



Assessing Inequalities in Registration of Births and Deaths



Bhutan (2024) CRVS Inequality Assessment Brief

A complete and inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system ensures that every individual is recognized and counted. It supports access to essential rights and services, and enables governments to plan effectively and monitor progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, registration systems often fail to capture events among certain population groups, contributing to gaps in legal identity, health care access, and social protection.

Recognizing the need to understand and address these gaps, the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) carried out a national inequality assessment of its CRVS system with technical support from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The assessment provides insights into disparities in birth and death registration across age groups, sex and maternal age cohorts.

This brief summarizes the key findings and policy implications of Bhutan's CRVS inequality assessment, covering the period 2017 to 2022. The full report is available here: [Assessing Inequalities in Registration of Births and Deaths in Bhutan](#).

Bhutan's CRVS System

The Department of Civil Registration and Census (DCRC) under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) manages the Bhutan Civil Registration System (BCRS), a centralized digital platform for registering births, deaths, and other vital events. The Ministry

of Health issues notifications of births and deaths, while the National Statistics Bureau (NSB) analyzes the data and produces vital statistics.

Bhutan's CRVS system has evolved from a paper-based family diary to a fully digital registry with 230 registration points nationwide, including Community Centers. Registration of births and deaths is mandated within one year of occurrence, although late registration is permitted with justification. Registration is linked with other government services including citizenship, insurance, and national ID issuance.

Despite improved accessibility and geographic coverage, data sharing across agencies remains fragmented, and registration completeness remains unequal across certain population groups.

Methodology

The assessment compared registered births and deaths (numerators from BCRS) with expected totals (denominators from NSB population projections, the UN World Population Prospects, and the 2017 Population and Housing Census).

Disaggregation was carried out by age, sex, and maternal age groups. Analysis included both timely (within one year) and delayed registrations.

Key Findings

Birth Registration

- Overall completeness of birth registration was 83.2% in 2022, with a high of 89.8% in 2021 (including delayed registrations).
- Timeliness improved, with 97.4% of births registered within one year in 2022 (up from 90.8% in 2017).





- No major gender disparities were observed; registration rates for male and female children were similar across all age groups.
- Maternal age was a key factor: Births to mothers aged 30–34 had the highest registration completeness (92.9%), while adolescents (15–19) had the lowest (55.0%).
- Birth registration is slightly less complete for children born abroad or to Bhutanese-foreign national parents.
- Late registration remains a factor, but rates have improved over the assessment period.

Death Registration

- Overall completeness was 70.1% in 2022, with higher registration rates observed among older age groups.
- Children under the age of 8 had the lowest death registration completeness in 2022 (13.1%), highlighting a significant gap in the registration of child deaths.
- The Rural Life Insurance Scheme, which provides a cash payout for registered deaths among individuals aged 8 and above, has contributed to higher death registration completeness, but excludes children under 8, leaving a critical gap in coverage.
- Females had higher registration rates than males, especially among those aged 80+ (86.2% vs. 78.1%).
- Timeliness improved over the study period, with 97.4% of deaths registered within one year in 2022, compared to 80.8% of deaths in 2017.

Policy Recommendations

- Extending financial incentives, such as life insurance or funeral cost support to families of children under 8 could help address under-registration of child deaths.

- Strengthen awareness campaigns by targeting rural communities, young mothers, and marginalized groups to promote understanding of the benefits and procedures of civil registration.
- Future data collection efforts should include variables such as maternal education, occupation, and geographic location to enable analysis of the social determinants of under-registration.
- Including variables like maternal education, occupation, and geographic location to better understand social determinants of under-registration.
- Adopt ICD standards for cause-of-death reporting by standardizing and coding mortality data in line with WHO guidelines to enhance the quality of health statistics and support evidence-based policy planning.
- Strengthen institutional capacity by providing training and technical support for CRVS personnel to enhance service delivery and data quality.
- Integrate marital status data from court records to enrich BCRS records and improve completeness analysis.

Conclusion

Bhutan has made significant progress in strengthening its CRVS system and extending its coverage to reach more of the population. Timely birth and death registrations have increased, and digital systems are in place. However, some disparities remain; particularly among young children and adolescent mothers.

Targeted interventions are needed to close these gaps and ensure that every birth and death is registered. Achieving universal and equitable registration will support Bhutan's broader development goals and its commitment under the Regional Action Framework for CRVS in Asia and the Pacific.

