



Get
every one
in the picture

ASIAN AND PACIFIC CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS DECADE 2015 - 2024



United Nations Publication

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United Nations

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Bangkok, 2015

Cover photo: Plan/ Jessica Lomelin



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**ASIAN AND PACIFIC CIVIL REGISTRATION AND
VITAL STATISTICS DECADE 2015 - 2024**



FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I present the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which was held in Bangkok in November 2014. As can be seen in the Ministerial Declaration to “Get Every One in the Picture” in Asia and the Pacific, there is a clear commitment by countries in our region to leave no one behind and to place people firmly at the centre of the development agenda beyond 2015.

The present publication forms part of events to celebrate the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, 2015-2024, and is intended as a reference for policymakers, experts and practitioners working at the subnational, national and regional levels to strengthen CRVS and live up to the promises made at the Conference. The Decade builds on tireless country-level efforts to improve CRVS systems, and is aligned with global and subregional initiatives.

CRVS is crucial for individuals as well as for society at large. Civil registration, and the personal documents it provides, give people a formal legal identity, civil status and recognize their key family relationships. Legal identity in turn provides access to a host of services and entitlements, ranging from schooling and banking, to claiming inheritances, a nationality and a passport. A legal identity is a human right, which is why CRVS is fundamental in rights-based inclusive development.

Civil registration records help to deliver public services more effectively and are key in monitoring progress on development goals. Well-functioning CRVS systems will, therefore, be essential in order to achieve the proposed sustainable development goals. Compiling detailed demographic data to properly profile populations is a primary responsibility of all States, and a critical element of good governance. Beyond simply counting every person, more nuanced statistics, disaggregated by

smaller administrative regions, or by age and sex, can facilitate the transformation of societies through targeted policy interventions to reduce inequalities.

It is my hope that, by the end of the Decade, that we will be able to reflect on successful, collaborative efforts and proudly say that in Asia and the Pacific: (a) all key life events are being registered; (b) all people possess legal proof of identity; and (c) registration records are fully utilized to produce and share accurate, complete and timely vital statistics.

We have the best possible starting point to make this happen. Governments of our region are committed to an integrated and holistic approach to improving CRVS systems. The Ministerial Declaration and Regional Action Framework contained in this publication are the results of many years of extensive consultations and deliberations.

ESCAP is fully committed to support our members and associate members in their endeavours throughout the Decade. We will leverage our broad mandate and analytical capacities, as well as our regional convening and norm-setting capacities, to ensure the success of the Decade.

Let us work together to get every one in the picture.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shamshad Akhtar', with a horizontal line underneath.

Shamshad Akhtar
Under-Secretary-General of
the United Nations and
Executive Secretary of ESCAP

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It's time to...



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INTRODUCTION

Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) is the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events of the population in accordance with the law. The actors in a CRVS system typically include the civil registration authorities, the ministries of the interior/home affairs, justice and planning, the national statistics office and development partners.

CRVS is about a person's legal identity, their right to recognition as a person before the law and their formal relationship with the State. It provides individuals with documentary evidence — for example, a birth certificate — to prove their name, age, family relationships and the nationalities of their parents, which often provides the key to accessing essential services such as health care, education and social protection. These documents also have implications for political participation, recourse to justice, nationality, property ownership, formal employment, using banking and financial services and inheritance. Well-functioning CRVS systems are therefore central to achieving the ambition of leaving no one behind, including marginalized and hard-to-reach populations.

Recording every life event gives an opportunity to produce the most accurate, complete and timely statistics on the health and demographics of the population, and to maintain a national civil registry or a population database. While producing vital statistics through sample surveys is an option, these can be costly, uncertain and may not cover the most vulnerable segments of the population, nor can they be localized. They are not a long-term substitute for vital statistics derived from a universal CRVS system.

Knowing how many people live in the country and its subdivisions, the causes of death, the fertility rates and life expectancy enhances public administration and provides decision makers with information to better respond to the needs of society through more effective, efficient and directed policies at national and local levels.

These data allow the Government to identify public health policy priorities.

The majority of countries in Asia and the Pacific do not have universal and responsive CRVS systems that meet relevant international standards. This impedes inclusive and sustainable development in the region. In response, Governments and development partners have come together as part of the “Get Every One in the Picture” regional initiative.

“Get Every One in the Picture” aims to accelerate and focus efforts to improve CRVS systems in the region by forging political commitment, regional cooperation and accountability, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and technical assistance, raising awareness, developing innovations and making tools and resources available. The custodian of the initiative is the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which met for the first time in December 2013.

A key element of the initiative was the first Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which was held in Bangkok from 24 to 28 November 2014. Held in pursuance of Commission resolution 69/15, the Conference was co-organized by a partnership consisting of the following entities: secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; United Nations Children’s Fund; United Nations Development Programme; United Nations Population Fund; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; World Health Organization; Asian Development Bank; and Plan International. The World Bank Group, the Asia Pacific Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, World Vision International and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century also contributed to the organization of the Conference. The Conference brought together ministers of the interior/home affairs and health, and heads of national statistical offices, as well as high-level representatives of development partners.

The Conference led to three historic outcomes:

- (a) Adoption of the Ministerial Declaration to “Get Every One in the Picture” in Asia and the Pacific;

- 
- (b) Endorsement of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, comprising three goals, 15 national targets and seven action areas for accelerating and focusing efforts to improve CRVS systems in Asia and the Pacific by 2024;
 - (c) Proclamation of the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, 2015-2024.

The Ministerial Declaration and Regional Action Framework commit countries to continue the work to enable the Asia-Pacific region to improve and align efforts, as well as tracking progress towards getting every one in the picture.

