.<sup>4</sup> CRRSA has a head office located in the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, where they keep their archives of all the civil registrations conducted since 1942.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Negarit Gazette, 22 August 2012, p. 6497; CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Negarit Gazette, 22 August 2012, p. 6499; Landinfo, 31 January 2020, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Federal VERA Branch, Addis Ababa, May 2018.

<sup>4</sup> CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>5</sup> CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

The regional states are divided into a number of administrative units called zones, which are again divided into *woreda* and *kebele* offices.<sup>6</sup> Woreda is the lowest administrative level in Addis Ababa, and kebele is the lowest administrative level in the rest of Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup>

The local body consists of officers of civil status appointed by the regional organ and stationed in each local administrative woreda or kebele office. The civil registrar records vital events, distributes copies of the records to relevant organs, issues civil status documents, maintains and stores the records of vital events registrations, and creates awareness of civil registration in the local community.<sup>8</sup>

#### *General information on civil registrations and civil status documents*

According to CRRSA, the civil registration system in Addis Ababa is strong, and it is therefore not possible to register twice with the same identity. Once a person is registered in the system at one woreda office, the person cannot register at another woreda office. The system and data are controlled at the head office in Addis Ababa. However, the system does not include registrations outside Addis Ababa, and since there is no centralised system of civil registration in the regions, like in Addis Ababa, civil registration in the rest of Ethiopia is not strong, according to CRRSA.<sup>9</sup>

All civil registrations are free of charge in Ethiopia, but only if it is done within the required timeframe. If one is unable to go to a woreda or kebele office to register (e.g. due to old age or disability), the civil registration can be done at home by a civil registrar.<sup>10</sup>

Around 2020, security printers from USA were implemented in all woreda offices in Addis Ababa to streamline civil registrations throughout Addis Ababa and to avoid forgery. The civil status documents are completed on computers and the data is automatically sent to CRRSA's head office. However, if the printer is not working due to power outage or other irregularities, the civil status documents will be filled out by hand.

The civil status documents issued in the rest of Ethiopia vary in layout from kebele office to kebele office and are filled out manually by hand.<sup>11</sup>

Around 2023, two QR codes were implemented on the rear side of every civil status document issued in Addis Ababa. At the same time as the QR codes were implemented, the name of the sub city where the woreda is located was also included on the civil status documents. The specification of the sub city will always appear

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<sup>6</sup> Landinfo, 31 January 2020, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Federal Negarit Gazette, 22 August 2012, p. 6499.

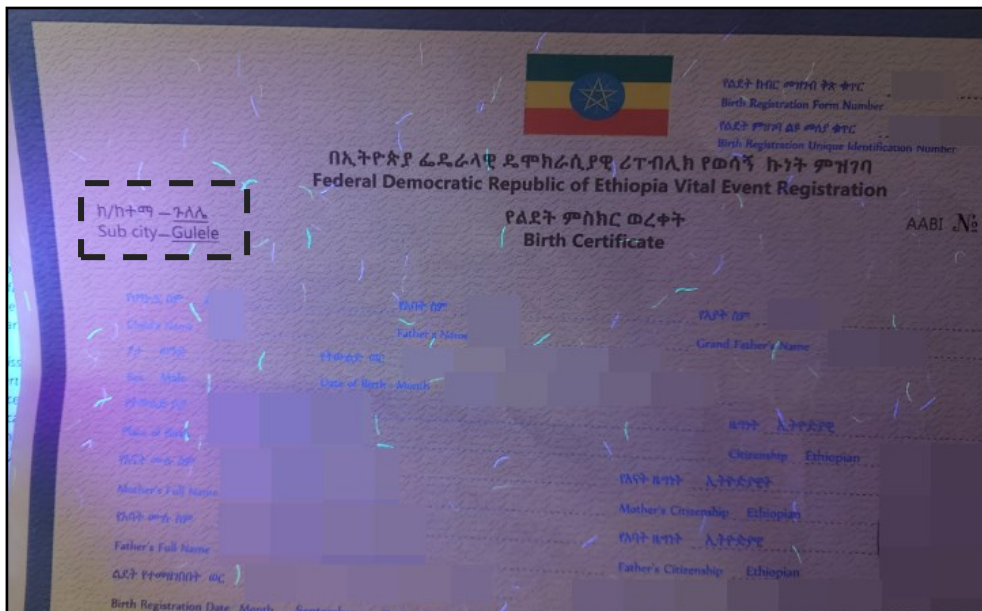
<sup>9</sup> CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>10</sup> CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>11</sup> CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

in the upper left corner on all civil status documents issued in Addis Ababa. See image below for an example.<sup>12</sup>

For more information about the QR codes, please see the NIDC note *Ethiopia - Verification of civil status documents*.



**Image 1:** Cut out of a birth certificate issued from woreda 9 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (NIDC reference material).

