

SECOND SOUTH-EAST ASIA CIVIL REGISTRATION PROFESSIONALS NETWORK MEETING

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA,
14 TO 16 JANUARY 2025





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BACKGROUND ON THE SOUTH-EAST ASIA CIVIL REGISTRATION PROFESSIONALS NETWORK

Every country in South-East Asia has an operational civil registration office, reflecting this region's prioritization of civil registration in domestic policy agendas and their commitment to the realization of the goals of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific. While civil registrars in South-East Asia face unique national challenges in achieving universal registration, they must also address cross-border issues, such as temporary and permanent migration caused by different labour markets, conflict, natural hazards and climate change. Strengthening information and communications technology and adopting innovative approaches to meet these challenges is therefore critical.

Addressing the need for innovation and transboundary collaboration can be facilitated by a regional network of civil registrars suitable for sharing ideas, learning from each other and finding common solutions through South-South cooperation. Countries in the region already have a shared vision that 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.¹

To this end, an initial meeting of South-East Asian civil registrars was held with the support of the Philippines Statistics Authority on 7 to 9 February 2023 in Manila, the Philippines. Supporting partners included ESCAP, Vital Strategies, Global Health Advocacy Incubator, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR and WHO. The participants unanimously agreed to establish the South-East Asia Civil Registration Professionals Network.

Following the successful first meeting in 2023, the secretariat of the South-East Asia Civil Registration Professionals Network (ESCAP and Vital Strategies) organized the second in-person meeting on 14 to 16 January 2025 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Hosted by the General Department of Identification (GDI), Ministry of Interior of Cambodia, the meeting was convened to facilitate discussions on key CRVS achievements and challenges in preparation for the Third Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific taking place on 24 to 26 June 2025.

Thematic discussions focused on the digitalization of registration systems, inclusivity and resilience in CRVS systems and the 2025 report on progress in implementing the Regional Action Framework on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific. GDI also hosted visits to relevant registration facilities and health centres to showcase registration of vital events in practice in Cambodia.

¹ <https://getinthepicture.org/resource/ministerial-declaration-get-every-one-picture-asia-and-pacific>

The objectives of the meeting were:

- To identify key achievements across the CRVS Decade to highlight at the Third Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific, to be held from 24 to 26 June 2025;
- To discuss focus areas for future CRVS improvement initiatives;
- To facilitate knowledge exchange and potential collaboration on issues of concern of civil registrars in the region;
- To document existing practices in the region and common challenges.

This report captures the discussions and experience sharing among South-East Asian civil registrars and development partners on CRVS progress in South-East Asia during the second in-person meeting of the network from 14 to 16 January 2025 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, as well as focus areas and future activities for the network.



CRVS PROGRESS IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Nations in South-East Asia have made significant progress in improving their CRVS systems since the start of the Asia-Pacific CRVS Decade (2015-2024), according to findings from the [2025 report on progress](#) in implementing the Regional Action Framework on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific (hereinafter referred to as the '2025 review'). Birth registration has markedly improved for many reporting South-East Asian members and associate members of ESCAP in South-East Asia, and nearly all countries have achieved their national targets on timely issuing of birth certificates. Lao PDR and Cambodia have made notable strides increasing their birth registration completeness² rate by 56 and 27 percentage points respectively.³ The region nearly halved the number of unregistered children under five years of age, from 9.5 million in 2019 to 5 million in 2024.⁴ Similarly, the region has registered and issued certificates for a larger proportion of deaths since the start of the Asia-Pacific CRVS Decade. For example, Cambodia and Indonesia have both increased their death registration completeness rate by over 45 percentage points between 2014 and 2024. South-East Asia has also made remarkable strides towards the production of vital statistics since 2015, doubling the number of countries who produce and quadrupling the countries who disseminate vital statistics on births and deaths based on civil registration records.

These achievements are largely a result of the initiatives and reforms implemented by civil registration authorities and other government entities. In the following sections, several of these initiatives are described.

Philippines

The Philippines Statistics Authority has prioritized CRVS system development since the start of the Asia Pacific CRVS Decade. They have implemented legal reforms and proclaimed 2015-2024 as the CRVS Decade and February as 'Civil Registration Month', aiming to get 'Every Pinoy and Pinay in the Picture'. They have adopted comprehensive strategies, collaborated with relevant government agencies and development partners and initiated projects such as the [Birth Registration Assistance Project](#) and mobile registration programmes. In committing to ensuring universal registration of all vital events, they have continued to innovate by implementing inequality assessments, embracing digitalization and updating their legal instruments as well as creating linkages between civil registration and other identification documents and the national ID.


Cambodia

As the host of the meeting, Cambodia presented key initiatives contributing to the country's CRVS achievements. They noted that CRVS improvement accelerated following the establishment of the General Department of Identification (GDI) in 2014. GDI and relevant Ministries established

2 Birth registration completeness refers to the timely registration of births within one year of occurrence.

3 [Progress Made on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific after a Decade of Getting Every One in the Picture](#)

4 Ibid.



the National Strategic Plan for Identification (NSPI) 2017-2026 in 2016 with key references to the Regional Action Framework on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific. In 2023, the government, with support from partners through the Data for Health Initiative, developed and promulgated the Law on Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identification (CRVS-ID), in line with the NSPI and under the guidance of the National Steering Committee on CRVS and Identification. The law established principles of universal civil registration, including the creation of unique identification codes issued at birth, health-civil registration link for notification and verification of births and deaths, and allowing the registration of births at both the place of usual residence as well as where the birth occurred. Complementary to legal and regulatory improvements, the government has conducted business process mapping, piloted digital registration in several communes at the capital and provincial levels and implemented health-civil registration link systems in six communes in Phnom Penh.

