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SNAPSHOT

OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS OF

TUNISIA



ECA

Program information

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The Centre of Excellence was established with funding from Global Affairs Canada and IDRC and contributes directly to the work of the Global Financing Facility, a key financing platform of the UN Secretary General's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health.

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide a brief introduction to the civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems in Tunisia.

This information was based on a case study of Tunisia, published by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in *The Nexus between Civil Registration and Social Protection Systems: Five Country Practices*. It is further supplemented with other findings from a desk review of documents and other resources available on the Internet. Among other things, the report presents:

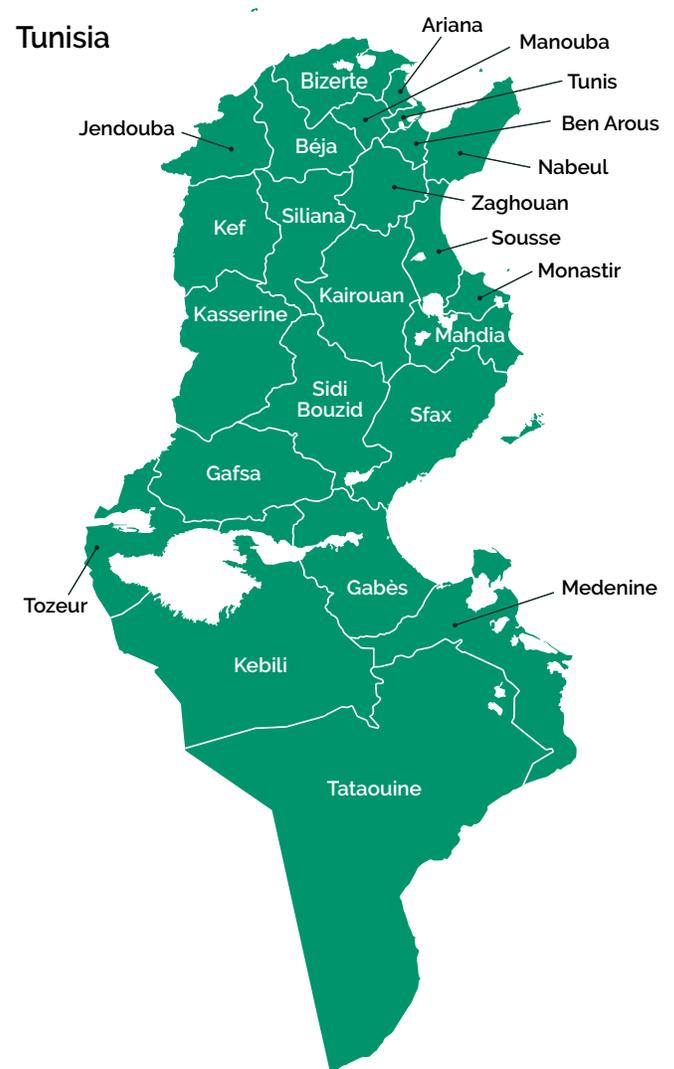
- Background information on the country;
- Selected indicators relevant to CRVS improvement;
- Stakeholders' activities; and
- Resources available and needed to strengthen CRVS systems.

Brief country profile

The Republic of Tunisia is a country in the Maghreb region of North Africa. It is bordered by Algeria to the west and southwest, Libya to the southeast, and the Mediterranean Sea to the north and east.

Tunisia is divided into 24 governorates. The governorates are divided into 264 delegations or districts, and further subdivided into municipalities and sectors.

- Land area: 163,610 km²
- Population: 11,565,204¹ with an estimated annual growth rate of 1.1 percent.² In 2018, 69 percent of the population lived in urban areas,³ with the remaining 31 percent living in rural areas.



Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

- Capital city: Tunis
- Official working language: Arabic
- Ministry responsible for civil registration: Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment
- Civil registration agency: General Directorate of Local Government
- National statistical office: National Statistics Institute



CRVS dimensions

Births	
Completeness of birth registration	99.9% (2019) ⁴
Children under 5 years of age whose births were reported as registered	99% (2019) ⁵
Births attended by skilled health personnel	99.7% (2019) ⁶
Women aged 15–49 who received antenatal care from a skilled provider	100% (2019) ⁷
DPT1 immunization coverage among 1-year-olds	99% (2018) ⁸
Crude birth rate (per 1,000 population)	18 (2017) ⁹
Total fertility rate (live births per woman)	2.2 (2017) ¹⁰
Adolescent fertility rate (per 1,000 girls aged 15–19 years)	8 (2017) ¹¹
Population under age 15	23% (2012) ¹²
Deaths	
Completeness of death registration	37% (2011) ¹³
Crude death rate (per 1,000 population)	6 (2017) ¹⁴
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	14.6 (2018) ¹⁵
Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	17 (2018) ¹⁶
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	43 (2017) ¹⁷
Marriages and divorces	
Marriage registration rate	N/A
Women aged 20–24 first married or in union before age 15	0% (2017) ¹⁸
Women aged 20–24 first married or in union before age 18	2% (2017) ¹⁹
Divorce registration rate	N/A
Vital statistics including causes of death data	
Compilation and dissemination of civil registration-based statistics	Available
Medically certified causes of death	Available

Civil registration system

Legislative framework

The *Personal Status Code (Code du Statut Personnel)*, enacted on 13 August 1956, marked the beginning of a major reform of the Tunisian civil status system. It provided detailed legal regulation of marriage and divorce procedures while introducing a complete ban on polygamy. Since then, the civil registration system in Tunisia has undergone a number of changes. Law No. 57-3, which regulates civil status, was enacted on 1 August 1957, one week after the Tunisian Republic was proclaimed and the monarchy was abolished. It introduced universal registration requirements regardless of ethnic or religious background. Declaration of births and deaths, which had been optional for Tunisian nationals, became mandatory. Persons failing to register births and deaths faced criminal penalties.

The registration of deaths was instituted by Article 76 of Law 75-33, dated 14 May 1975. This article regulated the use of medical certificates as mandatory in death registration.

The enacting of Organic Law No. 42 on 30 May 2017, and the signing of the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data in November 2017 provided the basis for introducing comprehensive privacy and data protection legislation. A draft of a new Tunisian law on the protection of personal data was submitted in March 2018 to the Tunisian Parliament to replace the 2004 law. When adopted, it will align Tunisia's legislation with the provisions of the European General Regulation 2016/679 on the protection of personal data.

Management, organization, and operations

The civil registration system in Tunisia is managed by the General Directorate of Local Government under the Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment. The authority over the civil registration system is shared with the Ministry of Justice through a tribunal of competent jurisdiction for each district. At the beginning of the year, the court provides all municipal districts with a dry stamp, which is affixed to each page of the two copies of the four civil status registers (birth, death, marriage, and divorce).

The Constitution and Organic Law No. 63-27 of July 2004 (Chapter VI) provided the legal basis for establishing the National Authority for the Protection of Personal Data. The Authority acts as a legal partner and advisor to the Identifier Management Unit in all matters related to identification systems and personal data. Its responsibilities include monitoring and regulation in the area of data and privacy protection.

National CRVS systems coordination mechanisms

Tunisia's legal identity system is supervised and coordinated by a national steering committee consisting of appointed representatives of the ministries and organizations with access to citizens' legal identity information, including the National Authority for the Protection of Personal Data.

A dedicated CRVS committee operates with the objective of improving the quality of statistics on civil status. Members of this committee are the National Statistics Institute, the Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment, and the Ministry of Health.



Administrative-level registration centres

Tunisia's civil registration system network consists of:

- 350 civil registry offices collocated with local government offices;
- 170 subsidiary offices, annexes, and mobile units; and
- 85 Tunisian consular missions or diplomatic posts with a registration office.

Accessibility of civil registration services

Information not available.

Registration of vital events

Birth registration should be done within 10 days after the birth. To complete the registration, a civil status officer requires a birth medical certificate issued by a health facility or a midwife (for births taking place at home) as well as the parents' birth certificates. If the birth is not registered within 10 days, birth registration can be done only upon a court decision.

