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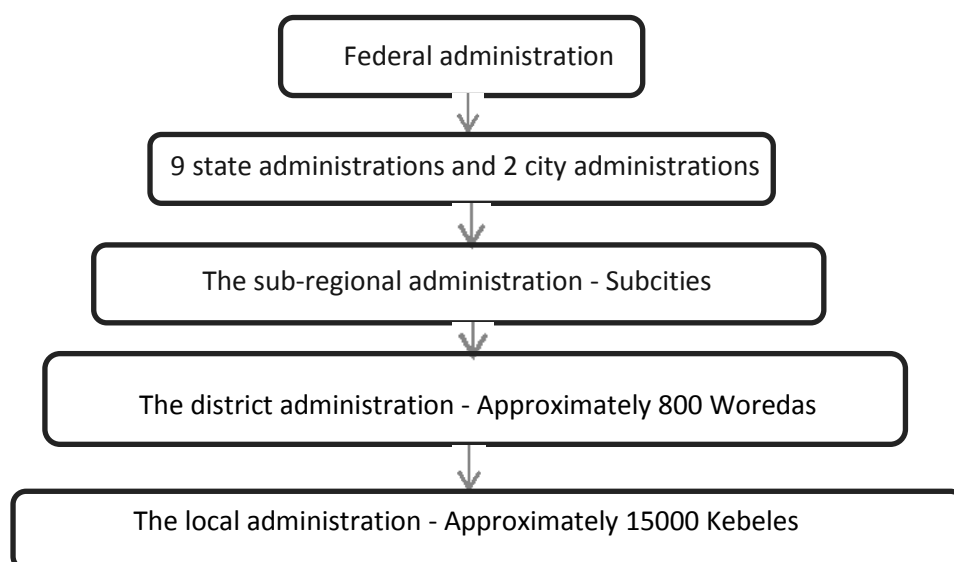
Ethiopian civil certificates issued by the Vital Events Registration Agency.

1. Objective

This note shows the technical features and appearances of the birth, adoption, marriage, divorce and death certificates issued by the Ethiopian Vital Events Registration Agency (VERA). Furthermore, it describes the process of obtaining the certificates for Ethiopian nationals and non-nationals respectively.

2. Background

Ethiopia is a federation consisting of 9 regional states and two administrative states. They are divided into approximately 800 Woredas, district level offices, which are again divided into approximately 15000 Kebele offices, the local administrative level.¹



¹ Ethiopian Government Portal, http://www.ethiopia.gov.et/government-structure?_p_id=56_INSTANCE_Aa8zGn38nDVb&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=column-1&p_p_col_count=1&_56_INSTANCE_Aa8zGn38nDVb_page=1. Accessed on July 25, 2018.

3. Vital Events Registration Agency and civil registration in Ethiopia

In August 2012 a proclamation of law was passed stating that civil registration was to be systematized.² The general point was to have a federal, regional and local organ in charge of civil registration³ and the issuance of civil documents;⁴

- The federal organ is established by the authority of the Council of Ministers and their mandates is to direct, coordinate and support the civil registration of vital events on a national basis as well as organize and keep records of vital events. VERA at the federal level is responsible for creating awareness of the need for national registration of vital events.⁵
- The regional organ is appointed by the specific region to direct, coordinate and structure the registering of vital events on a regional basis. The regional organ is also responsible for transferring the regional vital events records to the federal organ.
- The local organ consists of officers of civil status appointed by the regional organ and stationed in each local administrative office. The officer of civil status registers vital events, distribute copies of the records to relevant organs, issue certificates of registration, maintain and preserve the records of vital events registrations and create awareness of civil registration in the local community.⁶

The proclamation from 2012 established the legal and organizational framework of the vital events registration, but The Vital Events Registration Agency (VERA) was not established until August 2016.⁷

4. General appearance of the certificates

VERA has made the appearance of the civil certificates uniform throughout Ethiopia. The appearance of the documents is almost identical whether they are issued for refugees or nationals. The difference between the certificates is the color of the frame on the certificates; blue in the birth certificate (figure 3), pink in the certificate of adoption (figure 4), green in the marriage certificate (figure 5), grey in the divorce certificate (figure 6) and brown in the death certificate (figure 7).