The GDI highlighted challenges related to the transition to digital registration, data quality, geographic barriers, infrastructure requirements, technical and financial capacities and public awareness. It is essential to effectively communicate with relevant stakeholders on the economic and social benefits of an effective and fully functional CRVS system. Current priorities for the government include drafting more than 20 associated regulations to offer legal clarities on enforcement of the CRVS-ID law at both national and sub-national levels as well as developing NSPI 2026-2035 phase two and the National Center on Population Identity Management. They are also expanding the pilots on digital registration and health-civil registration link to more communes and integrating digital ID with other public and private services.

Lao PDR

Following the creation of the Department of Citizen Management within the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) in 2011, Lao PDR has transitioned from a paper-based CRVS system to an electronic CRVS (eCRVS) system. The implementation of the eCRVS system began in 2022, leading to improved processes for birth and death registration. Prior to the eCRVS adoption, civil registration was paper-based, leading to difficulties in reproducing documents, accuracy during data entry and producing accurate and timely vital statistics. With eCRVS, the government not only addresses these issues but also enhances the resilience of their CRVS system by implementing cloud storage. Additionally, the government carried out mass registration campaigns in 264 villages, 25 districts and 17 provinces to promote the use of the new eCRVS system, resulting in significant increases in the number of registered vital events. Good governance, strong leadership and interministerial collaboration between MOHA, Lao Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Public Security and other relevant agencies were key for the successful implementation of the campaigns.

However, the government still faces challenges in facilitating registration for ethnic minorities due to language barriers and difficulties reaching people in remote and mountainous areas, particularly during the rainy season. Furthermore, changes in leadership and officials lacking understanding of CRVS beyond administrative purposes demonstrates the need for effective and regular advocacy, awareness raising and capacity building. Funding challenges also persist as systems are becoming increasingly expensive to implement and maintain, especially with the transition to a digitalized system. The government acknowledged funding support from donors and development partners but highlighted the importance of domestic funding, including at the sub-national level, to sustain improvements.



Thailand

Thailand has made significant strides on enhancing its IT systems, legal frameworks and integration of data systems. The government has a strong political commitment to make CRVS a priority, especially for vulnerable groups, and it aims to see that all people residing in Thailand are documented. As such, on 29 October 2024, the Thai government issued a cabinet resolution to expedite the process for 480,000 stateless people to gain permanent residency and, if applicable, acquire Thai nationality. The government continues to explore opportunities to improve their CRVS systems, including partnering with development partners to leverage CRVS for service delivery. It should also be noted that Thailand has policies and constitutional provisions guaranteeing education for all children up to the age of 15 and has policies for free healthcare for non-Thai persons with issues pertaining to legal status. In fact, Thailand's 'linkage centre' is capable of linking data across multiple agencies, such as Tax Revenue, Social Security Office, National Health Security Office and the Police to provide services to every individual in Thailand, in line with the government's policies and Constitution.

Brunei Darussalam

One of the early efforts to digitize identification processes in Brunei Darussalam was the introduction of biometrics in 2000 for establishing a national ID. The Ministry of Transport and Infocommunications is currently coordinating efforts to implement a fully digital ID system. The government is also in the process of updating the system to accommodate a larger amount of information, including information on births, deaths, adoptions, marriages, migration and citizenship. Full integration of these data and their databases is planned for 2025. In terms of civil registration, Brunei has achieved a 99.9 per cent rate for in-person registrations, with all information stored in a centralized national information hub. Relevant ministries meet regularly at coordination meetings to facilitate the development of CRVS and ID systems in the country, aligning with a whole-of-government approach.

Malaysia

The National Registration Department (NRD) is responsible for managing citizen identity records and maintaining a comprehensive registry of personal data in Malaysia. NRD has been leading CRVS improvements in the country since its inception in 1948. A major achievement in their efforts was the introduction of MyKad, the country's official identity card for all Malaysian citizens and permanent residents aged 12 and above, in 2001. MyKad is one of the first biometric-enabled identity cards in the world and is integrated with various service delivery systems. The current iteration of MyKad enables online identity verification via biometrics, facilitating digitally secured access to public and private services. The government is developing a new generation of MyKad to streamline application and business processes, enable real-time monitoring and reporting of system performance and facilitate access to more digital services.

Timor-Leste

The CRVS system in Timor-Leste has notably progressed since the nation's independence in 2002. Timor-Leste's CRVS system is governed by several legal frameworks, including the Civil Code and Law No.10/2011, which provide the foundation for civil registration. The establishment of registry offices across municipalities and the implementation of the Demography Management Information System

(DMIS) mark significant advancements in the registration process. The government also established birth registration posts in hospitals and some health centres in 11 municipalities to facilitate timely registration of births carried out in these health facilities. With support from development partners, the government has conducted a mobile birth registration campaign to facilitate birth registration for children living in remote villages and sub-villages. The Ministry of Justice is implementing online application services for birth, marriage and death certificates, identity cards, criminal records and passports. In collaboration with UNICEF and telecommunication providers, the government is leveraging SMS services to enhance community awareness of CRVS. Inadequate infrastructure, low public awareness, data management issues, geographical barriers and human and financial resource constraints are key challenges facing the country.



2

DIGITALIZATION OF CRVS SYSTEMS

The session on 'Digitalization of CRVS Systems' explored the benefits of digitalization and enterprise architecture, which are key elements of CRVS systems, and the requirements, advantages, disadvantages and critical considerations for implementation. The session emphasized several important aspects of digital transformation in CRVS systems, including:

- Legal mandates to support digitalization
- Offline systems as essential backups
- Cloud-based data hosting solutions
- Public portals for online submissions
- Migration of data from legacy systems to new platforms
- Digitization of paper records with proper archiving and indexing
- Interoperability with health, national ID, education and social protection sectors

Specific country presentations illustrated practical applications and progress in digitalizing CRVS systems:

Viet Nam

Viet Nam highlighted the integration of health and civil registration systems. Key achievements included the enactment of a civil status law providing a legal foundation for civil registration, the Ministry of Health assuming responsibility for birth and death notifications, active involvement of local governments and capacity building for civil registration officials. The country exceeded its national targets for under-five birth and death registration in 2024. A unified electronic civil registration management software was expanded nationwide and is currently being upgraded. Since 2023, mortality data has been shared between healthcare centres and commune-level authorities. A nine-month pilot yielded significant outcomes: (a) improved data updating timelines; (b) enhanced on-time registration; and (c) better coordination between health and civil registration sectors. A summary report for the National Action Plan on CRVS (2015–2024) is being prepared and a new action plan is under development.