The law requires that **death registration** be done three days after the death takes place. The doctor who has confirmed the death must complete a death certificate that consists of two parts. The first part provides the legal identity information of the deceased and the second part provides medical information on the determined cause of death. The civil registration official completes the death registration upon receiving the death medical certificate.

Marriage registration is done for marriages celebrated before municipal civil registration officials. Individuals must present their

- birth certificate;
- identification document;
- proof of legal capacity to enter into a marriage contract;
- prenuptial marriage certificate (a medical certificate establishing eligibility to contract marriage);
- divorce certificate (if previously married); and
- death certificate (if previously married and the partner died).

Non-Muslim men must present a Mufti-issued certificate indicating that the man has been accepted into the Muslim religion.

Divorce registration and the issuance of the registration certificate is done within 10 days of the date of the divorce court ruling.

Sample registration forms

A sample image of a birth certificate is available at: fichier-pdf.fr/2014/05/05/extrait-de-naissance/?

Registration fee

Certificates are first issued in Arabic. The French version of the certificate is printed upon request after it is translated into that language. In most cases, the certificate takes only a few minutes to get. In 2019, the cost of a certificate was 0.7 Tunisian dinars (about US\$0.25) for either language.

Vital statistics system

Vital statistics

The National Statistics Institute is responsible for aggregating vital statistics data. Its work is done by 48 public statistical structures, which are coordinated by the National Statistics Council. Since 1970, the civil registration system has allowed the National Statistics Institute privileged but regulated access to civil registration records in order to generate vital statistics data.

Every year, the National Statistics Institute distributes vital events registration forms to all municipalities. The municipalities enter the information that is required to generate vital statistics on the forms from vital events registration records. Every month, municipalities are asked to return completed forms, which are then processed and used for generating vital statistics reports. The National Statistics Institute has an agreement with the National Centre of Informatics, which operates the information technology platform that supports municipal civil registration offices. Based on this agreement, the National Statistics Institute can obtain the data needed to generate vital statistics directly from the central civil register database. By cross-referencing the data received from the central civil register database and the data received directly from the municipal registration offices, the National Statistics Institute ensures completeness and quality of vital statistics reports that are published monthly.

Causes of death

Tunisia's system of information on medical causes of death was created in the late 1990s. This system has been fully and exclusively developed within the National Institute of Public Health. It is based on the use of a standard death certificate model, in line with the model recommended by the World Health Organization. This model was introduced in 1999 under a presidential decree (Decree No. 99-1043 of 17 May 1999, JORT No. 43 of 28 May 1999). The systematic collection of medical causes of death was ready in January 2001.

The main source of cause of death data is death registration records. Each record indicates the date and time of death and includes demographic, sociological, and geographic data relating to the deceased. The statistical part of the registration record contains medical information (cause of death) as well as additional information on the circumstances of the death (place of occurrence, possible link to pregnancy, and whether an autopsy was conducted). The medical part of the record is further divided into two separate but complementary sections. The first section examines the main causes of death and allows the physician to describe the process that led to death, ranging from the initial cause that is most important (particularly from a public health perspective) to the terminal cause or immediate cause.

According to the National Statistics Institute, about 70 percent of causes of death are reported. However, the Ministry of Public Health considers only 40 percent of death certificates to be statistically reliable for causes of death, even though it conducts training and awareness campaigns with physicians in the public and private sectors.



Digitization

Digitization of the civil registration system began in the 1980s. In this initial phase, some 40 municipalities developed their customized software applications, which they used to computerize their civil registration process. The change came in 1996 when the government decided to create a national computerized civil registry system and mandated all municipalities to use the same software platform. At that time, each of these municipal systems operated in local mode without being connected with other municipal systems. By 2005, all municipal civil registration offices were interconnected into a nationwide computer system. Civil status offices in municipalities created after 2005 were integrated in the nationwide system right after they were established.