The documents are personalized by hand.

The certificates display a frame and background print produced on a desk printer. Printed on security paper the certificates are optically dull when exposed to UV light. The certificates do, however, display UV reactive fibers and text (figure 1).

² Federal Negarit Gazeta, August 22, 2012, <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/proclamation-no-760-2012-registration-of-vital-events-and-national-identity-card-proclamation.pdf>. Accessed on July 25, 2018, page 6498.

³ Federal Negarit Gazeta, August 22, 2012, page 6499.

⁴ Vital Events Registration Agency home page, <http://www.vera.gov.et/Home/Pages>. Accessed July 25, 2018.

⁵ Federal VERA Branch (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.

⁶ Federal Negarit Gazeta, August 22, 2012, page 6499.

⁷ Federal Negarit Gazeta, August 7, 2017. <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Proclamation-no.-1049-of-2017.pdf>. Accessed July 25, 2018, page 9811.



Figure 1. UV reactive security fibers and text.

When exposed to transmitted light all of the certificates display a watermark designed as a pattern covering the whole page.

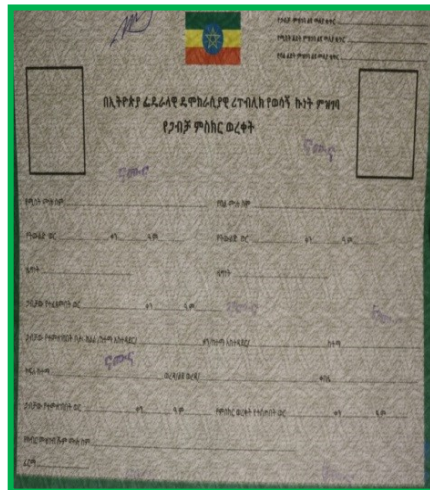


Figure 2. Watermark under transmitted light

5. Issuance procedures for Ethiopian nationals.

5.1 Birth certificate

According to the Federal Negarit Gateza, the law establishing VERA and defining the agency's responsibilities, the staff should automatically prepare a notification paper following a birth taking place at a health institution. If the birth has not taken place at a health institution, the parents/guardian must seek out a lower level government official to prepare the notification paper and deliver it to the local administrative office, thus getting the birth registered there.⁸

The notification paper states the full name and place of birth of the parents, their principal residence, marital status, citizenship, religion and ethnic origin as well as signature or thumb print of the person who witnessed the birth.⁹

⁸ Federal Negarit Gazeta, August 7, 2017, page 9814. <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Proclamation-no.-1049-of-2017.pdf>. Link accessed on June 8, 2018.

⁹ Federal Negarit Gazeta, August 7, 2017, page 9813.

The information that is collected about the child includes the child's name, date of birth, sex, weight at the time of birth, the place of birth, type of place of birth (hospital, home etc.), date and place of registration, attendant at birth and type of birth (single, twin, triplets etc.).¹⁰

The registration must be provided when a citizen wants a birth certificate issued from VERA. Along with the registration a valid Kebele card is required; if the applicant does not hold a Kebele card an affidavit from the parents can be provided instead.¹¹

As the only vital event births are required by law to be registered within 90 days of the event. Marriage, divorce and deaths must be registered within 30 days following the event.¹² Failure to do so can be punished with prison for up to six months or a fine of up to 5000 Birr.¹³ But since most children in Ethiopia are born outside of health institutions many of them are still not registered.¹⁴ It is worth noting, however, that not all registered children receive a birth certificate upon registration.¹⁵

Figure 3. Birth certificate issued to refugees.

Figure 3 shows the birth certificate issued to refugees in Ethiopia.

The certificates issued to nationals and refugees are almost identical. The only variation is some extra information included in the certificates for refugees referring to their status (for example refugee ID number). The certificates issued to

¹⁰ UNICEF, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/crvs/ethiopia/> Link accessed on June 11, 2018.

¹¹ Local Ethiopian lawyer (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.

¹² Federal Negarit Gazeta, August 7, 2012, page 6502.

¹³ United Kingdom: Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note - Ethiopia: Background information, including actors of protection and internal relocation*, October 2017: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/59ef3b954.html>, accessed June 14 2018.

