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Ethiopia: Birth and death registration and the issuance of related civil status documents

Introduction

The following note describes birth and death registration in Ethiopia as well as the application and issuance procedure for birth and death 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.¹ The general point was to have a federal, regional and local body in charge of civil registration and the issuance of civil status documents.²

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.³ 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.⁴ 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 1942.⁵

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

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

³ Federal VERA Branch, Addis Ababa, May 2018.

⁴ CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

⁵ 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.⁶ Woreda is the lowest administrative level in Addis Ababa, and kebele is the lowest administrative level in the rest of Ethiopia.⁷

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.⁸

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.⁹

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.¹⁰

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.¹¹

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

⁶ Landinfo, 31 January 2020, p. 7.

⁷ CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

⁸ Federal Negarit Gazette, 22 August 2012, p. 6499.

⁹ CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

¹⁰ CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

¹¹ 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.¹²

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

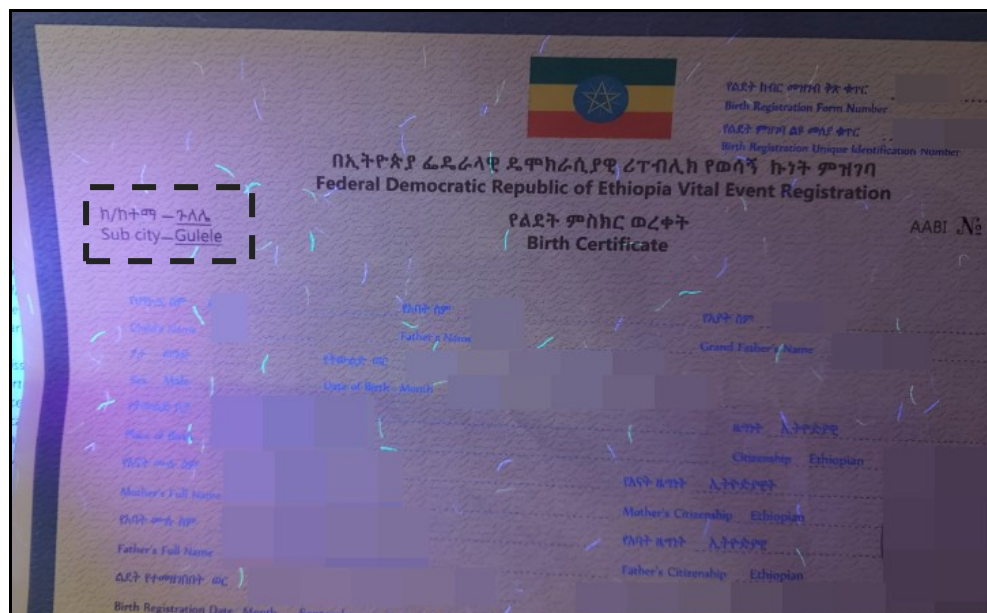


Image 1: Cut out of a birth certificate issued from woreda 9 in Addis Ababa (NIDC reference material).

Birth registration

To register a birth of a child, the registration must take place within 90 days of the birth. The registration can take place at a hospital, health facility or, in case of a home birth, at a woreda or kebele office. However, it is possible to register a birth any time, but a fee will be charged for late registration.¹³

If the child is under 18 years of age, both parents must provide an ID document and a birth notification paper issued by the hospital or by a health worker. If the child was born at home, a health worker will come to the house and issue the paper.¹⁴

The birth notification paper states the child's sex, date of birth, place of birth, type of birth, as well as the parents' full name and place of birth, their principal residence, marital status, citizenship, religion and ethnic origin, as well as a signature or thumb print of the person who witnessed the birth.¹⁵

If the mother or father is unable to register the birth, one of the parents must give a special birth proxy to the other parent, who then must register the birth. If one of the parents is deceased, the other parent must show a legal death certificate of

¹² Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

¹³ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

¹⁴ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

¹⁵ Federal Negarit Gazette, 22 August 2012, p. 6504; Federal Negarit Gazette, 7 August 2017, p. 9813.

the deceased parent. If both parents are deceased, a guardian can register the birth. A legal proof of guardianship is required.¹⁶

When registering a child under the age of 18, the child must be registered at the nearest woreda or kebele office where the child was born or where the parents reside.¹⁷

If the registration takes place after the person has turned 18, the presence of parents and ID documents of the parents are not required. However, the person registering his/her birth is required to provide an ID document. The person is also required to register at the nearest woreda or kebele office where he/she resides.¹⁸ If the person has a disability, the registration can be done by a caregiver, who must present an ID document. Since the parents are not required for registration, the person registering his/her birth is responsible for providing information about the parents, which will be filled out on the related fields on the birth certificate. The parents' signatures will be marked with a hyphen (i.e. '-').¹⁹

Most children in Ethiopia are born at home, and many of them are not registered within the required timeframe.²⁰ Most Ethiopian citizens only register a birth when they are issued a passport, as the birth certificate is a required ID document for passport issuance.²¹