Malaysia

Malaysia presented its achievements and challenges in data sharing. The National Registration Department, established in 1948 with 200 branches, manages identity records including births, deaths, marriages, divorces and health data. In 2001, Malaysia introduced MyKad, a multipurpose ID card with a chip and biometrics—enabling integration of services through a unique identifier and online birth registration. The transition from paper-based ID cards to MyKad and from shorter to 12-digit ID numbers was explained. The MyIdentity initiative established secure identity verification

and offline authentication, involving 22 government agencies and facilitating approximately six million transactions in 2024. Benefits included faster services, reduced paperwork and improved accuracy. The current system, established in 1998, is being transformed into a national population system serving as a single gateway. Challenges include talent retention, procurement process changes and legal and policy readiness.

Thailand

Thailand discussed the role of civil registration in digital identity systems and service improvements for both Thai and non-Thai populations. The transition from paper-based to digital systems has significantly reduced the time required to issue ID cards—from six to eight weeks to just 15 minutes. Key milestones were shared, along with a comprehensive video showcasing Thailand's journey in digitalizing CRVS systems.



3

WORLD CAFÉ – DIGITALIZATION OF CRVS SYSTEMS

Following the initial sessions, participants engaged in a World Café focused on the digitalization of CRVS systems. Discussions were organized around several thematic areas:

Roll-out, costing and funding of digital and integrated identity management

Participants explored the financial aspects of implementing digital and integrated identity systems. Topics included hosting infrastructure, software, equipment, operational costs, training and support, connectivity and both initial and ongoing expenses.

They also discussed strategies and challenges related to implementing national ID systems. Discussions included integration with CRVS systems, coordination across agencies and the importance of legal frameworks and digital infrastructure to support identity management.

Digitization of existing records


This discussion centred on efforts in **Cambodia, Lao PDR** and the **Philippines** to digitize historical civil registration records. In the Philippines, microfilm is used as part of the Civil Registry System Information Technology Project Phase II (CRS-ITP2), while paper records are still retained. A new law may change this practice. Some digitized birth records date back to 1930, and manual review is still required for certain documents. In Lao PDR, a pilot project has digitized records from one district in Vientiane, with scanning conducted at the local level. Cambodia employs optical character recognition (OCR) technology to scan and recognize text from paper records.

Data sharing

This session examined how civil registration data is shared across government agencies and other entities. Key themes included:

- Data flows from civil registration offices to other departments
- Mechanisms for data sharing
- Challenges and barriers to expanding data sharing

In the **Philippines**, data is shared with social security systems, the Department of Health, legislative bodies, foreign embassies and researchers. Mechanisms include data matching, individual and batch verification, memoranda of agreement (MoU) and data product agreements. Challenges include requests for complete (microdata) or recent data, delays, lengthy MoU reviews and duplicate records.



In **Cambodia**, data is shared with the National Institute of Statistics and the General Department for Identification. Mechanisms include inter-ministerial probes, sub-decrees, data portals with APIs and standardized formats. Challenges include confidentiality, server performance, connectivity and data quality.

In **Papua New Guinea**, discussions raised questions about the distinction between public and private data, and whether sharing should focus on authentication or validation. The broader implications of data sharing between governments, citizens and businesses were also considered.

In **Timor-Leste**, the Ministry of Justice shares data with the National Institute of Statistics upon request. Mechanisms include a Steering Committee. Challenges include duplicate data, confidentiality concerns, identity theft risks due to the absence of biometric systems and limited coordination among ministries.

In **Thailand**, civil registration data is shared from the Bureau of Registration Administration to other government agencies. Mechanisms include memoranda of understanding and the use of Smart ID cards. Challenges include ensuring data security and confidentiality. Stateless individuals are entitled to free education up to age 15 and, once registered, gain access to free healthcare. Thailand's stateless population is nearly 600,000, representing about 1 per cent of the total population and significant efforts are being implemented to register this population. Mobile registration teams include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, international agencies and staff from the Ministries of Justice and Interior.

Monitoring systems performance

The efforts currently ongoing in countries for monitoring systems performance were discussed:

In **Malaysia**, national and regional departments are responsible for monitoring CRVS performance and developing new digital systems. However, national-level reporting is irregular.

In **Timor-Leste**, monitoring focuses on identifying duplicate records, with quarterly reports on vital events.

In **Papua New Guinea**, a national CRVS Committee meets quarterly to support coordination and reporting. Sub-national monitoring involves mobile registration units, control sheets, health centres and local government departments, which report to the Registrar General.

In **Cambodia**, local commune offices conduct physical audits. District-level checks of vital event records feed into provincial reports. The General Department of Identification compiles monthly data and reports annually to the National Steering Committee.

In the **Philippines**, quarterly review of the Strategic Plan is being done by the Inter-Agency Committee on CRVS, alongside annual monitoring and mid-term review of the Philippine Development Plan and the Philippine Statistical Development Program, including monitoring of activities at the subnational level. Submission of civil registry documents by the Local Civil Registry Offices nationwide to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) is closely monitored. The documents are processed and included in the PSA's civil registry database as well as for statistical reporting.