Computerization

Civil status registration offices are connected with the central civil register database through the civil registration software platform MADIANA. The platform made major improvements in how registered information is stored, processed, and shared. Most notably, it allows for

- printing of the civil status documents regardless of the place of registration (online);
- transmission and exchange of data between civil status data users;
- maintaining a reliable centralized database;
- decision-making support and reports generation; and
- electronic exchange of civil status documents with the national social security funds.

The registrar records vital events directly in the database. These events are accessible the next morning to all registration offices across the country. Users no longer have to travel to the place

of their birth to get a document. Any civil status officer in any municipal district can access and print certificates in real time after the user gives their last name, first name, and date of birth.

The Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment has contracted the National Centre of Informatics to operate the information technology platform run by the municipalities. The agency also provides technical support and maintenance. The National Centre of Informatics operates under the Minister of Communication Technologies and Digital Economy. The centre is tasked with providing support to the public structures that realize, deploy, and operate information systems. The National Agency for Computer Security periodically audits and validates the security system for the centre's servers that host the civil status data.

Online registration services at health facilities

Other than issuing birth and death medical certificates, health facilities do not have specific roles in registering these events.

Mobile technology application

Mobile technology is not used for civil registration processes.

Unique identification number

Historically, Tunisia's identity system consisted of identity programs and registers. Each of these registers operated its own unique identifier that was used to quickly look up personal data in the system. These unique identifiers were not interoperable between the systems and each was designed using different logic or standards.

In 2011, the government decided to work on creating a Citizen's Unique National Identifier Number that would mitigate problems arising from different unique identifiers used by different systems. The resulting roadmap recommended

setting up a universal identification system using three strategies:

- Create the Citizen's Unique National Identifier Number assigned from birth.
- Appoint the Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment to be responsible for the Citizen's Unique National Identifier Number.
- Adopt the X-Road interoperability platform, a secure and decentralized data exchange network that allows easy connection of various databases, and the addition of new ones, regardless of the original platform. This decentralized system implies that information is stored only within the government system responsible for it and is accessible through the unique identifier of the individual or company concerned.

In many other countries, the unique identification number is mandatory for all systems. However, in Tunisia, public data users can set up their own sectoral unique identification number. These unique identification numbers can be either made public or not, depending on the custodian of the database.

The Identifier Management Unit of the Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment coordinates all activities related to identity management by Tunisian public authorities. The unit is tasked with putting in place conditions for data interoperability between different public databases. The unit's main task is to create lookup tables that translate the citizen's unique national identifier numbers into a corresponding sectoral unique identifier developed by the operator of that system. These translation lookup tables allow data interoperability, although identifiers in use by two systems do not match. This approach of using a wide range of interoperable identifiers comes with two very important advantages:

- It allows operators that have an identification system in place to avoid building a new one.

- It limits managers of a public database operator from accessing the personal data of users of other public database operators without their explicit permission.

For example, a public database operator can set up an agreement via the Identifier Management Unit to access vital statistics or data belonging to other operators from time to time. They may also arrange one-time transactions to any public institution database operator. For each request, the unit creates a lookup table between the identifier numbers of the two operators to open access to data. If problems arise, a technical team meets to find a solution.

Digitization of historical civil registration records

Digitization of historical civil registration paper records began in 2000. The decision was made to do the manual data entry directly into the electronic database rather than to scan registration records. By March 2005, all civil registration paper archives had been transferred and since then, they have been kept in the central database. Since that time, all civil registration records are produced as a handwritten copy in the existing civil register books and as a digital copy in the civil register database. Only the version recorded in the paper registers has probative force: if there is a material error in the handwritten registers, only a judge can authorize that it be corrected. If there is an error in transcription from paper records to the computer record, the registrar can correct it at the civil registration office.

Link with identification system

From the age of 18, all Tunisian nationals living in Tunisia must have a national identity card. To apply for an identity card, the applicant must present their birth certificate. Persons whose birth was never registered must first get their birth certificate by documenting their identity through a court judgment before being able to apply for a national identity card.



The General Directorate for National Security of the Ministry of Interior is in charge of implementing the national ID system. To enrol, people must apply in person at the police station (for those who live in cities) or at the National Guard station in the district of their current residence (for those who live outside cities). The national identity card system is not interoperable with the civil register database, which means that each applicant must have a birth certificate that is not older than three months.