The Ministerial Declaration and Regional Action Framework are contained in this brochure, to be used as a reference document for the Decade 2015-2024. Further information on CRVS activities, partners and country progress towards the goals and targets of the Decade can be found on the website www.getinthepicture.org.





Get every one in the picture

Birth Certificate

1 Name: **ASIAN AND PACIFIC CRVS DECADE, 2015-2024**

2 Birth Date: Month **November** Day **28** Year **2014** 3 Sex: **Every one**

3 Place of Birth: **UN Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand**

4 Full Name of Parent(s): **Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific**

5 Nationality of Parent(s): **Asian and Pacific**

6 Signatures of Parents/Notifiers/Attendants/Registrars:

The block contains numerous handwritten signatures and names in various colors. Notable names include: Nepal, New Zealand, Japan, Philippines, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, and many others. A large green circular stamp is overlaid on the bottom right, featuring the text 'CRVS' in large letters, 'Plan International' below it, and 'International Plan of Action for the Decade of the Girl Child' around the bottom edge.

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION TO “GET EVERY ONE IN THE PICTURE” IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

We, the ministers and representatives of members and associate members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific assembled at the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok, from 24 to 28 November 2014,

Reaffirming the human right of everyone to be recognized everywhere as a person before the law, which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹

Recalling the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,² the Convention on the Rights of the Child,³ the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families,⁴ and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,⁵ which stipulate that States Parties should register all children immediately after birth without discrimination, as invoked by resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, the most recent being General Assembly resolution 66/141 of 19 December 2011, and Human Rights Council resolution 22/7 of 21 March 2013,

Also recalling the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages,⁶ which stipulates that States Parties should

1 General Assembly resolution 217 A (III).

2 See General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

3 United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

4 United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2220, No. 39481.

5 United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2515, No. 44910.

6 United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 521, No. 7525.

ensure that all marriages are registered in an appropriate official register by the competent authority,

Further recalling General Assembly resolution 68/261 of 29 January 2014, which endorsed the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and General Assembly resolution 64/267 of 3 June 2010, which acknowledged that reliable and timely statistics and indicators measuring a country's progress are an indispensable basis for informed policy decision-making and for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals at the national, regional and international levels, on the understanding that this extends to other internationally agreed development goals and to monitoring at the subnational level,

Recalling World Health Assembly resolution WHA67.14 of 24 May 2014, in which member States were urged, in the context of the development agenda beyond 2015, to recognize the importance of accountability by strengthening of civil registration and vital statistics and health information systems, which can be used for monitoring health equity by providing disaggregated data that do not reveal information about individuals,

Also recalling Commission resolutions 67/12 of 25 May 2011 and 69/15 of 1 May 2013, which recognize the importance of civil registration and vital statistics for measuring aid effectiveness and raising the visibility of and improving policy focus on the most vulnerable groups,

Welcoming World Health Assembly resolution WHA67.10 of 24 May 2014, endorsing "Every newborn: an action plan to end preventable deaths", particularly the strategic objective that every newborn needs to be registered, and newborn and maternal deaths and stillbirths need to be counted,

Also welcoming the conclusion on civil registration of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of 17 October 2013,⁷ which noted the importance of civil registration

⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Conclusion on civil registration*, No. 111 (LXIV) – 2013, EXCOM Conclusions, 17 October 2013.

and documentation for the protection of refugees and that the lack of civil registration and related documentation makes persons vulnerable to statelessness and associated protection risks,

Recognizing that civil registration is the continuous, permanent, compulsory, and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events in people's lives in accordance with the national law, including births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages, divorces, adoptions, legitimations and recognitions,

Also recognizing that civil registration and vital statistics systems are, depending on national laws and administrative arrangements, typically the shared responsibility of multiple ministries and government agencies, such as the ministries of the interior, justice, home affairs and health, national statistics offices, and local and provincial governments,

Affirming that universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems have a critical role in achieving inclusive, equitable and people-centred development, including the following:

- (a) Providing documents and a permanent record for individuals to establish their legal identity, civil status and family relationships, and subsequently promoting social protection and inclusion by facilitating access to essential services, such as education and health care, among others;
- (b) Enabling good governance and strengthened public administration through greater political participation and accountability, and facilitating public service delivery by providing a basis for national population databases, national identity programmes and e-governance;
- (c) Providing vital statistics on the demographics and health of the population and other information that offer an evidence base for policymaking at local, provincial and national levels, including preventative and targeted interventions for addressing social, economic and health inequities, especially among hard-to-reach and marginalized populations;
- (d) Assisting the implementation of universal health coverage and providing the most reliable data to monitor and address the causes of mortality,

including providing an evidence base for measures to improve newborn, infant and maternal health;

- (e) Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through the provision of documents to prove family relations and civil status, and the production of age-, sex- and geographically disaggregated statistics;
- (f) Preventing and reducing the risk of statelessness, human trafficking, child and early marriage, child labour etc., as well as promoting durable solutions for refugees, including by documenting links to the country of origin;
- (g) Offering information for humanitarian planning, disaster risk reduction and management, and aiding the response to disasters,

Deeply concerned that an estimated 135 million children under 5 years of age in the region have not had their birth registered and that millions of other vital events are not registered,⁸

Alarmed that the majority of countries in the region do not possess universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that meet relevant international standards and recommendations,⁹

Convinced that a comprehensive and integrated approach to improving civil registration and vital statistics, involving all relevant stakeholders and incorporating civil registration and vital statistics into relevant national development plans, is the most effective and sustainable way to develop and improve civil registration and vital statistics systems,

Recognizing the need to address disparities in the civil registration coverage of hard-to-reach and marginalized populations, including people living

8 This figure is an estimate provided by the United Nations Children's Fund, *Every Child's Birth Right: Inequities and Trends in Birth Registration* (New York, 2013).