Business process improvement

Countries shared their experiences in improving CRVS-related business processes:

In **Indonesia**, agencies mapped existing processes based on current regulations and validated them through stakeholder workshops. Identified bottlenecks included lack of linkage between health and civil registration systems and absence of data standards.

In **Timor-Leste**, improvement plans were developed through stakeholder consultations, highlighting issues such as variable harmonization and data operability.

In **Lao PDR**, a two-day workshop involved core CRVS teams and field staff to gather insights for process monitoring.

In the **Philippines**, business process improvements were initiated before digitalization. A recent review focused on linking CRVS with national ID systems, including legal alignment.

In **Malaysia**, annual reviews aim to identify barriers and enhance efficiency. The process involves brainstorming from field consultations to business units, with key performance indicators used to track service delivery.

In **Papua New Guinea**, departments initially conducted separate reviews. They later collaborated to create an integrated business process map. However, siloed development remains a challenge, prompting the National Steering Committee to work on harmonization and implementation.

The health sector's role in notifications and registration

The role of health facilities in notifying and registering vital events was discussed with examples from **Cambodia** and **Indonesia**:

In **Cambodia**, legislation mandates both public and private health facilities to act as notifiers. Efforts are underway to formalize procedures involving health facilities and village chiefs in birth registration. However, technical expertise in system development is still needed.

In **Indonesia**, similar legislation exists, but enforcement is limited. Health workers face heavy workloads, and suggestions were made to introduce electronic notification systems to reduce burden and leverage existing health infrastructure for civil registration.

INCLUSIVITY AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR CIVIL REGISTRARS

The second day of the civil registrars meeting focused on inclusivity in CRVS systems and its importance to civil registrars. The Regional Action Framework for CRVS in Asia and the Pacific calls upon Members and Associate Members of ESCAP to assess inequalities related to CRVS experienced by subgroups of the population, including hard-to-reach and marginalized populations and particular geographic areas and administrative subdivisions. Similarly, the Ministerial Declaration on Building a More Resilient Future with Inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics from 2021 recognizes the need to address disparities in the civil registration coverage of hard-to-reach and marginalized populations, including people living in rural, remote, isolated or border areas, minorities, indigenous people, migrants, non-citizens, asylum seekers, refugees, stateless people and people without documentation.

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.

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.

Assessing inequalities in CRVS can be framed through three dimensions: (1) geography; (2) demographic and socioeconomic factors like education level, gender, income, ethnicity and religion; and (3) classifications of hard-to-reach populations such as minority groups, people on the move, indigenous populations, asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons and persons with disabilities.

Details were provided on three different inequality assessment analyses undertaken in Lao PDR, Fiji and Samoa.⁵ It was noted that there are no major sex differentials in birth registration, but the most pronounced disparities were between urban-rural populations and income quartiles. In Fiji, analysis highlighted the elevated under-registration of births for children born to particularly young mothers under the age of 19. In Samoa, geospatial analysis emphasized the importance of proximity to registration centres; data revealed a clear pattern of lower registration rates as distance from the two primary registration centres increased.

In the 2025 report on progress, it was noted that more work was needed on an analytical level; only two countries have completed a formal inequality assessment, and only three countries have undertaken specific gender-gap studies. Systematic and continuous assessment of inequalities is thus a priority.

5 <https://getinthepicture.org/regional-picture/implementation-steps/inequality-assessment>



Presentations from representatives of Singapore and Thailand highlighted their efforts to create inclusive systems. Efforts to digitalize CRVS systems in Singapore were notably comprehensive and rigorous, and clear progress was made in legal reform and business process improvement to ensure the registration of people without a Singaporean passport or ID. In Thailand, a specific division of the National Registration Authority was established to focus on providing services for non-Thai citizens and special populations. Thailand has collaborated with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on using the Bali Process Assessment Toolkit to identify vulnerable sub-populations, abandoned children and state-accepted minorities in border areas, and improving policy frameworks and business processes.



WORLD CAFÉ – GETTING EVERY ONE IN THE PICTURE THROUGH INCLUSIVE CRVS SYSTEMS

This was followed by a World Café session on ‘Getting every one in the picture through inclusive CRVS systems.’ The discussions centred along the following themes: barriers to registration of non-citizens, marriage and divorce registration, assessing inequalities and using results in policy, gender equity in CRVS, legislative changes to facilitate inclusion, inclusive standards and registrar training.

Barriers to registration of non-citizens

The registration of foreigners and citizenship determination was discussed with examples from **Cambodia, Viet Nam** and **Indonesia**. All three countries are registering foreigners, but not all foreigners or children born to foreigners. In Cambodia, only children born to foreigners residing legally in the country are registered.

Marriage and divorce registration


Marriage and divorce registration practices across South-East Asia were explored. In **Thailand**, marriage registration is lawful for individuals over the age of 18 using an ID card or passport, applicable to both citizens and non-Thai immigrants. Registration is conducted at district civil registration offices. Motivations for registering marriages include access to financial benefits such as loans, tax relief and other entitlements. Thailand recognizes two types of divorce: civil divorce, processed at civil registration offices when both parties agree, and judicial divorce, handled by the courts when there is disagreement. Regardless of the process, divorce must be registered and a certificate issued. Thailand recently amended its Marriage Act, effective 23 January 2025, to guarantee marriage registration and equality for LGBTQI+ individuals.

In **Cambodia**, not all divorces go through the court system. Some couples opt for local negotiation and informal separation. Marriage and divorce certificates are issued by civil registration offices. If a marriage is registered in court, divorce must also follow a court procedure. Legal complexities may arise due to factors such as children or property. While proof of marriage is important for accessing spousal benefits, Cambodia relies more on family books than formal certificates for registration purposes.

Assessing inequalities and using results in policy

Countries shared approaches to studying and addressing inequalities through CRVS data. In the **Philippines**, birth and death registration records from 2015 to 2022 are analyzed using variables such as sex, birth order, place of occurrence and attendant at birth.





