



## Information Note<sup>1</sup>

### **Inclusivity: A theme for the 2024 review and potential extension of the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015-2024)**

#### **Summary**

This paper examines inclusivity as a key theme for the 2024 Review and potential extension of the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Decade (2015-2024) to 2030. It includes a review of existing literature to develop a comprehensive understanding of inclusivity in the context of CRVS and to justify the integration of inclusivity into the 2024 Review and potential extension. In addition to proposing a definition for inclusivity, the paper also operationalises the definition by identifying inclusivity-building catalysts and proposes a framework for integrating inclusivity in CRVS system improvement initiatives. Finally, the paper outlines a list of potential questions designed to measure progress in building and promoting inclusivity throughout the Asia-Pacific CRVS Decade as part of the 2024 Review process. These questions are intended for consideration by members of the Regional Steering Group (RSG) for CRVS in Asia and the Pacific.

#### **Introduction**

Sustainable Development Goal 16 calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, with the provision of access and inclusive institutions at all levels, including civil registration with target 16.9 specifically focused on providing legal identity for all. Additionally, 67 indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals require population-based data that can be fully or partially sourced from civil registration systems. Therefore, to ensure “no-one is left behind”, population data must be disaggregated by relevant characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, migratory status and disability status.

In 2014, Ministers from region proclaimed the *Asia and the Pacific CRVS Decade (2015-2024)*. The accompanied Ministerial Declaration established 2015-2024 as a timeframe for realizing the shared vision that “by 2024, all people in Asia and the Pacific will benefit from universal and

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responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitate the realization of their rights and support good governance, health and development”. The Declaration further emphasized “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”.<sup>2</sup> This commitment also aligns with relevant regional mandates such as the *Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development*<sup>3</sup> and the *Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration*<sup>4</sup>. Universal registration entails registering vital events for every individual, regardless of their background, characteristics, or circumstances, ensuring their records are included in vital statistics, and realizing their legal identity.

Over the past decade, significant strides have been taken to enhance the registration rates of vital events. A notable achievement in Asia and the Pacific is the successful reduction in the number of children under five whose births

### Box 1. Achieving inclusive CRVS systems through registering vital events of asylum-seekers and refugees

There is a large and growing number of asylum-seekers and refugees in South Asia – a reflection of the growing number of refugees worldwide: from 27.1 million in 2021, to 35.3 million at the end of 2022. Many refugee-hosting States in the region do not have sufficient domestic legal or administrative frameworks covering the legal status and rights of refugees. As a result, refugees and asylum-seekers are often subjected to national immigration laws which are separate from civil registration laws.

Registering children born to asylum-seekers and refugees is complex, yet especially important to provide them with proof of a legal identity and ensure that they receive adequate protection, assistance, and access to durable solutions. Where children are registered and the records are well kept, family tracing for separated children becomes easier as there is documentation of their parents and their origin. In cases of child marriage or the worst forms of child labour, proof of age can help aid children and prosecute perpetrators.

In some Member States, national legal frameworks provide for inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees in the national CRVS systems. Yet, the number of registered births is often unavailable, not reported by governments, or not properly recorded in national administrative systems. In many cases this is because the births of refugee children are not registered in the host States’ CRVS system, or due to difficulties in determining how many are refugees among all children registered by authorities.

As the number of humanitarian crises continues to increase each year, and protracted humanitarian situations become further entrenched, innovative solutions will be required to ensure civil registration and civil identification services are available to everyone residing in a country. Data linkage, most likely in the form of data sharing agreements, may offer one innovative approach. During 2022, for example, UNHCR drafted a data sharing agreement with Norway and made progress towards advancing similar agreements with other States. Existing protocols already implemented with the United States of America were further strengthened by training and technical support for enhanced identity verification.

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

3 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2014). [Report of the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference](#).

4 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2014). [Report of the Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration](#).

were unregistered, declining from 135 million in 2012 to 64 million in 2019.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, more efforts and resources are needed to accelerate progress towards the goals of the Regional Action Framework on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific, and to extend the benefits of CRVS to all, especially the population groups furthest behind.

Civil registration systems provide individuals with a recognized mean to establish and retire legal identity. Civil registration also provides essential documents for accessing a diverse range of rights and services, including education, healthcare, social protection, and legal protection, burial/cremation service and inheritance. Without a recognized legal identity, individuals may be excluded from various opportunities and may face challenges in asserting their rights. Unequivocally, those excluded individuals are often those most vulnerable and most in need of these rights and services, which result in an exclusion tautology and perpetuates inequality.