Issuance of birth certificates and the layout

A birth certificate will be issued immediately after registration and only one certificate is issued.²² There are local rates for issuing a birth certificate.²³

For birth certificates issued in Addis Ababa, the name and signature of the issuing registrar will automatically be printed on the birth certificate when it is issued. However, the birth certificate is stamped manually. In Addis Ababa, information on the birth certificate will be filled out on computer (e.g. date of birth, the parents' names, date of issue and who issued the certificate). More information will be registered in the system and will not appear on the birth certificate (e.g. the parents' religion, their dates of birth and address). Please note that the aforementioned issuing procedure may differ across regions.²⁴

If the birth certificate is issued at the hospital, a stamp is put on the rear side of the birth certificate stating that the certificate was issued at a health facility.²⁵

¹⁶ CRRSA (A), year of issue n/a.

¹⁷ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

¹⁸ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

¹⁹ CRRSA (A), year of issue n/a.

²⁰ Landinfo, 31 January 2020, p. 13.

²¹ CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

²² Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

²³ Landinfo, 31 January 2020, p. 13.

²⁴ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

²⁵ CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

It is not mandatory that the birth certificate contains a photo of the child.²⁶

The birth certificate must contain a unique ID number in the upper left corner on the front side, also called the 'Birth Registration Unique Identification Number'. The unique ID number is generated by the IT system.²⁷

It is mandatory that the language used on the certificates must be the local language of the concerned region and in Amharic. English may be added if necessary.²⁸ Therefore, the language on the birth certificates may differ from region to region because the local language in the regions is most often used.²⁹

According to woreda 9, the layout of birth certificates in Addis Ababa must be the same with the same security features etc. However, the layout of birth certificates issued outside Addis Ababa is different.³⁰ The latest version of the birth certificate issued from woreda 9 in Addis Ababa is from 2015, but there have been several changes to the format since then.³¹

Death registration

To register a death, the person who lived with the deceased or the relatives of the deceased (e.g. by blood or marriage) must report the death. If there is no cohabiting people, the nearest neighbour or anyone who knows about the deceased must report the death.³²

The person registering the death must contact a local government official to prepare a notification paper, which must include the name and gender of the deceased, as well as the date, place and cause of death. The notification paper must be delivered to the nearest woreda or kebele office at the place of death and be registered.³³ According to the law from 2012, the cause of death must always be registered, but currently this is only the case for deaths occurring in health institutions.³⁴

If a death occurs at a health institution, the staff must produce a notification paper. The staff must then deliver the notification paper to the civil registrar of the woreda or kebele office for registration.³⁵

A death must be registered within 30 days.³⁶

²⁶ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

²⁷ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

²⁸ Federal Negarit Gazette, 7 August 2017, p. 9815.

²⁹ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

³⁰ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

³¹ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

³² CRRSA (B), year of issue n/a.

³³ Federal Negarit Gazette, 7 August 2017, pp. 9814-9815.

³⁴ Landinfo, 31 January 2020, p. 14.

³⁵ UNICEF, year of issue n/a.

³⁶ UNICEF, year of issue n/a.

Any police officer who receives a report of a death that has occurred due to accidental or unknown causes must declare the death within three days following the date of receipt of the report.³⁷

Issuance of death certificates and the layout

Like the birth certificates issued in Addis Ababa, the name and signature of the issuing registrar will automatically be printed on the death certificate when it is issued. The stamp will be set manually. Information on the death certificate will be filled out on computer in Addis Ababa, and by hand in other regions.³⁸

The death certificate can also be issued at the hospital. If the death certificate is issued at a hospital, a stamp is placed on the rear side of the certificate stating that the certificate was issued at a health facility.³⁹

A death certificate will be issued immediately after registration and only one certificate is issued.⁴⁰ There are local rates for issuing a death certificate.⁴¹

The overall layout of the death certificate is the same as the birth certificate, but it has a brown border instead of a blue. The layout is the same in Addis Ababa, but it may vary in other regions of Ethiopia.⁴²

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 and whether a new document should be issued. The correction must be made in accordance with the decision within 30 days of the date of the decision.⁴³

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.⁴⁴

Lost or stolen civil status documents

Ethiopian citizens are entitled to get a lost, damaged or invalid civil status document reissued.⁴⁵ However, a police report is required.⁴⁶ A substitute certificate will be issued by extracting copies from the old register.⁴⁷

³⁷ UNICEF, year of issue n/a.

³⁸ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

³⁹ CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

⁴⁰ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024; UNICEF, year of issue n/a.

⁴¹ Landinfo, 31 January 2020, p. 13.

⁴² CRRSA, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

⁴³ Federal Negarit Gazette, 7 August 2017, p. 9816.

⁴⁴ Local lawyer, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

⁴⁵ Federal Negarit Gazette, 7 August 2017, p. 9816.

⁴⁶ Woreda 9, Addis Ababa, October 2024.

⁴⁷ Federal Negarit Gazette, 7 August 2017, p. 9816.

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