Thailand collects data from village chiefs in hard-to-reach communities to assess disparities. A process flow was outlined involving the Ministry of Justice implementing government policy through mobile registration teams, district registration offices and the Department of Provincial Administration under the Ministry of Interior. These efforts are supported by various government departments, NGOs and international organizations.

In **Malaysia**, collaboration with the Ministry of Education ensures that unregistered students are identified and given opportunities to register. Interagency task forces have been formed to support further research and policy development.

Gender equity in CRVS

Discussions addressed how gender perspectives are integrated into CRVS systems, including:

- Incorporating gender inequalities and sex differentials into system strengthening efforts
- Reflecting gender perspectives in the production, dissemination and use of vital statistics
- Addressing gender inclusion in CRVS and identity integration initiatives

Legislative changes to facilitate inclusion

Countries shared legislative reforms aimed at improving inclusion in CRVS systems. In **Cambodia**, births, deaths and marriages can be registered either at the place of occurrence or residence, with mothers typically serving as the principal informants.

In **Indonesia**, there is no formal system for registering stateless persons. Children born to parents without marriage certificates often have only the mother's name on the birth certificate. Recommendations included linking inequality assessments to legal reviews and creating provisions for registration in cases where documentation is limited or absent. Late registration requirements were noted as a barrier for marginalized communities, especially when death registration requires prior birth registration.


In the **Philippines**, legal provisions were recommended to be tailored to different circumstances, including for marginalized groups and refugees. A recent presidential decree was highlighted regarding Muslim marriage and divorce.

In **Papua New Guinea**, new legislation allows for registration under guardianship and recognizes customary marriage registration, promoting cultural sensitivity.

Inclusive standards and registrar training

Countries discussed how to implement and monitor standards of practice in CRVS and train registrars effectively. In **Papua New Guinea**, time constraints hinder registrar retraining. Breaches of standards are common and often overlooked. Monitoring is conducted through reporting mechanisms, with complaints accepted in-person, via email or through inquiry platforms.

In **Timor-Leste**, national-level refresher training incorporates roleplay and theatrical methods to enhance engagement. Feedback from cascade trainings are reported centrally, and monitoring is conducted through a data quality assurance system. Complaints and corrections are managed at the municipal level.



In **Cambodia**, civil registrars are elected every five years, and clerks are civil servants. Both receive training on registration practices. There are four levels of civil registrars, and registration occurs at the sangkat (commune) level. Trainers are trained nationally, and monitoring is conducted at national, provincial, and district levels. Data quality is monitored at the district level, and complaints can be submitted via a complaint box or through Facebook.

The role of civil society organizations

The discussions also explored the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in supporting CRVS efforts across South-East Asia.

In the **Philippines**, CSOs such as WHO, CDC Foundation, Vital Strategies, Global Health Advocacy Incubator, Plan International and UNHCR are actively involved. Their systemic contributions include improving medical certification of cause of death (MCCD), providing legal expertise, developing national statistics plans, coding and implementing pilot programmes. At the community level, they engage in advocacy with legislators, support budgeting processes and raise public awareness.

In **Cambodia**, CSOs including the Asian Development Bank, Vital Strategies, Plan International, Global Health Advocacy Incubator and UNHCR are contributing to CRVS system improvements. Their systemic work includes enhancing birth registration systems, developing national statistics plans, digitization and digitalization efforts, piloting health-civil registration linkages and supporting government strategy development. Community-level activities focus on raising awareness of CRVS.

In **Lao PDR**, WHO and UNICEF are supporting improvements in death notification and MCCD, mobile registration initiatives and birth registration systems.

In **Papua New Guinea**, organizations such as Transparency International, CDC, UNICEF, Vital Strategies, Global Health Advocacy Incubator, ESCAP and local churches are involved. Their systemic work includes developing a national CRVS strategy, improving civil registry and statistical systems, enhancing verbal autopsy processes and strengthening birth registration systems. Community efforts emphasize promoting transparency and accountability in CRVS activities.

Importance of ongoing assessment, monitoring and communication

Another key area of discussion was the role of communication in improving demand for civil registration services. Participants emphasized the importance of continuous and rigorous assessment of civil registration data to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions aimed at reducing inequality. It was suggested that inter-agency coordination should not only address legal frameworks and digitalization but also integrate inequality assessments as a regular agenda item. Cross-validation of civil registration data with independent sources was encouraged to improve the quality of these assessments. The session concluded with recommendations to institutionalize inequality assessments in regular interministerial meetings.



6

FIELD VISIT TO LOCAL REGISTRATION OFFICE AND HEALTH CENTRE

The participants of the meeting visited the local registration office at Sangkat Tropeangkrosang of Posencheay District and a Samaky Health Center in Phnom Penh, hosted by the General Department of Identification. Delegates on the study visit observed the workflow of the pilot implementation of the registration of live births and deaths.

The purpose of the pilot implementation is:

1. To test the procedures for civil registration in accordance to the provisions of the law on Civil Registration, Vital Statistics, and Identification, allowing technical teams to adjust the draft legislation and interministerial prakas (i.e. official proclamation made by a minister or interministerial body).
2. To learn and evaluate the pilot use of the civil registration system via notifications from health centres, enabling technical teams from General Department of Identity, Ministry of Interior, and the General Department of Technical Health of the Ministry of Health to update and adjust the system before official implementation nationwide.
3. To test the transmission of civil registration data to the National Institute of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning and producing vital statistics reports.
4. To expand the pilot implementation to additional target communes/sangkats, especially those implementing one-stop service registration for identity service.
5. To learn from the experiences of the above pilot implementation to prepare a guidebook for civil registration and action plans for master training of trainers in all 25 capitals and provinces, as well as preparing, monitoring and supporting plans for the implementation nationwide.