In the context of CRVS, inclusivity means the assured registration of these individuals, for both birth and death registration, thereby endowing them with the essential legal recognition and guaranteeing the full protection of their rights. In addition, with the increased number of climate-change related disasters, many individuals are internally and internationally displaced<sup>6</sup>, and they might lose critical identification documents or might not have these documents in the first place, which hinder their access to essential services and benefits. At the *Second Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific*, Ministers welcomed recommendations from a paper on civil registration and identity management systems which called for countries to “ensure that the lack of civil registration documentation or other identity credentials are not a barrier for accessing services and exercising rights, including the prevention of statelessness, which can be achieved in contexts where universal coverage of legal identity has not been achieved through comprehensive exception handling mechanisms at points of service delivery”<sup>7</sup>.

Ministers at the *Second Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific* also noted the linkage between civil registration and legal identity, highlighting the importance of universal birth registration and the implementation of a holistic and gender-inclusive approach to legal identity that is inclusive of people in vulnerable situations and hard-to-reach populations<sup>8</sup>. In 2022, ESCAP adopted Resolution 78/4 endorsing the 2021 Ministerial Declaration further calling upon members and associate members to “conduct substantive identification and assessment of inequalities related to civil registration and vital statistics, in light of national context, regulations and priorities, and take measures to remove all barriers to civil registration of vital events among all hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations”<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, to achieve the goal of universal registration, CRVS systems should be designed and implemented in ways that

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5 <https://www.unicef.org/media/62981/file/Birth-registration-for-every-child-by-2030.pdf>

6 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2021). How climate change impacts refugees and displaced communities. Retrieved from <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/how-climate-change-impacts-refugees-and-displaced-communities/#:~:text=Such%20hazards%20are%20already%20inducing,search%20of%20safety%20and%20protection>.

7 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2021). Intersection between civil registration and identity management systems in Asia and the Pacific. Retrieved from: [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP\\_MCCRVS\\_2021\\_7\\_Intersection\\_civil\\_registration\\_vs\\_management\\_English.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP_MCCRVS_2021_7_Intersection_civil_registration_vs_management_English.pdf)

8 <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/>

9 <https://getinthepicture.org/crvs-decade/second-ministerial-conference>

consider the diverse needs, circumstances, and identities of individuals.<sup>10</sup> By recognizing the differences among individuals and actively working to remove all obstacles and barriers to registration that they may face, governments can progress towards truly universal registration.

Furthermore, CRVS systems provide governments and policymakers with critical information on their population. This notably includes monitoring public health trends and providing demographic data to understand a country's demographic profile and keep track of population changes, all of which are critical for evidence-based policy-making, governance and planning. An inclusive CRVS system is vital for ensuring that data is representative and includes marginalized and vulnerable populations which lead to the development of more effective policies, targeted interventions, and equitable service delivery.

Additionally, crises often disproportionately affect marginalized and remote communities. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated social exclusion of certain groups, as the responses of most countries relied heavily on the accessibility of existing enabling infrastructure<sup>11</sup>, such as national identification systems and administrative data<sup>12</sup>. As a result, many individuals were left out of essential services and response strategies, including vaccination<sup>13</sup>. Unregistered deaths in already excluded communities made it even more difficult for health authorities to accurately track the evolution and impact of the crisis<sup>14</sup>.

### **Defining inclusivity for CRVS**

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) has developed a working definition of social inclusion as a fundamental concept of the *Leaving No One Behind* framework.<sup>15</sup> They define it as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights.” To achieve social inclusion, it is essential to adopt inclusive policies deliberately designed to encompass and welcome all individuals, embracing greater equality and acceptance of differences. It also means recognizing that certain individuals may face barriers that hinder their participation in society for various reasons. As part of this process, efforts should be made to eliminate these barriers and take active inclusionary steps to make sure people are both able and willing to participate in a variety of societal activities, including registering vital events.

This concept broadly applies to many areas, particularly for the provision of services and social protection programs and thus to CRVS as well. CRVS systems should provide individuals with official documentation establishing their legal identity which is foundational for accessing a wide

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10 [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP\\_MCCRVS\\_2021\\_4\\_CRVS\\_as\\_an\\_accelerator\\_English.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP_MCCRVS_2021_4_CRVS_as_an_accelerator_English.pdf)

11 <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/civil-registrations-and-vital-statistics-its-not-just-important-its-matter-life-and-death>

12 <https://covid-19-response.unstatshub.org/posts/use-of-administrative-data-sources-under-covid-19/>