¹⁴ United Kingdom: Home Office (October 2017), link accessed on June 14 2018.

¹⁵ Central Statistical Agency. Demographic and Health Survey, 2016. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR328/FR328.pdf>, page 13. Accessed on September 17, 2018.

refugees are primarily used in this note in order to show this information on the certificates.

5.2 Certificate of adoption

In order to register an adoption the adoptive parents must go to the judicial office of the permanent residence of the adoptive parents and get an approval.¹⁶ The approval from the judicial office must be shown to VERA, when applying for a certificate of adoption.

The form is titled 'FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA VITAL EVENT REGISTRATION' and 'Adoption Certificate'. It contains fields for adoptive parents' names, date of birth, place of birth, and the child's details.

Figure 4. Certificate of adoption issued to nationals¹⁷

5.3 Marriage certificate

A registration of the event of marriage is required to obtain a marriage certificate. To get the initial registration of one's marriage proof of both the husband and wife being present at the time of the event as well as proof of age for both parties is required. Apart from the regions of Afar and Somali (where the girls can legally marry from the age of fifteen) both parties must be over 18 years of age at the time of the marriage. The officer of civil status who witnessed the wedding ceremony can be the legal informant when registering the marriage.¹⁸

The marriage certificates issued to refugees display the refugee camp where the holders are registered but are otherwise identical to the one issued to nationals.

The form is titled 'FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA VITAL EVENT REGISTRATION' and 'Marriage Certificate'. It contains fields for spouses' names, date of birth, place of birth, and the date of marriage.

Figure 5. Marriage certificate issued to refugees.

¹⁶ Federal Negarit Gazette, August 7, 2017, page 9814.

¹⁷ Picture from unicef.org: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/crvs/ethiopia/> on June 11, 2018.

¹⁸ UNICEF data, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/crvs/ethiopia/>. Accessed on July 27, 2018.

5.4 Certificate of divorce

In order to obtain a certificate of divorce from VERA only a letter of approval from the court or the administrative office of the couple's permanent residence is required.¹⁹ The certificates issued to refugees and nationals are identical.



Figure 6. Certificate of divorce issued to refugees.

In cases involving custody of a child the parents must provide the child's registration of birth.²⁰ Note that certificates regarding custody of children are issued by the courts.²¹

5.5 Death certificates

When a death occurs at a health institution the staff must produce a notification paper stating the name and sex of the deceased as well as the date, place and the cause of death. The staff must then deliver the notification to the officer of civil status enabling him to register the death. Stillbirths are not registered.²²

If a death occurs outside of a health institution, the relatives must contact a local government official to prepare the notification and have it delivered to the nearest administrative office to the place of death and have it registered. When requesting a death certificate from VERA, one must provide this registration.²³

The death certificates issued to refugees display the holder's refugee ID number or passport number as well as the refugee camp the holder is registered in, but is otherwise identical to the certificate issued to nationals.

¹⁹ Federal Negarit Gazette, August 7, 2017, page 9814.

²⁰ Federal Negarit Gazette, August 7, 2017, p. 9815. Link accessed on June 8, 2018.

²¹ UNICEF, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/crvs/ethiopia/>. Link accessed on June 11, 2018.

²² UNICEF, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/crvs/ethiopia/>. Link accessed on June 11, 2018.

²³ Federal Negarit Gazette, August 7, 2017, page 9815.



Figure 7. Death certificate issued to refugees.

6. Issuance procedure for refugees

Upon arrival asylum seekers are transported to one of four Reception & Registration Centres in Ethiopia to get registered as a refugee.²⁴ The registration is conducted by the Administration for Refugee & Returnee Affairs (ARRA) in collaboration with UNHCR. ARRA is a control unit under the National Intelligence and Security Service²⁵ and is responsible for granting the refugee status and for establishing identity of the arriving refugees.²⁶

UNHCR runs the Reception & Registrations Centres located near the 18 official border crossings into Ethiopia.²⁷ The Danish National ID Centre visited the Registration Centre in the region of Tigray, Endabaguna, where ARRA informed that the initial registration of newcomers can last from three days to one month.²⁸ The registration process is twofold:

- ARRA conducts a screening for nationality resulting in the applicant being granted or denied refugee status. If the status is granted the refugee is issued a ration card.
- UNHCR conducts a registration where the refugee's biometrics and personal information is obtained.²⁹

After being granted the refugee status the individual can get his/her vital events registered at the VERA office in the refugee camp that he/she is assigned to.³⁰ To have civil certificates is not mandatory, and many only get them when they need

²⁴ ARRA (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.