The visit to Samaky Health Center focused on observing the process of reporting birth and death events. The visit to Sangkat Tropeangkrosang local registration office focused on observing the process of civil registration utilizing digital technology systems via notifications from health centres. A presentation on the process of reporting birth and death events from health centres to the civil registration system was delivered by Mr. Chev Mony, Deputy Director of the Planning and Health Information Department, General Technical Health Department, Ministry of Health.

7 RESILIENCE AND THE ROLE OF CIVIL REGISTRATION

The meeting also focused on resilience in CRVS systems and the role of civil registration. Discussions focused on disaster preparedness, management and recovery, particularly in the context of COVID-19. The need for continuous improvement in data collection and management systems was emphasized. The session highlighted the necessity for countries to share best practices and develop resilient systems to protect individual identities and rights, especially in disaster events. Actionable strategies and global guidance are needed to enhance the resilience of CRVS system, ensuring communities are supported in rebuilding their lives after disasters. Overall, the discussion covered various aspects of CRVS, sharing challenges, best practices and collaborative strategies to improve accuracy, timeliness and effectiveness in crisis management and emergency planning.

Civil registration systems resilience


One key topic was the use of CRVS data in different countries. The **Philippines** utilizes civil registration data to validate census data, predict populations and track deaths, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The country has an efficient system for publishing civil registration data, reducing the usual 13-month lag to monthly updates, which are made available on a public dashboard under Vital Statistics. **Thailand** has an integrated system where personal profiles are linked with ID cards, allowing relevant agencies to access specific information based on agreements. Thailand also uses civil registration data for resource allocation and identification recovery during crises, such as floods. **Timor-Leste** updates its registration data in real-time to enhance disaster response efforts.

Another discussion point was data availability. **Lao PDR** is in the process of transitioning from paper-based to digital records, with data available from the village-level. In the **Philippines**, civil registration data exists at the community and municipality levels but is not yet linked to a Geographic Information System (GIS), unlike census data. **Thailand** also has village-level data and is in the process of developing GIS integration for civil registration data.

The participants also addressed challenges in civil registration. **Lao PDR** reported under-registration among certain populations, such as Muslim and indigenous groups, and emphasized the need for quality assessment to improve data reliability.

Finally, collaborative solutions were highlighted. **Lao PDR** integrates birth and death data with the Ministry of Health. The **Philippines** collaborates with local governments for mobile registration and capacity building to reach underserved populations. **Thailand** shares civil registration data with government agencies like the Disaster Risk Prevention Department, while **Timor-Leste** integrates data across multiple ministries, including Public Health, Justice and Social Security.





Civil registration during the COVID-19 pandemic and other emergencies

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries, including **Cambodia**, **Lao PDR** and **Viet Nam** faced challenges in tracking deaths due to the closure of civil registration offices. In **Cambodia**, the Ministry of Health led a task force, mobilizing significant government resources and volunteers to count the deceased, particularly in quarantine centres. **Viet Nam** followed a similar approach, ensuring that pandemic-related deaths were recorded despite the disruption to regular registration processes. In the **Philippines**, the National Statistics Office provided daily data to national stakeholders, enabling timely interventions, lockdown measures, and resource allocation for healthcare facilities, including patient treatment and vaccinations. The Philippines also leveraged civil registration data during the COVID-19 crisis for real-time death reporting and disaster risk reduction planning.

The discussion also touched on the protection of civil registration records, especially in flood-prone areas. In some cases, records have been lost due to fires, such as in Mali, where a civil registration office was destroyed in a terrorist attack. This highlighted the need for countries to safeguard paper-based records against natural disasters and attacks. In response to ongoing disaster risks, the **Philippines** has integrated simulation exercises into routine tasks as part of a government-led disaster risk reduction training. These exercises prepare officials for future crises, ensuring a structured response. The transition to OpenCRVS has further improved efficiency by enabling real-time data processing and reducing reliance on paper records. While the system is not yet fully resilient, officials believe they have a solid framework in place to respond effectively to future disasters.

Civil registration for displaced and nomadic populations

The discussion focused on how to serve displaced populations. The group defined displaced populations as refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and stateless persons.

In **Thailand**, there are two categories of refugees:

1. Refugees in border camps – These individuals have lived in Thailand for generations. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) manages their database and camp leaders notify births and deaths. Refugees have access to services like education and healthcare, with biometric data (face and fingerprints) recorded in the system.
2. Urban refugees – These asylum seekers come from various countries. Only children born in Thailand can access birth registration and receive the 13-digit ID number, allowing them access to healthcare and education. If they meet specific conditions, such as completing higher education, they may have a pathway to Thai nationality. However, their parents do not have access to the registration system.

In the **Philippines**, the discussion highlighted the nomadic Sama Bajau population, who live a fishing-based, mobile lifestyle. They have universal access to birth, death and marriage registration but must complete an additional form to access these services.

Overall, the discussion emphasized different approaches to registering and providing services to displaced and stateless populations, highlighting Thailand's structured refugee registration system and the Philippines' efforts to accommodate nomadic communities.

Business continuity during disasters

The **Philippines, Malaysia** and **Papua New Guinea** have developed business continuity plans to strengthen institutional resilience. The Philippines and Malaysia have focused on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, with Malaysia also emphasizing flood preparedness and the Philippines cyclone preparedness. Meanwhile, Papua New Guinea has created an institutional resilience plan called New Ways of Working, shaped by their COVID-19 experience.

During 2020 and the early pandemic stages, the **Philippines** and **Papua New Guinea** imposed mandatory lockdowns but quickly developed streamlined procedures to resume operations. **Malaysia**, on the other hand, rapidly advanced digitalization efforts, enabling online registration services for easy public access. These approaches demonstrated rapid adaptation and resilience in the face of disruption.

