

Status and key features of administrative population registers In Africa

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Definition of population register

- The United Nations defines population registers as:

“records all residents in the country, together with their basic demographic information, and updates for births, deaths, changes of marital status, international migration (both into and out of the country), and internal migration (by recording changes of address within the country).” [United Nations handbook on Registers-Based Population and Housing Censuses](#) (2022).

Importance of population registers

Two major functions:

1. Administrative functions
2. Statistical functions



Format and distinct functions of population registers

1. **Administrative Population register (APR):** An administrative register primarily used by public agencies for their own specific purposes such as establishing personal identification, creating list of voters, administration of health, education and other services. When centralised, it is used as a base register for statistical purposes and provides a key component of any register-based statistical system;
2. **Statistical population register (SPR):** A systematized and indexed collection of individual records for every resident* of the country. Usually generated from an existing APR. It is connected on a regular basis with administrative registers starting with the APR for updating. Used solely for compiling aggregate statistics.

Drivers for & relevance of population registers in the current development context

1. Increasing demand for robust, timely, frequent and disaggregated population data in the context of SDG agenda.
2. Concerns over traditional methods of data collection e.g., costs, difficulty in reaching respondents and their lack of cooperation.
3. Many African governments are already undertaking efforts to implementing APRs to facilitate identification of all residents within a population

3. About the study

Justification, objective(s), methods, preliminary findings

Synthesis of preliminary findings

1. The study found that no country has attained a population register which aligns to the definition set by the UN i.e., a register that collates information pertaining to each member of the resident population of a country in such a way to provide **the possibility of determining up-to-date information concerning the size and characteristics of that population** at a given point in time.
2. Despite the non- existence of 'complete' /'fully-fledged' registers, as defined by the UN, the study confirmed that there is great interest among African governments to establish or further develop existing registers
3. The study highlighted inadequacies in the capturing of international migration data within the population registers of the countries assessed. A further assessment is required to determine the reasons behind to this gap.
4. The study did not delve into understanding the quality of data held in existing registers. However, some inferences can be drawn from what is known of the quality of civil registration systems which form the basis for development of the population registers. The study encourages that such assessments are undertaken
5. The use of the data held in population registers for statistical purposes remains wanting. The study recommends that such usage is encouraged as it is instrumental in improving the quality of the registers.

Next steps and areas of further investigation

1. Completion of the study –to include French speaking countries and countries in the North Africa region
2. Determine the reasons why existing registers fail to cover international migration and document challenges/ differences in country practices in addressing this thematic area.
3. Determine linkage of the population registers with other existing administrative data systems
4. Develop resources to support assessment of the coverage, completeness and quality of data held in existing registers.

Conclusion

1. Though still far from complete, the existence of administrative population registers among African countries provides a good foundation for making advances in the production of register-based official statistics. The registers hold great potential for statistical production that should be explored
2. There is a gradual evolution of census methods in different regions of the world and in particular increased adoption of register based and combined methods. It is pertinent that Africa begins to prepare for such a future. Development of well functioning APRs is a critical entry point.
3. The increased uptake of national Identification systems among African countries creates valuable opportunities for implementation of national population registers.
4. Countries are encouraged to maximize on the technical and other resource support available UN partners including the APAI-CRVS initiative while partners are encouraged to provide relevant technical guidelines on this topic.