Draft concept Note for a meeting of civil registrars in Central Asia[1]

Context

In Asia-Pacific, approximately 51 million children under the age of 5 do not have their births registered.[2] Such a lack of identity denies these children an existence before the law, and as they grow it also prevents them from participating in governmental processes, or from accessing social and financial services, employment markets and legal protections necessary for increasing their quality of life and for sustainable and inclusive development. Universal civil registration and legal identity for all consequently strengthens a country's ability to measure, monitor and meet a wide variety of goals and targets for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Each country in Central Asia has an operational civil registration office, reflecting this region's prioritization of civil registration in its domestic policy agenda, 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. Although each country in the region exercises different coordination mechanisms and methods to conduct civil registration tasks, there remains a fundamental commitment to achieve complete civil registration.

Birth and death registration, as well as identity management, are a priority of most governments, however, across Central Asia there are similar issues and questions faced by civil registrars. The midterm review of the Asia Pacific CRVS Decade in 2020 highlighted common challenges with registration of deaths as well as recording of causes of deaths. It further highlighted an estimated 135,000 children under the age of five who had not had their birth registered within the region.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union has resulted in a known stateless population, with people often left with outdated identity documents. Several countries have pledged to end known statelessness and resolve stateless people's situations by providing them with identity documents or birth registration, and efforts are paying. Kyrgyzstan was declared by UNHCR the first Stateless-free country in the world in 2019, after legal amendments and reach-out campaigns. Kazakhstan has also made amendments and efforts to bring everyone in the fold of their civil registration system.

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[1] Central Asian countries

[2] UNICEF data from The Right Start in Life: 2024 update - UNICEF DATA

The recording of causes of death and the quality of data on causes of death are of a particular concern in Central Asia as highlighted in the midterm report.

What can a network of civil registrars achieve?

While Asia-Pacific civil registrars face unique national challenges in achieving universal registration, they must also address practical registration issues, as well as cross-border issues such as migration caused by conflict, natural hazards and climate change. As such, strengthening information and communications technology, and adopting innovative approaches to meet these challenges requires registrars to network in a space suitable for sharing ideas, learning from each other, and finding common solutions through South-South cooperation.

Recognizing universal civil registration as critical for sustainable and inclusive development, ESCAP and its development partners hosted an initial meeting of Asia-Pacific Civil Registration Authorities in 2014. The participants agreed to create subregional mechanisms for national registrars to meet, share ideas and practices and collaborate on cross-border issues. The initial meeting emphasized solutions to common challenges.

Since then, three subregional mechanisms were established with assistance from ESCAP, UNICEF, SPC and other development partners; namely, the Pacific Civil Registrars Network (PCRN)[3] for Pacific Island States and the Civil Registration Professionals of South Asia (CR8)[4] for South Asian countries, while a third network for the South-East Asian countries was established in 2023. The mechanisms have, in turn, assisted members in developing methods to foster coordination and prioritize shared technological approaches to collaborate on common, transboundary challenges. For instance, PCRN's data sharing plan assists members in building resiliency to natural hazards by enabling members to adopt best practices in data archiving and use of vital statistics to inform the provision of public services responding to crises.

The subregional mechanisms ultimately promote cooperation through disseminating knowledge of innovative methods for improving CRVS systems, developing data-sharing approaches and sharing good practices for improving systems to ensure no one is left behind. Stemming from shared visions to improve subregional systems, platforms for sharing information allow stakeholders to regularly communicate with one another and have even generated collective approaches to CRVS data storage and retrieval.

The subregional mechanisms are also the first of their kind in Asia-Pacific, which specifically prioritize the needs of civil registration authorities while still accounting for cross-border interests. Each mechanism is also based on a shared vision for addressing common issues while maintaining flexibility to local needs and supporting the implementation of the 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.[5]

How are the existing networks organized?

By emphasizing South-South collaboration whilst placing the national needs of the registration authorities at the heart of their visions, both subregional mechanisms are self-sustaining and driven by the

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[3] https://sdd.spc.int/pacific-civil-registrars-network-pcrn
[4] https://getinthepicture.org/partners/institutional-partners/civil-registration-professionals-south-asia
[5] https://getinthepicture.org/resource/ministerial-declaration-get-every-one-picture-asia-and-pacific

participating countries themselves. Furthermore, member countries also benefit from developments in each other's systems. For example, thanks in no small part to the cooperative nature of the subregional mechanisms, national stakeholders are streamlining the process for recognizing public documents from other members to ease the transmission of data sharing across borders. PCRN, for instance, quickly recognized the need for a common network sharing civil registration data. Because Pacific Islanders frequently travel overseas for medical treatment, the lack of data sharing hindered countries from collecting accurate information on vital events, including births and deaths.

After observing the demonstrable success of the PCRN, the Civil Registration Professionals of South Asia (CR8) established a group of professionals in 2018 dedicated to common issues facing their own subregion. Each meeting of the CR8 has subsequently resulted in the production of compendiums showcasing common issues and the efforts being made to address them. Finally, as the mechanisms learn from one another, replicability in additional subregions relies upon political commitment to improving CRVS systems, as well as an openness to sharing information. In this manner, civil registrars across Asia and the Pacific will continue working together to expand registration coverage and meet related SDGs by guaranteeing legal identity for all.