Simulation exercises were a key part of disaster preparedness efforts. In the **Philippines**, staff engaged in typhoon simulation exercises to improve disaster recovery facilitation. A disaster recovery facility is also in place. Similarly, **Malaysia** conducted flood simulation exercises in collaboration with the National Disaster Management Authority. Both countries incorporated disaster preparedness into their annual planning and response initiatives.

Papua New Guinea's resilience planning is structured across four layers, covering different administrative levels from provinces to the national government. Civil registration services in Papua New Guinea are not yet a standalone government department, giving them flexibility to explore innovative approaches to disaster preparedness. However, this also means they are more vulnerable to budget fluctuations, as they operate as a special project rather than a fully funded government authority.


Overall, the discussion highlighted diverse strategies for business continuity, disaster preparedness and resilience building across the three countries, with a strong emphasis on adaptability, digital transformation and collaboration with national disaster management agencies.

Digitalization and resilient systems

A key advantage of digitalized registration systems, highlighted during the discussion, was the ability to register births from anywhere rather than requiring registration in the district where the child was born, as is common in manual systems. A centralized database allows for registrations to take place even if one part of the country experiences disruptions. This approach is already being implemented in Brunei Darussalam and other countries, ensuring flexibility and continuity in civil registration.

Another important feature discussed was the elimination of manual processes, such as physical stamps, as well as using digital stamps and electronic documentation. This shift not only enhances efficiency but also improves data security and accessibility. Additionally, the group explored the benefits of data sharing and storage, with civil registration data being leveraged for statistical analysis and policymaking.

The conversation also covered the importance of offline and online functionality in digital systems. The ability to work offline during a disaster and later sync data ensures uninterrupted services. Cross-validation mechanisms further enhance data accuracy and reliability. The discussion also emphasized the value of dual databases where notification and health records are stored separately from civil registry data. This structure ensures secure storage and seamless finalization of registration data when needed.



Data recovery and storage were key concerns, with many countries expressing scepticism about cloud services and preferring to store their data on national servers for security reasons. A notable best practice shared was the implementation of business continuity plans (BCPs), which include Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) detailing responses to various disaster scenarios. These plans ensure that civil registration offices can continue operating even in emergencies, such as system failures or office closures. Regular random checks and process tests help assess preparedness.

Finally, the discussion raised the legal flexibility of registration systems during emergencies. Participants considered whether existing laws allow for alternative registration processes in crises and whether contingency policies should be introduced to ensure compliance while maintaining data integrity. Balancing legal requirements with emergency adaptability was identified as a key challenge in ensuring resilient civil registration systems.

Supporting disaster response

This discussion involved participants from **Papua New Guinea**, the **Philippines**, **Indonesia** and **Malaysia**. One key takeaway was how civil registration data is used in Papua New Guinea to validate provincial and local records during emergencies. When a disaster occurs, centralized civil registration data helps authorities identify affected individuals, ensuring a more accurate response.

Another significant point was that civil registration offices played a backup role for national systems during COVID-19. If other government offices had to close due to an outbreak, civil registration facilities helped maintain essential services, highlighting their importance beyond documentation. Additionally, civil registration offices hold the most updated population estimates, making them a critical source for validating local records. A similar system exists in **Timor-Leste**.

A key question posed to all countries was whether national IDs or other documentation were required to access services after a disaster. It was found that in countries with highly digitalized systems, national IDs were necessary, increasing pressure on registration systems to restore lost documents. However, in countries with less complex systems, people could access services without documentation, demonstrating how the maturity of civil registration systems influences disaster response.

In **Cambodia**, the National Disaster Committee does not directly include the General Department of Identification (GDI), but at the commune level, all government agencies collaborate on disaster response. The commune-level involvement ensures that data flows efficiently from local offices to national authorities. **Indonesia** has a similar setup, ensuring coordinated disaster management.

Malaysia has established standalone emergency units that are self-sufficient, equipped with satellite connections and mobile systems. These units quickly restore documentation services in affected areas, including birth and death registration. A similar system is also in place in **Indonesia**. Additionally, Malaysia has greatly expanded online registration services, making it easier for people to access civil registration remotely.

The **Philippines** has faced multiple disasters, including COVID-19 and typhoons, but has demonstrated resilience by providing weekly statistics during the pandemic, a significant improvement in data reporting. The country also has an ongoing support system to help local registries recover lost data, ensuring continuity in civil registration. These measures highlight the critical role of civil registration systems in disaster preparedness and response across different countries.

Securing data during disasters and emergencies

This discussion focused on securing data during disasters and emergencies, with insights from **Indonesia** and **Cambodia**. Participants emphasized the increasing frequency of both man-made and natural disasters, recognizing the need to prepare for the worst. While systems may seem secure, they remain vulnerable to complete destruction in the face of disasters. The group reflected on countries that, following war or prolonged conflict, had to rebuild their systems from scratch. In some cases, war divided nations and created new governments, requiring the establishment of entirely new legal frameworks.

One of the key concerns raised was the loss of infrastructure. A country may have well-equipped civil registration offices with robust servers and backup systems, but a single disaster could wipe everything out overnight. Additionally, manual records remain vulnerable, as fires, floods and other calamities can destroy physical documents, leading to the loss of critical legal identity records. For individuals forced to flee dangerous situations, retrieving or carrying documents often becomes impossible, further complicating identity verification during and after crises.

To address these concerns, **Indonesia** and **Cambodia** have implemented data security measures. Both countries store digital records at district, provincial and national levels. Cambodia maintains backup servers in another ministry, though they are now working toward relocating storage 50 to 70 kilometres away for greater security. Indonesia has a main server in Jakarta and a backup in Batam, near the Singapore border, ensuring backup in case of a disaster.

Regarding cloud storage, **Indonesia** utilizes some cloud-based backups, while **Cambodia** has rejected this option due to concerns over data security and trust. Cambodia believes that storing personal data on the cloud is not secure, reflecting a broader sentiment among many governments that prefer national control over sensitive records.

