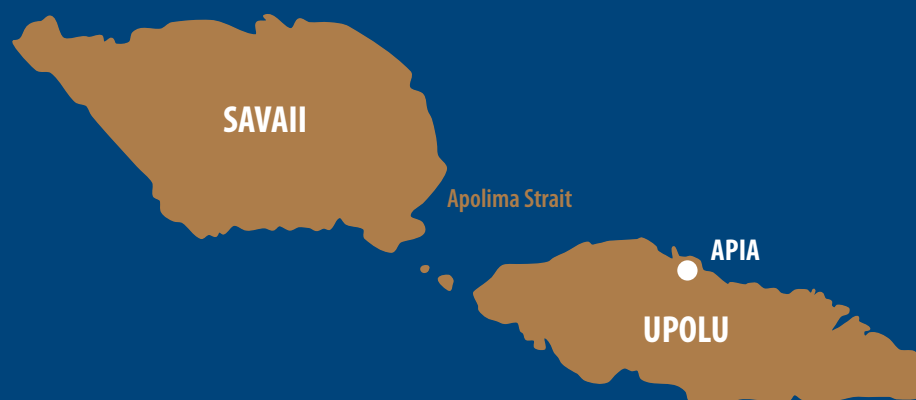


CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS IN SAMOA

Samoa is a country consisting of two main islands, Savai'i and Upolu, and four smaller islands. The entire island group was called «Navigator Islands» by European explorers before the 20th century because of the Samoans' seafaring skills.



Land area
(km²)
2,934

2020 mid-year
population estimate
198,600

Population growth
rate (%)
0.6



Pacific
Community
Communauté
du Pacifique



Pacific CRVS
supported by Brisbane Accord Group

unicef 
for every child

OVERVIEW

This civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) country profile for Samoa is part of a series of country profiles for the Pacific Island region. The CRVS profiles consolidate knowledge shared by countries on the status of their CRVS systems in the recent past, including through government websites, published reports, media releases and presentations, and direct engagement between the authors of these profiles and in-country civil registration offices and health information offices. The objective of these CRVS country profiles is to provide a living resource (updated every 2-3 years) and quick reference point on the status and developments in CRVS systems in the Pacific Island region. The profiles provide an overview of the legislative, organisational and management frameworks of CRVS systems, registration processes, levels of completeness of birth and death registration, and the most recent developments towards improving CRVS systems. Whilst civil registration covers many vital events, these profiles focus on the registration of births and deaths, and collation of cause of death information. It is envisaged that these country profiles will serve as a fundamental tool in advocating for further investment in strengthening the coverage and completeness of CRVS systems across the Pacific Island region.

SOURCE OF BIRTH AND DEATH DATA

The source of figures in Table 1 (births) and Table 2 (deaths) is outlined below each table, with the full citation given in the Reference section at the end of the document. All figures were obtained from published sources or through direct contact with in-country civil registration offices and health information offices. The date figures were obtained through direct in-country contact is stated below the tables, and indicates when those figures were extracted from in-country databases.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Pacific Community and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2021. Civil registration and vital statistics in Samoa. Noumea, New Caledonia: Pacific Community.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information please contact the Statistics for Development Division (SDD) – Pacific Community at: contact-sdd@spc.int; <https://sdd.spc.int/>

CRVS LEGISLATION, ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

Current legal framework governing birth and death registration

The recording and registration of births and deaths in Samoa is governed by the Samoan Births, Deaths, and Marriages Registration Act of 2002, which mandates the Registrar General (who is also the Government Statistician) to establish and maintain a register of all births, deaths, marriages, changes of name, and adoptions; and secondly, to issue certificates in respect of information recorded in the register.

Agencies responsible for birth and death recording and registration

Registration functions are overseen by the Samoa Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) division located within the Samoan Bureau of Statistics. The civil registration system is run both manually and electronically. Paper records are used to capture primary information provided by the informants. This information is transferred into an electronic database where every event registered is captured. The subnational offices in Upolu and Savai'i follow a similar registration process to the national process. However, since the databases in both offices are detached from the national database, records collated in these offices are routinely sent to the main office for centralised electronic storage. At present, there are plans to update the national civil registration database, particularly to improve its functionality in support of civil identification functions, which the government is embarking on.