13 [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/world-health-data-platform/final-crvs-partners-meeting-summary-report.pdf?sfvrsn=54cfd634\\_5&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/world-health-data-platform/final-crvs-partners-meeting-summary-report.pdf?sfvrsn=54cfd634_5&download=true)

14 [https://crvssystem.ca/sites/default/files/assets/images/CRVS%20Systems%20in%20the%20Face%20of%20the%20COVID-19%20Pandemic%20A%20literature%20review\\_3%20working%20paper%20series.pdf](https://crvssystem.ca/sites/default/files/assets/images/CRVS%20Systems%20in%20the%20Face%20of%20the%20COVID-19%20Pandemic%20A%20literature%20review_3%20working%20paper%20series.pdf)

15 <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/full-report.pdf>

range of rights and services, including education, healthcare, and social protection, which are all essential for social inclusion. However, hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations often face barriers in accessing CRVS systems, which can lead to their exclusion from essential services and rights. For example, individuals living in rural, remote, isolated or border areas, minorities, indigenous people, migrants, non-citizens, asylum seekers, refugees, stateless people, and people without documentation may encounter challenges or barriers to registration or might have trouble obtaining necessary documentation for a variety of reasons. Population groups excluded from civil registration will not only have their existence unacknowledged by the state, but the absence of data on unregistered individuals makes it difficult for governments and organizations to understand the scope of many critical issues and design targeted policies that address the specific challenges faced by them. This means that exclusion from CRVS system can further compound social and economic difficulties and is often an intergenerational issue.<sup>16</sup> For example, without proper and accurate information on deaths, particularly in marginalized or remote communities, there is a risk of underreporting or misrepresentation of mortality trends, leading to ineffective policymaking and inadequate response from health authorities. Moreover, the lack of death registration can also impede legal processes, inheritance rights, and access to social benefits for surviving family members.

As previously mentioned, members and associate members of ESCAP acknowledged this issue in both the 2014 and 2021 Ministerial Declarations and called for a holistic and gender-inclusive approach to developing an inclusive civil registration system. Building upon this work, this paper adopts a similar definition of inclusivity for CRVS:

*Inclusivity in the context of CRVS can be defined as the process of enhancing civil registration coverage and completeness of hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations, including people living in rural, remote, isolated or border areas, indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, non-citizens, asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons, internally displaced persons, domestic workers, women, children, persons with disabilities, foundlings and persons without documentation, among others (“hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations”), and producing precise and disaggregated vital statistics that capture the diverse realities of these population groups.*

Thus, achieving inclusive CRVS requires measures to include all individuals in registration processes, with targeted policies, to ensure universal registration of vital events and the production of complete and timely vital statistics representative of all the population.

The universality of the system can be measured by the coverage and completeness of the registration of vital events. In the context of CRVS, *coverage* refers to a spatial metric to indicate the geographical reach of CRVS systems, whereas *completeness* is a metric used to evaluate the proportion of vital events that are appropriately captured in the CRVS system<sup>17</sup>. Coverage and completeness combined offer a nexus for measuring the universality of a CRVS system because it is only universal if all vital events are appropriately and accurately registered. This differs from inclusivity, as inclusivity focuses on acknowledging differences among the

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<sup>16</sup> [Annual Report Template \(wvi.org\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). Guidelines for estimating completeness of civil registration of vital statistics, p. 1. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12870/4323>

population and finding ways to increase registration of under covered population groups. This entails addressing barriers related to accessibility to registration, which ultimately determines whether or not every individual is being served by the civil registration system. If universal CRVS system is a state, then inclusivity is the active process that works toward attaining that state. This goes to show the imperative nature of having inclusive CRVS systems to achieve the vision of the Asia Pacific CRVS Decade.

### ***Barriers to inclusive CRVS systems***

The reasons individuals are not registered can be categorized into two main categories. The first relates to a lack of accessibility, or the ability to register, and the second relates to the lack of willingness or awareness to register. An emphasis on inclusivity is crucial in addressing both of these two categories. Some individuals may not be aware of the importance of registration and of its associated benefits or might distrust the registration processes. Others might be hesitant to register due to cultural, religious, or social reasons. Additionally, individuals might find it difficult or impossible to access registration due to a variety and intersectionality of different factors. An inclusive CRVS system recognizes these realities and promotes measures to encourage registration. Inclusivity within CRVS systems also acknowledges the diversity of populations and their unique needs. It involves engaging with all segments of the population, understanding their concerns and the intersectionality of the difficulties they face, and tailoring registration practices to suit different sociocultural contexts. Inclusivity also assures that hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations are actively engaged and included in the registration processes. Emphasizing inclusivity thus involves tailoring registration practices and social services to diverse contexts, raising awareness, and engaging with all segments of society to confirm that no individual is left unregistered.