The discussion also covered the storage of manual records. Both **Cambodia** and **Indonesia** use metallic cabinets to offer some protection against fire and environmental damage. However, Indonesia has taken additional steps by developing data safety guidelines, ensuring manual records are fireproof, humidity-proof, and locked against external interference. Cambodia identified an issue where manual records in certain regions had begun decomposing, highlighting the urgent need to digitize documents to prevent permanent data loss.

The discussion identified several challenges in securing data during disasters:

1. Reliance on manual systems – Many regions still rely heavily on paper records, which are vulnerable to destruction and degradation.
2. Lack of trust in data sharing – Countries are often reluctant to share data within the country or with neighbouring nations, making cross-agency and cross-border collaboration difficult.
3. Mistrust of cloud storage – Many governments prefer not to use cloud services, fearing security risks and loss of control over sensitive data.
4. Political sensitivities – Data related to elections and governance is particularly sensitive, leading to additional restrictions on where and how it is stored.

Despite these challenges, the consensus was clear: data backup is essential. Disasters are unpredictable, and countries must ensure secure, redundant and well-planned data storage systems to protect civil registration records and maintain national identity frameworks.

BUILDING A RESILIENT CRVS SYSTEM IN AN ERA OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND CRISIS

A panel discussion titled 'Building a Resilient CRVS System in an Era of Climate Change and Crisis' began with insights from the **Philippines**, which has developed a mature national statistical and identity management system. The country has digitized over 195.5 million birth, marriage and death records, stored centrally to ensure resilience during disasters such as typhoons. Local registry offices can now retrieve lost records from this central database. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of real-time mortality tracking, prompting weekly reporting to authorities. Despite these advances, challenges remain, including integrating OpenCRVS, improving birth and death registration in Muslim communities and revising civil registry forms.

Papua New Guinea presented a contrasting picture as an emerging CRVS system in a geographically and culturally diverse country prone to natural disasters. Civil registration was largely manual until 2015, with records dating back to 1892. Many citizens still lack legal identification, but the National ID Project is raising awareness and increasing registrations. While CRVS data is now centrally stored, efforts are underway to decentralize it to provincial and district offices. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the country to develop contingency plans rapidly, underscoring the need for stronger disaster preparedness. Innovative solutions, such as solar-powered mobile registration kits, are being introduced to enhance resilience.

The panel also reflected on lessons from the pandemic. **The Global Financing Facility (GFF)** noted that most low-income countries had weak death registration systems during COVID-19. Key takeaways included the importance of preparedness, coordination between CRVS and health systems, capacity building for skilled personnel and adopting digital platforms to replace vulnerable paper-based systems. GFF emphasized priorities such as strengthening digital infrastructure, creating legal frameworks for data sharing and engaging communities to boost registration rates.

From a research perspective, the **International Development Research Centre (IDRC)** stressed the need to decolonize data systems, empowering countries in the Global South to lead CRVS improvements. The role of technology and AI in enhancing efficiency was highlighted, along with the disproportionate impact of crises on women and marginalized groups, calling for inclusive data policies.

Post-pandemic, both the **Philippines** and **Papua New Guinea** accelerated digital transformation, introducing online processes, contactless appointments and streamlined registrations. In Papua New Guinea, the crisis even spurred national information and communications technology (ICT) policy reforms to promote cloud-based data storage. Globally, the pandemic spotlighted the critical importance of timely and reliable mortality statistics.

The session concluded with a call to action: governments must sustain momentum in strengthening CRVS systems beyond the pandemic. Ministries of Finance and political leaders should recognize CRVS as a core accountability tool, and continuous investment is needed in the production, analysis and public use of vital statistics.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES FOR CIVIL REGISTRARS IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

The Second South-East Asia Civil Registration Professionals Network meeting concluded with a discussion on future activities of the network, including preparations for the Third Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific. The rich discussions over the three days of the meeting were highlighted and partners were acknowledged for their support, emphasizing the importance of collaboration. ESCAP also shared experiences from other sub-regional civil registrars' networks on coordination and practices.

1. Coordination:

Partners can coordinate among the South-East Asia Civil Registration Professionals Network members to organize activities and facilitate country-to-country engagements.

2. Regular engagements, documentation and sharing of good practices:

In addition to in-person meetings, South-East Asia Civil Registration Professionals Network members can meet virtually on a quarterly basis. The Network secretariat can convene the quarterly meetings and webinars to facilitate peer learning and sharing of promising practices. The secretariat and other development partners can respond to ad-hoc requests for bilateral engagement and technical exchanges.

3. Support for research and generating evidence:

The Network secretariat can offer on-demand support for knowledge production and dissemination in response to members' requests.

ESCAP presented the following calendar of future activities to which members agreed:

Date	Activity
23 June 2025	Associated 3-hour event to the Third Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific, in-person, Bangkok, hosted by Thailand
October 2025	1.5-hour webinar for experience sharing, ESCAP to organize with inputs from countries
January 2026	1.5-hour webinar for experience sharing, ESCAP to organize with inputs from countries
April-June 2026	In-person meeting, Location TBC



Members of the South-East Asia Civil Registration Professionals Network also reiterated their support for the organizational structure and working arrangement of the Network, specifically on the informal nature of the Network without a central fund management entity or system. In-person meetings may be arranged, provided adequate financial resources are mobilized, and can be supplemented by regular and on-demand virtual meetings.

The secretariat concluded by expressing appreciation to the General Department of Identification, Ministry of Interior of Cambodia for hosting the Second Meeting of the South-East Asia Civil Registration Professionals Network and thanking all participants for their active engagements throughout the three-day event. Finally, the secretariat encouraged all members to maintain the active engagement through to the Third Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific, 24-26 June 2025.



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