Existing national identity cards carry no biometric data in electronic format. A new law that was still being developed in 2019 envisages issuing a national identity card with a secure electronic chip. The chip would contain the photo and electronic print of the cardholder's right thumb, along with other data that are available only to national security officers who are responsible for identity verification.

Interface with other sectors and operations

Many other government systems rely on civil registration records to determine whether persons meet eligibility criteria for accessing various services. Many of these records are connected with social grants.

In 2007, the Ministry of Social Affairs launched a program to help children of poor and disadvantaged families to receive schooling. The program provides monthly financial aid to educate children in families that receive benefits from the Programme National d'Aide aux Familles Nécessiteuses (national program for families in need). In 2019, families received US\$3.50 per month per pupil (up to three pupils). The program reached more than 90,000 school-aged children.

The Amen Social Program, initiated in January 2019, is aimed at poor and limited income individuals or families whose lack of resources affects their income, health, education, access to public services, and living conditions. The Amen Social Program aims to reach adults who are in the civil registration system but do not have a national

identity card. The first strategy of the Amen Social Program is to develop and implement a Social Identifier Number at the national level. This will allow all the administrative databases attached to the Ministry of Social Affairs to be interoperable — a key condition that had to be put in place before reforming the social protection system. The Ministry of Public Health recently decided to assign that same Social Identifier Number to patients using public health facilities.

Managing information systems around the Social Identifier Number should help social protection policies achieve their goals by better targeting programs and by reducing errors when it comes to who is included and excluded. The Social Identifier Number is intended to link and combine the many programs that the Ministry of Social Affairs manages, such as:

- National program for families in need;
- Access to Care Program;
- Children without family support;
- Social action in schools;
- Social protection for all categories of people with special needs;
- Integration programs in schools for students with a disability;
- Training;
- Employment and income earning; and
- Physical and digital accessibility for people with disabilities.

As part of ongoing plans to implement e-government, different government services will be linked directly with the national identity card database to allow for identity verification. While the system is in the planning phase, some of the interoperability elements have been already implemented. One example is sharing death registration information with the Ministry of Social Affairs, which can authorize payments or stop further social transfers to the family of the deceased.

Improvement initiatives and external support

Improvement plan and budget

Strategic plan

The Tunisian government was mindful of the objectives for the digital economy sector found in the National Development Plan 2016–2020. As such, it adopted the “Digital Tunisia 2020” National Strategic Plan. The project consists of establishing

- the main ministerial information systems (such as e-finance, e-justice, and e-local government); and
- platforms that guarantee an e-government (such as interoperability, the public cloud, and the government intranet).

Now that the civil registration business processes have been fully digitized, including the civil registration paper archives, the focus shifts toward realizing data and systems interoperability within the government sector.

Budgetary allocations and requirements

Civil registration services are financed jointly by the Ministry of Local Government and Environment and the local authorities and diplomatic representations hosting civil registration offices. The fact that Tunisia has achieved very close to universal vital events registration rates and full computerization and digitization of registration business processes demonstrates adequate budgetary support.

Support from development partners

Tunisian registration authorities cooperate with UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) on the development of multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS) reports. They also draw from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa’s Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) for exchanging good practices in CRVS and making further improvements to CRVS systems across the African continent.

Conclusion

Civil registration and legal identity management systems are very long-established and rooted in Tunisian society, and are an indivisible aspect of the public governance system. The government has very early on recognized the importance of universal and continuous registration as well as the importance of investing in the digitization of civil registration records and the registration business processes. The decision to keep sector-specific unique identifiers that can be linked with the Citizen’s Unique National Identifier Number using protected lookup tables shows how the unique identification number from birth can later be used without compromising privacy and personal data protection. The role of the civil registration system in public governance will be further pronounced with the expansion of interoperability between government information technology systems and the rolling out of a range of e-governance services.



Resources

Websites

Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment
environnement.gov.tn/index.php?id=3

National Centre of Informatics www.cni.tn

National Statistics Institute – www.nis.tn

Additional materials

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