9 According to self-assessments conducted by 47 (out of a total of 62) ESCAP members and associate members during the period between 2010 and 2013 using a rapid assessment tool developed by the University of Queensland and the World Health Organization, 36 assessed civil registration and vital statistics systems that were categorized as "dysfunctional", "weak" or "functional but inadequate".

in rural, remote, isolated or border areas, minorities, indigenous people, migrants, non-citizens, asylum seekers, refugees, stateless people, and people without documentation,

Also recognizing the need for special attention to build national capacities related to death registration and determining causes of death, including medical certification of death and coding causes of death according to the International Classification of Diseases, verbal autopsy and training of health workers,

Underscoring that the functioning of civil registration and vital statistics systems¹⁰ should be guided by the United Nations' Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System and production of vital statistics undertaken in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics,

Emphasizing that, when universal, civil registration is the best source of vital statistics, and that, while household surveys have considerable value, they cannot replicate the strengths of civil registration as a data source, namely universality in coverage, permanence, continuity, archiving of records and cost-effectiveness over time, and are thus not a long-term substitute for civil registration and vital statistics systems,

Recognizing the important role and added value of international, regional and subregional organizations and initiatives to support the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in countries through advocacy, technical assistance, capacity-building, dissemination of information, research, innovation, and facilitation of the exchange of knowledge and best practices,¹¹

Also recognizing that non-governmental organizations, civil society, professional associations, media and the private sector, including those involved in public-private partnerships, can also play a significant role in supporting the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics, in accordance with national

¹⁰ *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System: Revision 3* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.XVII.10). Available from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/Demographic/standmeth/principles/M19Rev3en.pdf>.

¹¹ Such as the first International Identity Management Conference, held from 23 to 25 September 2014 in Seoul, which recognized that civil registration is a basis for civil identification of individuals and that an organic link between civil registration and identity management is critical.

priorities and strategies,

Believing that monitoring and accountability, including the setting of national targets for elements of civil registration and vital statistics, can expedite the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems,

Appreciating the efforts already made by members and associate members to improve their civil registration and vital statistics systems,

Also appreciating the ongoing support provided by development partners as part of the regional initiative to improve civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific, including recent efforts to strengthen financing for civil registration and vital statistics improvement activities at national, regional and global levels,

Recognizing the valuable role of subregional programmes to improve civil registration and vital statistics and in the implementation of the present Declaration, particularly for addressing unique subregional challenges,

Acknowledging that the establishment of a regional network of civil registrars would facilitate information sharing and peer-to-peer technical support to realize universal civil registration,

Welcoming the growing momentum around civil registration and vital statistics, including the progress achieved through initiatives in developing countries in Asia and the Pacific and other regions, including Africa, Latin America and the Eastern Mediterranean,

Applauding the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific for its efforts in overseeing the preparations for the Ministerial Conference and the development of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific,

Expressing appreciation to the co-organizers of the Ministerial Conference and to Thailand as the host Government,

1. *Proclaim* our shared vision that, by 2024, all people in Asia and the Pacific will benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitate the realization of their rights and support good governance, health and development;

2. *Affirm* that that the realization of our shared vision depends on achieving the following goals:

(a) **Goal 1:** Universal civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events;

(b) **Goal 2:** All individuals are provided with legal documentation of civil registration of births, death and other vital events, as necessary, in order to claim identity, civil status and ensuing rights;

(c) **Goal 3:** Accurate, complete and timely vital statistics (including on causes of death), based on registration records, are produced and disseminated;

3. *Declare* the years 2015 to 2024 to be the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade for Asia and the Pacific to achieve our shared vision;

4. *Endorse* the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, so as to accelerate and focus the efforts of Governments and development partners and, thereby, to achieve our shared vision;

5. *Commit* to the implementation of the Regional Action Framework so that the shared vision, goals and national targets can be achieved through comprehensive, integrated and concerted efforts by all relevant stakeholders in the following action areas:

(a) Political commitment;

(b) Public engagement, participation and generating demand;

(c) Coordination;

(d) Policies, legislation and implementation of regulations;

(e) Infrastructure and resources;

- (f) Operational procedures, practices and innovations;
- (g) Production, dissemination and use of vital statistics;

6. *Also commit*, by the end of 2015, to establish an effective and sustainable national civil registration and vital statistics coordination mechanism, develop a national improvement strategy, including monitoring and evaluation, set national targets for 2024 and initiate the other implementation steps of the Regional Action Framework;

7. *Resolve* to give particular attention and take measures to reduce all barriers to civil registration and to ensure the registration of vital events among hard-to-reach and marginalized populations and to build national capacities related to death registration and ascertaining causes of death;

8. *Call upon* development partners to provide technical and financial assistance to countries in a coordinated manner that is conducive to a comprehensive and integrated approach to improving civil registration and vital statistics;

9. *Invite* all concerned development partners, including the following, to join and contribute to the regional partnership supporting the implementation of the Regional Action Framework:

- (a) Subregional organizations, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the Economic Cooperation Organization, and initiatives, such as the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan (2011-2014) under the auspices of the Brisbane Accord Group, to promote subregional cooperation for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics;
- (b) Development cooperation agencies, to strengthen the effectiveness of their plans and programmes on civil registration and vital statistics and related areas of development assistance in line with national policies and priorities;
- (c) Bilateral and multilateral development agencies, banks and other



financial institutions, such as the World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank, to harness their technical and financial resources for supporting the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics; The United Nations system, including programmes, funds and specialized agencies, to jointly deliver support for improving civil registration and vital statistics, including through effective use of existing mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels, such as the United Nations Development Group, country teams, and disaster and emergency planning and response teams;