National CRVS committee and CRVS action plan

Samoa has a CRVS Committee which is comprised of the Ministry of Health; Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development; Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Police; and Samoa Bureau of Statistics. The committee was established in 2013, however it has not been active in recent years.

National ID systems

The government is in the process of planning for the establishment of a national ID system, including establishing legislation that will support implementation of the national ID system. It is envisaged that the system will potentially yield improvements in civil registration as entry into the system will require a Birth Certificate.

REPORTING AND REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS

Recording births at health facilities and registering births at the civil registry

For births that occur in the hospital, or are brought to the hospital within twenty-four hours of birth, the law requires that the Director General, Chief Executive Office or the doctor of a privately owned health facility notify the Registrar of the occurrence of each birth. For events that occur outside a health facility, the law places responsibility on the attendant at birth, the President of the Women's Committee of a village, the Minister of Religion, or the parents of the child to notify the BDM department. To register a birth the informant, most commonly a parent, is required to provide a vaccination certificate, or other evidence of birth. If the baby was born in the hospital, confirmation of the birth from the National Health Service is required. If the baby was born at home, a Birth Advice Form from the Village representative is required. A church Baptismal Certificate may be accepted if either of the documents from the hospital or village representative are not available.

Timeframes and Costs

The legally stipulated timeframe for birth registration is within three months of the birth.

Standard, on-time birth registration	no charge
Late registration (> 3 months)	20.00 (WST)
Birth certificate printed	15.00 (WST)

Tasks which require a 'Birth Certificate' and incentives (financial or other) for completing the birth registration process

A birth certificate is required for school enrolment and to obtain a passport.

Registration process for births occurring overseas

Only births which occur in Samoa can be registered in the civil registry. Samoans born overseas are entitled to Samoan citizenship if one or both of their parents were born in Samoa. This process is not handled by the civil registry.

REPORTING AND REGISTRATION OF DEATHS

Process for recording deaths at health facilities and registering deaths at the civil registry

The law requires that any Minister of religion that conducts a funeral service, any person that organises for the disposal of the remains of the deceased, any person present at death, the President of the Women's Committee of a village where the death occurs, or the Pulenuu of a village (government representative in the village) in which a death occurs must notify the registrar of the event within fourteen days of the funeral service or the disposal of the human remains. Notification of the event is undertaken through completion of a death registration form, which should be sent to the BDM office. In Samoa, every Minister of religion is supplied by the BDM office with a death register book (comprising death registration forms) in which he/she is required to maintain a record of deaths. The law further provides for the privacy and security of the records maintained by the Minister, and criminalises any fraudulent alterations to the death register. The death registration process is only completed when the family presents at the registration office to complete the process. This process is often delayed as it is largely dependent on whether or not there is a need for a death certificate by the family.

Timeframes and Costs

The legally stipulated timeframe for death registration is within fourteen days of the death.

Standard, on-time death registration	no charge
Late registration (>3 months)	20.00 (WST)
Death certificate printed	15.00 (WST)

Tasks which require a 'Death Certificate' and incentives (financial or other) for completing the death registration process

A Death Certificate is required for inheritance of land, properties and estates of deceased persons.

Registration process for deaths occurring overseas

Only deaths which occur in Samoa can be registered in the Civil Registry.

COLLATION AND CLASSIFICATION OF CAUSE OF DEATH

Process for coding death certificates

The law requires that all deaths are certified by a medical doctor and the registrar is provided with a medical certificate certifying the cause of death within twenty days from the date of death if known, or within twenty-eight days from the date of discovery of the death. Cause of death certification is in alignment to the WHO International cause of death certificate.

Training and resources for cause of death certification and coding

In 2019 mortality coders from the Samoa Ministry of Health participated in a two-week attachment programme with the Ministry of Health in New Zealand. In December 2018 two medical doctors from Samoa travelled to Tonga to participate in a three-day regional training workshop on medical certification of cause of death, coordinated by SPC and supported by BAG partners. In 2017 and 2018 the government, with the support of the

BAG, provided training to medical doctors in Samoa on medical certification of causes of death. These trainings were delivered as training of trainers, with a number of doctors from Samoa identified to join and support BAG's regional training team.