²⁵ ARRA (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.

²⁶ ARRA (May 2018), meeting in Shire.

²⁷ UNHCR (May 2018), meeting in Hitsats Refugee Camp.

²⁸ ARRA (May 2018), meeting in the Hitsats Refugee Camp.

²⁹ ARRA (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.

³⁰ ARRA (May 2018), meeting in Hitsats Refugee Camp.

them.³¹ VERA has registered vital events for refugees since October 2017.³² There is no issuance fee for refugees.³³

After registering a refugee ARRA sends two copies of the registration form to ARRA's headquarters in Addis Ababa within 30 days.³⁴

Since 2016 personal information obtained by ARRA and UNCHR when registering has been stored in a database accessible to both ARRA and UNHCR. Only UNHCR can edit information in the database.³⁵

To secure stable issuance procedures in the refugee camps more than one VERA officer with authority to issue certificates are employed in each camp.³⁶ VERA registers vital events taking place before and after a refugee's arrival in Ethiopia.³⁷

It is most common for refugees to bring documents such as school registrations and ID-cards. They rarely bring national passports. Thus the refugees are not required to provide ID documents from their country of origin when requesting a civil certificate.³⁸ If the refugees do not possess an ID document, VERA accepts the identity established in the registration conducted by ARRA and UNHCR.³⁹

7. Error correction

When a clerical error is pointed out by an interested party a civil registration officer is obligated to correct it. Correction in a specific document must be conducted so the original text remains visible in the document. If the clerical error is on all copies of the civil registration the officer of civil status must inform all bodies who have a copy of the document of the error.⁴⁰ Errors of other nature than clerical cannot be corrected without the consent of a court.⁴¹

To alter information in the civil records one must file an application of correction to the courts. On this background the court decides whether the existing record should be corrected or a new record should be produced.⁴² If a court rules to annul the existing record the judgment must be stored together with the new record. The reason for the correction must be written on the back of the registration form. The officer of civil status shall inform all official organs already in possession of a registration about the change.⁴³ When the new registration form has been

³¹ ARRA (May 2018), meeting in Hitsats Refugee Camp.

³² ARRA (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.

³³ VERA officer (May 2018), meeting in Hitsats Refugee Camp.

³⁴ Federal Negarit Gazette, August 7, 2017, page 9814. Link accessed June 8, 2018.

³⁵ UNHCR (June 2018), e-mail on June 3, 2018.

³⁶ ARRA (May 2018), meeting in Hitsats Refugee Camp.

³⁷ ARRA (May 2018), meeting in Hitsats Refugee Camp.

³⁸ Administration for Refugee-Returnee Affairs (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.

³⁹ VERA officer (May 2018), meeting in Hitsats Refugee Camp.

⁴⁰ Federal Negarit Gazette, August 22, 2012, page 6511.

⁴¹ Federal Negarit Gazette, August 22, 2012, p. 6512.

⁴² Federal Negarit Gazette, August 22, 2012, page 6512.

⁴³ Federal Negarit Gazette, August 22, 2012, page 6512.

sent to all official bodies a new certificate of registration is issued to the interested party.⁴⁴

8. Lost documents

Ethiopian nationals are entitled to get a lost, damaged or invalid certificate reissued.⁴⁵

The Woreda offices keep a physical archive of the documents that they have issued at district level and the federal VERA office keeps a nationwide record of all issued documents. Thus, it is only possible to get a new document issued if the citizen applies at the original Woreda office and proves his/her identity with the same Kebele card as presented when the certificate was originally issued.⁴⁶ The federal VERA office is currently in the process of digitalizing their records.⁴⁷

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⁴⁴ Federal Negarit Gazette, August 12, 2012, page 6512.

⁴⁵ Federal Negarit Gazette, August 7, 2017, page 9816

⁴⁶ Local Ethiopian lawyer (May 2018), meeting in Addis Ababa.

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