- (d) Non-governmental and civil society organizations, to support Governments and foster continuous responsiveness to the aspirations and needs of all people, including hard-to-reach and marginalized populations;
- (e) The private sector, to promote innovation and strengthen efforts to form public-private partnerships;
- (f) Academic and research institutions and professional societies, to collect, develop and disseminate best practices, innovation and technical resources;

10. *Designate* oversight for the Regional Action Framework and custodianship of the Decade to the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific reporting through the Commission;
11. *Call upon* members, associate members and development partners to support the further development of an Asian and Pacific regional network of civil registrars, and, in particular, its contribution to the implementation of the Regional Action Framework;
12. *Encourage* members and associate members to advocate for the inclusion of civil registration and vital statistics in the development agenda beyond 2015;
13. *Recommend* that the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems be included in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks;
14. *Request* the Executive Secretary:
 - (a) To accord priority to supporting members and associate members in the full, effective and sustainable implementation of the present Declaration and Regional Action Framework, in cooperation with other concerned entities;
 - (b) To provide secretariat support for the implementation of the Regional Action Framework;
 - (c) To oversee regional reviews of progress in implementing the Regional Action Framework in 2020 and 2025;
 - (d) To mainstream the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems into the work of the secretariat;
 - (e) To continue engagement with development partners to ensure the ongoing, coordinated and effective operation of the regional partnership;
 - (f) To submit the outcome of this Ministerial Conference to the Commission at its seventy-first session.

REGIONAL ACTION FRAMEWORK ON CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Introduction

1. Through Commission resolution 69/15, countries in Asia and the Pacific requested that further regional action be taken to support the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems. The Regional Action Framework responds to that request as a catalyst for Governments and development partners to focus and accelerate their efforts to realize a shared vision and the three CRVS goals outlined in this document during the proposed civil registration and vital statistics decade for Asia and the Pacific (2015 to 2024).
2. The Regional Action Framework facilitates collaborative action at local, provincial, national and international levels by enabling multiple stakeholders to align and prioritize their efforts, as well as to monitor progress towards achieving shared results.
3. Guided by the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific,¹² the development of the Regional Action Framework benefited from comprehensive consultations with countries and development partners during 2014. It builds on and offers a practical means for implementing the Regional Strategic Plan for the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific.¹³

¹² The Regional Steering Group was established in September 2013 pursuant to Commission resolution 69/15, comprising a balance of representatives of the Governments from the five subregions of the Commission and the civil registration, health and statistics sectors, as well as representatives of regional organizations with mandates to support the improvement of CRVS systems in the region.

¹³ As endorsed by Commission resolution 69/15.

4. CRVS is defined as the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording and production of vital statistics on the occurrence and characteristics of vital events in accordance with national laws, rules, regulations and policies from time to time in force, including births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages, divorces, adoptions, legitimations and recognitions.¹⁴

A. Shared vision, goals and action areas

5. The shared vision is that, by 2024, all people in Asia and the Pacific will benefit from universal and responsive CRVS systems that facilitate the realization of their rights and support good governance, health and development.

6. The goals and targets of the Regional Action Framework offer measurable outcomes that reflect progress towards achievement of the shared vision during the course of the decade 2015 to 2024. They recognize core human rights principles of progressive realization, non-regression, non-discrimination and equity, which apply to all countries and areas.

7. The three goals are:

- (a) **Goal 1:** Universal civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events;
- (b) **Goal 2:** All individuals are provided with legal documentation of civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events, as necessary, to claim identity, civil status and ensuing rights;
- (c) **Goal 3:** Accurate, complete and timely vital statistics (including on causes of death) are produced based on registration records and are disseminated.

8. The realization of the shared vision depends on coordinated and concerted efforts to develop and enhance the capacities of members and associate members in seven action areas, which are:

¹⁴ Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System: Revision 3 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.XVII.10). Available from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/Demographic/standmeth/principles/M19Rev3en.pdf>.

- (a) Political commitment;
- (b) Public engagement, participation and generation of demand;
- (c) Coordination;
- (d) Policies, legislation and implementation of regulations;
- (e) Infrastructure and resources;
- (f) Operational procedures, practices and innovations;
- (g) Production, dissemination and use of vital statistics.

B. Key principles

9. The six key principles for implementing the regional action framework are:

- (a) **Countries take the lead.** Activities under the Regional Action Framework should be driven by country demand and address the needs identified in the comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategy, if one exists;
- (b) **A stepwise approach.** The Regional Action Framework harnesses existing strengths of members and associate members, and facilitates incremental, feasible and sustainable improvements that are supported by ongoing monitoring and evaluation;
- (c) **Flexibility and responsiveness.** Recognizing that there is no single blueprint for improving CRVS systems in every setting, the Regional Action Framework offers action areas as a broad basis for the activities of Government and development partners with flexibility to accommodate the particular circumstances of each member and associate member;
- (d) **Building on local expertise.** In recognition of national and regional diversities, the Regional Action Framework leverages local knowledge and expertise for CRVS improvement;

- (e) **Consistency with international human rights and legal principles, and national law.** The Regional Action Framework is consistent with relevant international frameworks, including article 6 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹⁵ and article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,^{16,17} as well as the principles of universality and non-discrimination. The Regional Action Framework should be applied consistently with the existing national law, rules and regulations;
- (f) **Coordination and alignment.** The Regional Action Framework is a platform to facilitate harmonization and avoid duplication of activities of local, provincial, national, regional and international stakeholders, including subregional initiatives,¹⁸ for augmented impact in countries.

15 General Assembly resolution 217 A (III).

16 United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

17 Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states "... a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless[,] under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier".