### Marriage registration

It is mandatory by law to register a marriage with the authorities. Civil, religious and customary marriages must all be registered in Ethiopia.<sup>13</sup>

Marriage registration must take place within 30 days.<sup>14</sup> In this case, the fee for registration is 120 birr. If the marriage is registered later than 30 days after the marriage ceremony, the fee is higher.<sup>15</sup> Although the law requires marriages to be registered with the authorities within 30 days, there is reason to believe that few marriages are actually registered.<sup>16</sup>

In Addis Ababa, registration takes place at the woreda office.<sup>17</sup> In the other regions, registration takes place at the kebele office.<sup>18</sup>

In the case of a civil marriage, the marriage ceremony can be performed and registered at the woreda or kebele office. The couple must first make an appointment.

<sup>12</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Landinfo, 2020, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Federal Negarit Gazette, 22 August 2012, p. 6502.

<sup>15</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>16</sup> Landinfo, 2020, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>18</sup> Landinfo, 2020, p. 15.

After making an appointment, a notice of the impending marriage must be posted by the woreda or kebele office. According to the interviewed source at woreda 9, the marriage can take place after two weeks.<sup>19</sup> According to the CRRSA website, it can take place after 15 days.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of a religious or customary marriage, the marriage can be registered at the woreda or kebele office after the marriage ceremony. The couple must appear at the woreda or kebele office and present a marriage document. The woreda or kebele office will register the marriage and issue a marriage certificate.<sup>21</sup>

For civil, religious and customary marriages, the couple must bring four witnesses to the woreda or kebele office, both parties must be present at the marriage ceremony, and one of the parties must live in the woreda or kebele where the marriage is registered.<sup>22</sup>

According to the interviewed source at woreda 9, the couple and the witnesses must bring an ID document. A birth certificate cannot be used for identification in this situation.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Issuance of marriage certificates and the layout*

A marriage certificate will be issued immediately after registration.<sup>24</sup>

For marriage certificates issued in Addis Ababa, the name and signature of the issuing registrar will automatically be printed on the marriage certificate when it is issued. In Addis Ababa, information on the marriage certificate will be filled out on a computer (e.g. date of marriage, names of the couple, date of issue, and who issued the certificate). Please note that the aforementioned issuing procedure may differ in the regions.<sup>25</sup>

Photos of the couple, no more than six months old, must be submitted upon registration.<sup>26</sup> In Addis Ababa, only color photos are accepted. Previously, black and white photos were accepted.<sup>27</sup>

The marriage certificate must contain a 'Marriage registration form number' in the upper left corner on the front side. The number is generated by the system. The marriage certificate must also contain a 'Marriage registration unique identification number' in the same upper left corner.<sup>28</sup> For more information, please see the NIDC note *Ethiopia - Verification of civil status documents*.

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<sup>19</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>20</sup> CRRSA, year of issue n/a.

<sup>21</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>23</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>26</sup> CRRSA, year of issue n/a.

<sup>27</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>28</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

The upper right corner contains the ‘Birth registration unique identification number’ of both the husband and wife.<sup>29</sup>

Marriage certificates issued in Addis Ababa contain UV features, QR codes and security fibres. The UV features on the certificates have changed over time, and certificates issued outside of Addis Ababa generally differ in layout.<sup>30</sup>

The language used on marriage certificates must be the local language of the concerned region and in Amharic, and if necessary, in English.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the language on the marriage certificates may differ from region to region, because the local language of the regions is most often used.<sup>32</sup>

The latest version of the marriage certificate issued from woreda 9 in Addis Ababa is from 2015, but there have been several changes to the format since then.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Divorce and divorce registration*

Divorce is granted by the court. The court must provide the parties with a copy of the divorce document.<sup>34</sup> The spouses, both or one of them, are responsible for registering the divorce with the authorities within 30 days. Upon registration, a divorce certificate will be issued to each party.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Error corrections on civil status documents*

If a correction is to be made on a civil status document, a competent court must decide on the correction. On this basis, the court decides whether the existing record should be corrected or a new one should be issued. The correction must be made in accordance with the decision within 30 days of the date of the decision.<sup>36</sup>

According to a local lawyer, it is mandatory to submit a court order when applying for a new civil status document at the woreda or kebele office. However, if the issuing registrar made an error on the civil status document, the registrar can correct it without a court order.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Lost or stolen civil status documents*

Ethiopian citizens are entitled to get a lost, damaged or invalid civil status document reissued.<sup>38</sup> However, a police report is required.<sup>39</sup> A substitute certificate will be issued by extracting copies from the old register.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>30</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>31</sup> Federal Negarit Gazette, 7 August 2017, p. 9815.

<sup>32</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>33</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>34</sup> Landinfo, 31 January 2020, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Landinfo, 31 January 2020, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Federal Negarit Gazette, 7 August 2017, p. 9816.

<sup>37</sup> Local lawyer, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>38</sup> Federal Negarit Gazette, 7 August 2017, p. 9816.

<sup>39</sup> Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

<sup>40</sup> Federal Negarit Gazette, 7 August 2017, p. 9816.

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