COMPLETENESS OF CIVIL REGISTRATION DATA

The completeness of birth and death registration can be estimated by comparing the number of births and deaths in the civil registry with the number of births and deaths recorded by the health system, enumerated during national censuses, and estimated by international agencies. In some countries in the Pacific Island region, the births and deaths of citizens overseas can be registered in the civil registry. When estimating completeness, it is best these overseas births and deaths are not included in the civil registry figures since the other sources which it is compared to, for example health records, do not include overseas events. In Samoa, only births and deaths which occur in the country can be registered in the civil registry, so no overseas births or deaths are included in Table 1 and 2 below. Table 1 shows that between 2010 and 2018, the estimated completeness of birth registration when compared to health records has remained above 100%, and is as high as 180%. Comparison with the 2016 census indicates a completeness of around 115%, and with the 2011 census indicates around 113% completeness. Whilst comparison with the SPC projection of births for 2018 indicates a completeness of around 83%. The reason for the greater than 100% completeness of the civil registry when compared to health and the census requires further investigation. One possible explanation is that all sources have underenumerated the true number of births that have occurred in Samoa over recent years. Results from periodic population sample surveys, outlined below, indicate this may be the case.

The completeness of birth registration in Samoa has also been estimated by periodic population sample surveys. During the past decade there has been two Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), and one Demographic and Health Survey-Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (DHS-MICS) conducted in Samoa. These surveys ask the mother or caregiver of children aged under five years whether their child's birth has been registered with a civil authority, and if their child possesses a birth certificate. These surveys indicate that between 2009 to 2019–2020, birth registration has steadily increased in Samoa. The 2019–2020 Samoa DHS-MICS found that of the 2,687 children aged under five years included in the survey, 66.9% were reported to have had their births registered with a civil authority (SBoS, 2020). The 2014 Samoa DHS found that of the 3,581 children aged under five years included in the survey, 58.6% were reported to have had their births registered, and 45.6% reported to possess a birth certificate (SboS and MoH, 2015). And the 2009 Samoa DHS found that of the 1,907 children aged under five years included in the survey, 47.7% were reported to have had their births registered, and 44.2% reported to possess a birth certificate (MoH, SboS and ICF Macro 2010).

Table 1. Completeness of birth registration data

Year	Source of births				Completeness of birth registration		
	Civil Registry ^a	Health ^b	SPC projection ^c	Census ^d	Compared with health	Compared with SPC	Compared with census
2018	4,423	4,206	5,302	-	105%	83%	-
2017	4,876	4,176	-	-	117%	-	-
2016	5,574	3,890	-	4,835	143%	-	115%
2015	5,860	3,237	-	-	181%	-	-
2014	6,248	3,762	-	-	166%	-	-
2013	6,138	3,920	-	-	157%	-	-
2012	6,453	4,058	-	-	159%	-	-
2011	6,441	3,960	-	5,703	163%	-	113%
2010	5,324	3,715	-	-	143%	-	-

Sources: ^aObtained directly from the Samoa Births, Deaths and Marriages division on 07.04.2021. ^bObtained directly from the Samoa MoH on 19.04.2021. ^cCalculated from 2018 crude birth rate (Pacific Community 2018a) and 2018 population projection (Pacific Community 2018b). ^dThe 2011 census (SBoS 2013)

and the 2016 Census (SBoS 2018) asked a question about the number of births in the household in the twelve months preceding the census. Completeness was calculated by dividing 'Civil Registry' by 'Health'; dividing 'Civil Registry' by 'SPC projection'; and dividing 'Civil Registry' by 'Census'.

Table 2 shows that between 2010 and 2018, the estimated completeness of death registration when compared to health records has remained above 100%, and is as high as 160%. Comparison with the 2016 census indicates a completeness of around 152%, and with the 2011 census indicates around 94% completeness. Whilst comparison with the SPC projection of deaths for 2018 indicates a completeness of around 130%. The reason for the greater than 100% completeness of the civil registry when compared to health, the SPC projection and the 2016 census requires further investigation. Similar to births, it is possible that all sources have underenumerated the true number of deaths that have occurred in Samoa over recent years.