18 For example, the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan and initiatives of the World Health Organization, including the Regional Strategic Plan for the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Regional Strategy on Strengthening the Role of the Health Sector in Improving CRVS in South-East Asia.

Goals and targets

10. The three goals of the Regional Action Framework address the three essential outputs of CRVS systems: the civil registration of vital events, which is a precursor to the other two goals; the provision to individuals and families of legal documentation as evidence of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events; and the production and dissemination of vital statistics based on civil registration records.

11. The targets are designed to enable monitoring and evaluation in ways that are objective, efficient, technically sound and time bound during the decade 2015 to 2024.

12. Members and associate members set their own national target value for each target (either the percentage or the year, depending on the target) based on their ambition and capacity, and in accordance with their comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategy, if one exists.

13. Geographic location, gender, religion or ethnicity should not be barriers to civil registration. Many countries experience substantially lower civil registration coverage rates among certain population groups, geographic areas and administrative subdivisions. Members and associate members are thus encouraged to set separate national targets, where appropriate, for civil registration coverage, provision of legal documentation and vital statistics for these subgroups, including hard-to-reach and marginalized populations. These targets should be supported by specific activities, ideally as part of a comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategy, to address the inequalities related to CRVS that these subgroups experience.

14. Disaggregated data enable Governments and development partners to continuously monitor civil registration coverage and the provision of legal documentation and vital statistics among all population groups, and facilitate targeted actions to specific groups. Therefore, when members and associate members report on progress in implementing the Regional Action Framework,

they are encouraged to provide data that can be disaggregated by age, sex and geographic area or administrative subdivision, as well as by other relevant subgroups.

15. The civil registration of marriages, divorces and adoptions has profound development implications, such as contributing to gender equality and addressing issues related to marriage before the legal age. Each marriage, divorce or adoption registration has the potential to have drastic impacts on the lives of the individuals concerned. Members and associate members are encouraged to make additional commitments with appropriate national targets for the civil registration coverage, provision of legal documentation and vital statistics on marriages, divorces and adoptions.

A. Goal 1: Universal civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events

16. Goal 1 is an expression of the internationally accepted principle of the universal coverage of civil registration. The CRVS system should register all vital events occurring in the territory and jurisdiction of the country or area, including among hard-to-reach and marginalized populations.

17. The focus on universality and equity implies that, in countries where there are significant variations in civil registration coverage by geography or level of social and economic development, it may be necessary to establish special procedures for civil registration. These may include incentives and measures to alleviate barriers to civil registration, such as gender disparities, distance, costs and cultural factors, and may involve utilizing existing infrastructure or public services, including social workers and community health workers, for notifying civil registration authorities of vital events.

18. Civil registration records should contain, for each vital event, the minimum information for judicial and administrative purposes as recommended by the United Nations.¹⁹

¹⁹ *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System: Revision 3* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.XVII.10), annex I. Available from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/Demographic/standmeth/principles/M19Rev3en.pdf>.

19. Every death should have a medically certified cause associated with it. For statistical purposes, special measures, such as verbal autopsy, may be needed to ensure that all deaths are associated with a defined cause of death, especially in settings where many deaths occur outside of health facilities and without attention from a medical practitioner.

20. The targets for goal 1 are:



- 1A By 2024, at least ... per cent of births in the territory and jurisdiction in the given year are registered.²⁰
- 1B By 2024, at least ... per cent of children under 5 years old in the territory and jurisdiction have had their birth registered.
- 1C By 2024, at least ... per cent of all individuals in the territory and jurisdiction have had their birth registered.
- 1D By 2024, at least ... per cent of all deaths that take place in the territory and jurisdiction in the given year are registered.
- 1E By 2024, at least ... per cent of all deaths recorded by the health sector in the territory and jurisdiction in the given year have a medically certified cause of death recorded using the international form of the death certificate.

²⁰ Given that Member States endorsed, at the sixty-seventh World Health Assembly, “Every Newborn: An Action Plan to End Preventable Deaths” (World Health Organization (Geneva, 2014), annex 1), which contains the strategic objective that “every newborn needs to be registered, and newborn and maternal deaths and stillbirths need to be counted”, members and associate members should aim to register every birth within 28 days of occurrence, and reflect this in their national target for target 1.A.



21. Members and associate members are encouraged, where appropriate, to add national targets for the civil registration of other vital events, such as marriages, divorces and adoptions.

B. Goal 2: All individuals are provided with legal documentation of civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events, as necessary, to claim identity, civil status and ensuing rights

22. Goal 2 reflects that CRVS systems provide legal documentation of civil registration to individuals and families for legal and administrative purposes. Legal documentation is strongly linked with a broad range of rights and activities, in particular legal identity. This goal addresses the distinction between the civil registration of a vital event and the possession of formal proof that it took place, in the form of legal documentation.

23. Legal documentation of civil registration is obtained through paper or electronic certificates or certified copies of registration records that prove the occurrence and characteristics of a vital event. Governments should specify the method of issuing legal documentation for the first time, for replacements and

for corrections, and take necessary measures to eliminate discrimination, deter corruption, fraud and forgery, and protect the privacy of individuals and families.

24. Achieving this goal requires that legal documentation should be readily accessible to the appropriate individuals. Aside from physical access, this includes no or low fees for providing the legal documentation and short waiting time between the civil registration of a vital event and the provision of the legal documentation.

25. In order to mitigate risks of discrimination, legal documentation should contain just the minimum set of information required for legal and administrative purposes as the national legal framework dictates. The targets of goal 2 describe the minimum information that should be included on birth and death certificates, according to international standards and recommendations.