Objectives of the inception meeting of Central Asian civil registrars

An initial meeting of the Central Asian registrars will be organized in Ankara 15-17 April 2025. Multiple partners are supporting the event, including ESCAP, UNFPA, SESRIC, Vital Strategies, UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF, and possible others.

The objectives of the meeting are:

- For civil registrars to share progress and challenges in CRVS improvement efforts and identify common challenges
- To facilitate knowledge exchange and potential collaboration on issues of concern of civil registrars in the region
- capacity building for sustainable institutional development leading to improved decision-making processes
- To document existing practices in the region

The meeting will provide a professional forum for civil registrars to discuss priority areas that are of common concern to the civil registrars in the region as well as the potential terms of references and organizational setup of a Central Asian civil registrars network. This could include the following:

1. CRVS digitalization in Central Asia

Over the last two decades, the digitization of civil registration and identity management systems has paved the way for a more enabling environment to collect and store identity data using a coherent electronic database architecture. These advancements have also been accompanied by an increasing ability to share data. The digitization of identity systems has resulted in significant changes to the design of registration business processes, including how registered vital events can be defined, configured, created, stored, shared, and processed.

Digital processing of identity data has further enabled the creation of systems with an improved efficiency for data processing and sharing between different components of a system, including with other government systems. Digitization, in addition to the development of new tools, offers an improved means

to integrate different systems into one seamless system that reinforces a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics, and identity management, including the possibility to share information with functional registers. In recent years, most countries in Central Asia have invested significant resources to digitise their civil registration and legal identity systems, and more efforts are currently in process or underway. The thematic discussions around this topic will evolve around the following questions:

- What is the status of CRVS system digitisation in the region?
- What are the main areas of CRVS system digitisation conducted by countries in Central Asia in the last 10 years (e.g., digitisation of registry books, archives, the registration process itself, facilitation of online registration etc.)?
- Has digitisation been linked with the establishment of a national ID and/or unique identifier?
- To which extent has digitisation been practically linked to increased interoperability with other government systems (social protection, education, digital identity, etc.)
- What has been the role of development partners in supporting the digitisation process?

Key lessons learned and considerations when implementing digital CRVS systems and processes

- What considerations should be given when implementing digital systems and/or processes in CRVS?
- What have been the key challenges and barriers?
- How are digital systems addressing issues around data protection and privacy?

2. Assessing and addressing inequalities in CRVS

Some countries have pockets of lack of documentation within certain marginalized and hard-to-reach population groups or within specific geographic areas. Despite these inequalities and their negative impact, this problem often remains a blind spot. The groups affected remain largely invisible if the matter is not specifically investigated.

To ensure progress in registration is truly universal and fully inclusive, the Ministerial declaration to "Get Every One in The Picture" in Asia and the Pacific recognized the need to address disparities in civil registration completeness and coverage of these groups. Hence, the Regional Action Framework (RAF) for the Asia-Pacific CRVS Decade 2015-2024 (ESCAP resolution 71/14) calls upon countries to assess any CRVS-related inequalities experienced by population subgroups. Doing so is an essential step to getting every one in the picture. This step is also key to the realization of the 2030 Agenda in terms of both data and social protection.

The thematic discussions around this topic will evolve around the involvement of civil registration authorities in both quantitative and qualitative assessments of inequalities in CRVS as well as changes to legislation and operating procedures to support registration of hard to reach and marginalized groups. This includes outreach campaigns, mobile registration points and other initiatives.

3. The 2025 review of the Asia Pacific CRVS Decade

In accordance with the Ministerial Declaration and Resolution 71/14, ESCAP is supporting the 2024 review of the CRVS Decade. The review is crucial for assessing progress against the goals and targets under the Regional Action Framework for CRVS in Asia and the Pacific. During the meeting, ESCAP will provide participants with an overview of the process and timeline for the 2024 review of the CRVS Decade, the inputs needed from countries as well as initial plans for the Third Ministerial Conference on CRVS to be held 24-26 June 2025. During the meeting of civil registrars, the key concepts, methodology, process, and

data required to complete the questionnaire and examples from countries who have already completed the questionnaires will be discussed.

4. Discussions on establishing a network

In addition, the meeting will facilitate discussions on the potential establishment of an ongoing network of organizations and individuals from Central Asia involved in civil registration. This may involve identifying a chair and vice chairs (or equivalent) to support ongoing work to establish term of references for a civil registrars network for Central Asia. An ongoing network could (i) identify key issues in common across the civil registrars that would benefit from joint discussion, (ii) facilitate gatherings (virtual or in-person) of members, (iii) facilitate information exchange (listserv, e-bulletins, website, social media, etc.), and (iv) liaise with other networks on areas of mutual interest.

Participants

Participants at the meeting will include 2-3 professionals (Ideally the civil registrar general or deputy) working in civil registration from each of the CA countries. In addition, relevant development partners will be invited to participate in the meeting.

Invitations will be sent from ESCAP (jointly with SESRIC and UNFPA) to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs asking them to nominate up to 3 participants. Financial support will be provided to selected participants, depending on the country.

Language

The meeting will be conducted in English and Russian and documents provided in both languages.

Report of the meeting

As the meeting provides a unique opportunity to document some of the key developments in CRVS in Central Asian countries, following the meeting, an extensive report will be published by ESCAP and partners. The report will outline the key discussions had and key issues and challenges reflected in status updates from countries as well as the consultations on digitization and inclusion. The report and other meeting documents will be disseminated via www.getinthepicture.org and CRVS Insight,.