Table 2. Completeness of death registration data

Year	Source of deaths				Completeness of death registration		
	Civil Registry ^a	Health ^b	SPC projection ^c	Census ^d	Compared with health	Compared with SPC	Compared with census
2018	1222	756	943	-	162%	130%	-
2017	1111	755	-	-	147%	-	-
2016	1294	854	-	853	152%	-	152%
2015	1094	718	-	-	152%	-	-
2014	953	743	-	-	128%	-	-
2013	830	647	-	-	128%	-	-
2012	731	658	-	-	111%	-	-
2011	782	639	-	828	122%	-	94%
2010	616	594	-	-	104%	-	-

Sources: ^aObtained directly from the Samoa Births, Deaths and Marriages division on 07.04.2021. ^bObtained directly from the Samoa MoH on 19.04.2021. ^cCalculated from 2018 crude death rate (Pacific Community 2018a) and 2018 population projection (Pacific Community 2018b). ^dThe 2011 census (SBoS 2013) and the 2016 Census (SBoS 2018) asked a question about the number of deaths in the household in the twelve months preceding the census. Completeness was calculated by dividing 'Civil Registry' by 'Health'; dividing 'Civil Registry' by 'SPC projection'; and dividing 'Civil Registry' by 'Census'.

PUBLICATION OF CRVS DATA AND REPORTS

Civil registration records maintained by the Samoa BDM division are recognised for their potential value as a source of demographic information, and information about health, mortality, and other matters important for government. However, due to limitations in the completeness of the registration system, vital statistics are not routinely derived from civil registration records but only from periodic collections such as the census. It is envisaged that with improvements in registration completeness, the government will initiate release of vital statistics from civil registration records, as prioritised under the commitments made towards the Asia and Pacific Decade for CRVS.

RECENT INITIATIVES AND PLANS TO STRENGTHEN CRVS

1. With support from UNICEF, the BDM office of Samoa undertook a Mass Registration Campaign for births (in February to June 2018) aimed at raising awareness among the public on the importance and procedures for birth registration; assisting the BDM office to identify the key impediments in registration; and eliminating the birth registration backlog at the time.
2. In 2017 and 2018 the government, with the support of the BAG, provided training to medical doctors in Samoa on medical certification of causes of death. These trainings were delivered as training of trainers, with several doctors from Samoa identified to join and support BAG's regional training team.
3. In December 2018 two medical doctors from Samoa travelled to Tonga to participate in a three-day regional training workshop on medical certification of cause of death, coordinated by SPC and supported by BAG partners.

3. The government is in the process of planning for the establishment of a national identification system, including establishing legislation that will support implementation of the national identification system. It is envisaged that the system will potentially yield improvements in civil registration as entry into the system will require a Birth Certificate.

REFERENCES

MoH, SBoS and ICF Macro (Ministry of Health, Samoa Bureau of Statistics, and ICF Macro). 2010. Samoa Demographic and Health Survey 2009. Apia, Samoa: Ministry of Health, Samoa: 2010.

Pacific Community. 2018a. Pocket statistical summary (*Résumé statistique de poche*) 2018. Noumea, New Caledonia: Pacific Community. Available at: <http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/owbuh>

Pacific Community. 2018b. Population estimates and projections. Available at: <https://sdd.spc.int/topic/population-estimates-and-projections>

Pacific Community. 2020. Pocket statistical summary (*Résumé statistique de poche*) 2020. Noumea, New Caledonia: Pacific Community. Available at: <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/vrcao>

SBoS and MoH (Samoa Bureau of Statistics and Ministry of Health). 2015. Samoa Demographic and Health Survey 2014. Apia: SBoS; 2015.

Samoa Bureau of Statistics (SBoS). 2020. Fact sheet - Samoa DHS-MICS 2019-20 (preliminary results – July 2020). 2020. Accessed 07.10.2020. Available from: https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS6/East%20Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific/Samoa/2019-2020/Preliminary%20report/Factsheet%20Samoa%20DHS-MICS%202019-20_English.pdf

Samoa Bureau of Statistics (SBoS). 2018. 2016 Census Brief No. 2. Population dynamics and trends. 2018. Accessed 29.10.2020. Available from: <https://www.sbs.gov.ws/digi/3-2016%20Census%20Brief%20No.2.pdf>

Samoa Bureau of Statistics (SBoS). 2013. Population and housing census 2011 analytical report. 2013. Accessed 29.10.2020. Available from: <https://www.sbs.gov.ws/digi/Census%20Report%202011.pdf>

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). 2020. Samoa Midterm Questionnaire on the implementation of the Regional Action Framework on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific. 2020. Accessed 26.10.2020. Available at: <https://getinthepicture.org/resource/samoa-crvs-decade-2015-2024-midterm-questionnaire>