26. The targets for goal 2 are:



2A

By 2024, at least ... per cent of all births registered in the territory and jurisdiction are accompanied with the issuance of an official birth certificate that includes, as a minimum, the individual's name, sex, date and place of birth, and name of parent(s) where known.

2B

By 2024, at least ... per cent of all deaths registered in the territory and jurisdiction in the given year are accompanied with the issuance of an official death certificate which includes, as a minimum, the deceased's name, date of death, sex, and age.

27. Members and associate members are encouraged, where appropriate, to add national targets for the provision of legal documentation of civil registration of other vital events, such as marriages, divorces and adoptions.

C. Goal 3: Accurate, complete and timely vital statistics (including on causes of death) are produced based on registration records and are disseminated

28. Goal 3 highlights the critical importance of civil registration being linked to the production and quality assurance of vital statistics on the occurrence and characteristics of vital events.

29. For many Governments, the routine generation of accurate complete and timely statistics on births, deaths and causes of death will require medium-term strategic and prioritized investment to improve civil registration and the national statistical system. There is thus a need to work progressively towards this goal. In the interim, the need for data to track progress towards improved health outcomes and broader development goals can be met using alternative sources, including censuses, household surveys and sample registration methods. While each method has some advantages, none is able to replicate the key strengths of civil registration as a source, namely universality in coverage, permanence and continuity, and archiving of records.

30. In countries and areas where it is legislated that all births and deaths should be recorded by the ministry of health, the data collected should be seen as a possible valid administrative data source of vital statistics. However, there should be systems in place to ensure that the data are shared with the civil registry and national statistical system.

31. The production of vital statistics should allow for key disaggregation, namely by age, sex, geographic area, administrative subdivisions, other subgroups and characteristics of the vital event, such as cause of death, using the International Classification of Diseases (ICD).

32. The production of vital statistics should be in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.²¹

²¹ General Assembly resolution 68/261 of 29 January 2014

33. The targets for goal 3 are:



- 3A**

By ...(year), annual nationally representative statistics on births – disaggregated by age of mother, sex of child, geographic area and administrative subdivision – are produced from registration records or other valid administrative data sources.
- 3B**

By ...(year), annual nationally representative statistics on deaths – disaggregated by age, sex, cause of death defined by ICD (latest version as appropriate), geographic area and administrative subdivision – are produced from registration records or other valid administrative data sources.
- 3C**

By 2024, at least ... per cent of deaths occurring in health facilities or with the attention of a medical practitioner have an underlying cause of death code derived from the medical certificate according to the standards defined by ICD (latest version as appropriate).
- 3D**

By 2024, the proportion of deaths coded to ill-defined codes will have been reduced by ... per cent compared with the baseline year.²²
- 3E**

By 2024, at least ... per cent of deaths taking place outside of a health facility and without the attention of a medical practitioner have their underlying cause of death code determined through verbal autopsy in line with international standards.

²² The classification of “ill-defined” will depend on the code set adopted by the country, including the version of ICD being used and the level of detail being applied.



3F

By ...(year), key summary tabulations of vital statistics on births and deaths using registration records as the primary source, are made available in the public domain in electronic format annually, and within one calendar year.

3G

By ...(year), key summary tabulations of vital statistics on causes of death using registration records as the primary source, are made available in the public domain in electronic format annually, and within two calendar years.

3H

By ...(year), an accurate, complete and timely vital statistics report for the previous two years, using registration records as the primary source, is made available in the public domain.

34. Members and associate members are encouraged, where appropriate, to add national targets for the production and dissemination of vital statistics on other vital events, such as on marriages, divorces and adoptions.



Action areas

35. The action areas serve as a basis for Governments and development partners to focus and organize efforts towards developing, implementing and supporting comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategies, including delineating the responsibilities of involved stakeholders.

36. The action areas also facilitate structured reporting on activities and progress by Governments and development partners, which will enable enhanced knowledge-sharing, regional cooperation and learning, and the identification of opportunities for collaboration. If members and associate members have adopted an alternative approach for a comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategy, it should be ensured that all seven action areas are covered in some manner.

37. The features of a comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategy will depend on the administrative, legal, social, cultural and political structures within national and subnational contexts, and on available or attainable infrastructure and resources. However, progress towards achieving the three goals of the Regional Action Framework will for most countries require efforts in all of the action areas.

38. Examples of activities that can be undertaken in each of the action areas are annexed to this document. The examples are illustrative only and may be highly relevant to some countries but not to others.

A. Political commitment

39. Sustained political commitment is crucial for the development and continuous functioning of CRVS systems. Political commitment can galvanize all stakeholders and levels of society around efforts to improve CRVS systems, and enable CRVS improvement to be embedded into national development plans. Furthermore, political commitment is critical for ensuring that CRVS systems are adequately resourced and are designed to be inclusive and responsive.

40. Political commitment at the highest levels plays an essential role in ensuring that relevant government stakeholders effectively take on their roles and responsibilities, and unify around a single comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategy. It is imperative that all levels of government are engaged in the process of establishing political commitment and development of a comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategy.

B. Public engagement, participation and generating demand

41. Improving the coverage of civil registration requires individuals and families to know the value of declaring vital events to relevant authorities and to be willing to do so. Universal and responsive CRVS systems are thus dependent on relationships of mutual trust and accountability between authorities and the public, and should be organized and managed in ways that are respectful of cultural and behavioral sensitivities.

42. Public engagement, participation and demand generation involves enhancing public awareness of the importance of declaring vital events and the value of vital statistics, and efforts to remove barriers to registration at all levels. Often, health, education and other public services, as well as the media, social workers and civil society, play a crucial role in providing information about the value of CRVS and encouraging the public to register vital events.

C. Coordination

43. Since there are so many institutions involved in and benefiting from CRVS, effective coordination is a prerequisite for universal and responsive CRVS systems. Coordination must take place among all relevant responsible stakeholders in countries at all levels of government, among development partners and between Governments and development partners.

44. Within countries, effective coordination among different local, provincial and national stakeholders involved in reporting, recording and registering the occurrence of vital events is essential, particularly for preventing duplication

of functions and information and for facilitating the effective use of registration records for statistical purposes. It is therefore imperative that a national CRVS coordination mechanism, such as a national committee or board, functions well and comprises all sectors, including the civil registration authorities, provincial and local governments, the health and education sectors, the statistics authorities and civil society.

D. Policies, legislation and implementation of regulations

45. A sound legal framework provides the basis for a universal and responsive CRVS system. Reviewing and updating of relevant legislation, regulations and policies is often a first step and common priority in a comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategy. It is especially important that the legal framework for CRVS does not create discriminatory barriers to civil registration.

46. The legislation or regulations should provide definitions of vital events. The legal framework should make the civil registration of vital events compulsory and define the functions, duties and responsibilities of civil registration authorities and of those who are obliged to register, thus helping to ensure the completeness of registration and to improve the accuracy of information held in civil records. In accordance with international standards, birth registration should be free of charge or a low fee should be charged to the family for late registration. Incentives should be offered to families for timely civil registration.

47. The legal framework should protect the confidentiality of personal data and ensure that data can be securely shared between a proved departments, as necessary, for quality assurance and to produce the required vital statistics. The legal framework should ensure the quality, timeliness and completeness of the vital statistics produced in compliance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and should contain provisions for the CRVS system.

E. Infrastructure and resources

48. Registration points should be within a reasonable distance for the whole

population, or measures, such as digital registration options, need to be undertaken to facilitate civil registration in remote areas on a routine basis, including for hard-to-reach and marginalized populations.

49. In terms of human resources, CRVS systems depend on a sufficient number of qualified staff. Governments need to consider mechanisms for career development and appreciation, as well as ongoing training to enhance the skills of and retain staff. Special efforts should be made to develop and retain key technical skills, such as training for physicians to accurately determine and record immediate and underlying causes of death, as well as capacity-building of officials to be able to establish, maintain and monitor CRVS systems.

50. Sufficient and sustainable investments are essential to enable incremental improvements in CRVS systems in areas of human resources, infrastructure, equipment and supplies.

F. Operational procedures, practices and innovations

51. Whereas the existence of a sound legal and institutional framework is central to a universal and responsive CRVS system, by itself it is insufficient. Attention must also be paid to ensure that those frameworks are effectively and consistently applied through the design and implementation of operational procedures and practices.

52. Operational procedures must be designed and implemented so as to ensure the essential function of civil registration in providing legal documentation that can help to establish legal identity, civil status, family relationships, nationality and ensuing rights. Similarly, they should facilitate the transmission of data to approved departments for the production of vital statistics.

53. Digital collection, maintenance and dissemination of data as part of a CRVS system, including online civil registration and service delivery, is a likely long-term ambition of members and associate members since it can support efficient public service delivery and e-government. In addition, advances in

technology simplify and reduce the cost of secure storage and protection of civil registration archives from natural disasters, war and cyberattacks. Innovations and the application of information and communications technology, including mobile technology, can also facilitate the civil registration of vital events in areas that are remote or otherwise isolated. However, innovations and technology are effective only when applied within a sound legal and institutional framework, with appropriate operational procedures and practices in place and consistently applied.

G. Production, dissemination and use of vital statistics

54. The administrative data from civil registration, when universal, is the preferred source of vital statistics in terms of accuracy, completeness and timeliness. An advantage of vital statistics based on civil registration is that they can be disaggregated to smaller sections and areas of the population, for example administrative subdivisions. Furthermore, advances in technology and methodology have made it increasingly feasible to overcome technical and logistical challenges related to compiling, ensuring the quality of, analysing and disseminating complete and reliable information on vital events.

55. Governments may need to adopt a phased approach to using civil registration records as a source of vital statistics by ensuring that information on currently registered vital events is compiled in a way to allow the production of vital statistics. Even if civil registration is known to be incomplete and confined to certain areas of the country, for example urban areas, the information should nonetheless be compiled and analysed alongside vital statistics from other sources. In the longer term, the aim is to produce complete, nationally representative statistics using civil registration as the main source.

56. Vital statistics should be made available to key users and in the public domain within a reasonable time frame. Metadata, including information on the content, context and limitation of the statistics, should be provided to users to increase their understanding of the data.

IV

Implementation of the Regional Action Framework

A. Governance

57. The Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific will be responsible for providing regional oversight and guidance for the implementation of the Regional Action Framework, including acting as custodian for the decade 2015 to 2024.

58. The Regional Steering Group shall be responsible for facilitating synergies between the Regional Action Framework and other ongoing initiatives to improve CRVS systems in Asia and the Pacific.

59. The Regional Steering Group shall be serviced by the ESCAP secretariat.

60. Where subregional initiatives exist to improve CRVS, coordination will occur in conjunction with and through appropriate and mandated governance bodies overseeing such initiatives. For example, in the Pacific islands, coordination will continue through the Brisbane Accord Group and the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan (2011-2014), which is under the Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy 2011-2020.

61. Within countries, the implementation of the Regional Action Framework shall be overseen by the national CRVS coordination mechanism. Development partners operating within national contexts are encouraged to establish working groups to coordinate activities among themselves and with the Government.

B. Implementation steps

62. Implementation of the Regional Action Framework Requires members and associate members to undertake the following steps, if they have not done so already:

- (a) Establish an effective and sustainable national CRVS coordination mechanism comprising all relevant stakeholders;
- (b) Conduct a standards-based comprehensive assessment of CRVS in their territory,²³ which is inclusive of all relevant stakeholders, for the purpose of identifying gaps and making recommendations that will be the foundation of a comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategy;
- (c) Set the national target value for each target, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, and report these to the ESCAP secretariat,
- (d) Develop and implement a plan for monitoring and reporting on achievement of the targets, including on reporting to the ESCAP secretariat;
- (e) Assess inequalities related to CRVS experienced by subgroups of the population, including among hard-to-reach and marginalized populations and particular geographic areas and administrative subdivisions, and, where appropriate, set national targets to address those inequalities;
- (f) Develop and implement a comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategy, aligned, where appropriate, with the action areas of the Regional Action Framework, with political commitment, adequate funding, and a clear delineation of responsibilities for stakeholders to establish accountability for the implementation;
- (g) Assign a national focal point within the Government that is responsible for coordinating with the ESCAP secretariat and development partners;
- (h) Through the national focal point, report relevant information to the ESCAP secretariat or subregional body, as appropriate, in accordance with the reporting structure for the Regional Action Framework.

23 Using a tool such as Improving the Quality and Use of Birth, Death and Cause-of-death Information: Guidance for a Standards-based Review of Country Practices (World Health Organization and the University of Queensland Health Information Systems Knowledge Hub, 2010).

C. Reporting and regional reviews

Key dates for reporting and reviewing progress on implementing the Regional Action Framework

Year	Activity
2015	Members and associate members submit baseline report to the secretariat
2016	Regional baseline analysis
2019	Members and associate members submit midterm report to the secretariat
2020	Midterm regional review conducted
2024	Members and associate members submit final report to the secretariat
2025	Final regional review conducted

63. In order to facilitate reliable monitoring while respecting the need for flexibility to national circumstances, the reporting structure of the Regional Action Framework is as follows:

- (a) **Baseline report.** By the end of 2015, members and associate members, through the designated national focal point, will submit to the ESCAP secretariat:
 - (i) Most recent nationally representative baseline data for each target;
 - (ii) The national target value for each target;
 - (iii) A progress report on CRVS improvement activities;
 - (iv) The report of any comprehensive assessment conducted in the country, where available;
 - (v) Any national CRVS strategy, where available;



- (b) **Midterm report.** By the end of 2019, members and associate members, through the designated national focal point, will submit to the ESCAP secretariat:
- (i) Nationally representative data measuring progress towards each target, where available;
 - (ii) A progress report on CRVS improvement activities;
 - (iii) The report of any comprehensive assessment conducted in the country, where available;
 - (iv) Any national CRVS strategy, where available;
- (c) **Final report.** By the end of 2024, members and associate members, through the designated national focal point, will submit to the ESCAP secretariat:
- (i) Nationally representative data measuring progress towards

each target, where available;

- (ii) A progress update report on CRVS improvement activities;
- (iii) The report of any comprehensive assessment conducted in the country, where available;
- (iv) Any national CRVS strategy, where available.

64. For the purposes of tracking progress and compiling information about CRVS improvement activities that could be constructive to share across the region and with other regions, members and associate members should submit progress reports to the secretariat in the years mentioned above, detailing activities undertaken under each.

65. On a voluntary basis, members and associate members may submit reports and information in other years either on an ad hoc basis or upon request of the secretariat or the Regional Steering Group.

66. The progress reports on CRVS improvement activities should preferably be arranged along the lines of the action areas or the form of any template decided by the Regional Steering Group. Definitions of vital events and key terms used should be provided as a part of the progress reports.

67. In order to prevent duplication, members and associate members with existing similar progress reporting structures may provide their reports arranged as those structures allow, for example as part of their national CRVS strategy or for other international initiatives, as is the case for the Pacific islands under the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan (2011-2014).

68. In the years immediately following the three reporting years, the secretariat and development partners, in collaboration with the Regional Steering Group, will synthesize the country reports into a report on regional progress towards achieving the targets set by members and associate members, and publish the result as an overview report of the status of CRVS in the Asia-Pacific region.



69. To support monitoring of the Regional Action Framework, the secretariat and the regional partnership, in consultation with the Regional Steering Group, will develop and make available relevant definitions and guidelines for the collection and processing of monitoring information.

D. Regional partnership and secretariat

70. International, regional, subregional, national and local development partners, including international organizations, non-governmental and civil society organizations, academia and professional societies, have a key

role to play in supporting members and associate members to realize the shared vision. The implementation of the Regional Action Framework can include advocacy, technical assistance, capacity-building, dissemination of information, application of information and communications technology, research, innovation and facilitation of the exchange of knowledge and best practices in the region.

71. The regional partnership of organizations supporting the implementation of the Regional Action Framework will provide their support in accordance with the key principles. In particular, assistance shall be conducive to a comprehensive and integrated approach to improving CRVS, and delivered in a coordinated and harmonized manner that is aligned with the priorities set by members and associate members through their comprehensive multisectoral national CRVS strategies. Where subregional or other related CRVS initiatives exist, all involved stakeholders have a mutual obligation to ensure coordination.

72. National civil registration authorities are central to successful implementation of the Regional Action Framework, particularly realization of goals 1 and 2. Recognizing this important role, the regional partnership will, subject to the availability of resources, support the establishment and functioning of a regional network of civil registrars to facilitate information sharing and peer-to-peer technical support, as well as documenting and sharing knowledge and lessons learned.

73. The ESCAP secretariat shall contribute to the implementation of the Regional Action Framework through its regional convening and norm-setting role, facilitating coordination, servicing the Regional Steering Group and overseeing the regional reviews.

PARTNERS





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