There are multiple factors that can form barriers to registration and reduce accessibility for individuals. These can impact individuals, specific communities, and population groups. Individuals may also be facing multiple barriers at once, as barriers to registration often intersect. Inclusive policies should be tailored around these different factors.

- **Gender:** Gender-related norms and inequalities can influence an individual's or family's readiness to register events. In some societies, the registration of the vital events of women and girls might be deemed less important for a variety of social and economic reasons, leading to lower registration rates among women.<sup>18</sup> In some cases for birth registration, this can be exacerbated by provisions in legal and regulatory frameworks requiring the name or signature of the father on the birth certificate, which creates a barrier for single mothers wanting to register their child's birth<sup>19</sup>. Also, gendered cultural norms or gender-biased economic practices may restrict women's mobility or participation, making it challenging for them to register their children's or other's vital events. Additionally, stigma associated with certain gendered vital events, such as child marriage and being a teen or single mother, may cause reluctance to register marriage

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18 [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP\\_MCCRVS\\_2021\\_6\\_Implementing\\_gender-sensitive\\_CRVS\\_English.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP_MCCRVS_2021_6_Implementing_gender-sensitive_CRVS_English.pdf)

19 <https://data.unicef.org/resources/every-childs-birth-right-inequities-and-trends-in-birth-registration/>

and births respectively.<sup>20</sup> A gender-inclusive approach should remove such stigma and barriers and create a safe and enabling environment for registration.

- **Lack of awareness:** If individuals are unaware of how registration can impact their access to rights and services, they may not see the need to register. Some population groups, such as migrant workers and refugees, may have limited interactions with the authorities, and there may be mistrust or misunderstandings, such as mistaking a birth notification given by a health facility for a birth certificate. Similarly, and equally important, local registrars may also be unaware that these populations should, or are even allowed to, be registered either due to misinterpretation of or lack of awareness on the law and documentary requirements for registration these population groups.<sup>21</sup>
- **Linguistic differences and conflicting cultural practices:** Cultural and language barriers can hinder individuals' understanding and ability to follow registration procedures.<sup>22</sup> If processes conflict with cultural practices, they may be less willing to register. In some cultures, the process of registering births and deaths may conflict with traditional naming, maternity, or mourning practices. This can result in delayed or incomplete registration of births or deaths due to adherence to socio-cultural norms. Additionally, linguistic diversity within a country can hinder accessibility if registration materials and services are only available in dominant languages. Providing information and assistance in various languages relevant to the local communities including hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations can improve accessibility and positively impact registration rates.
- **Migration and required documentation:** Migrants, mobile populations, displaced people, asylum-seekers and refugees may fear that registration could lead to discrimination or persecution.<sup>23</sup> The lack of legal status or documentation may deter them or make it impossible for them to engage in registration processes. Migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people may also find it difficult to access or can sometimes be totally excluded from registration services due to legal complexities or the non-recognition of their status.
- **Disability:** Persons with disabilities may encounter physical, sensory or cognitive obstacles that restrict their ability to use and access registration facilities and services.<sup>24</sup> Accessing registration centers and successfully navigating the registration procedure might pose challenges depending on an individual's disabilities which can be determined by both the medical model or social and human rights model of disability first introduced in the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*<sup>25,26</sup>. To enhance accessibility,

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20 [https://crvssystems.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/CRVS\\_Gender\\_1.2\\_NoOneBehind\\_e\\_WEB.pdf](https://crvssystems.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/CRVS_Gender_1.2_NoOneBehind_e_WEB.pdf)

21 <https://getinthepicture.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/Chapter%204.pdf>

22 <https://crvssystems.ca/challenges>

23 [https://crvssystems.ca/sites/default/files/assets/images/CRVS%20in%20Conflict%2C%20Emergencies%20and%20Fragile%20Settings\\_Full%20Compendium\\_e\\_WEB.pdf](https://crvssystems.ca/sites/default/files/assets/images/CRVS%20in%20Conflict%2C%20Emergencies%20and%20Fragile%20Settings_Full%20Compendium_e_WEB.pdf)

24 [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP\\_MCCRVS\\_2021\\_8\\_Add.1\\_ministerial\\_declaration\\_English.pdf?\\_gl=1\\*1sogytr\\*\\_ga\\*NjgxMzgxNjU1LjE2ODQyMjQ3NDk.\\*\\_ga\\_SB1ZX36Y86\\*MTY5MjI0MTMxNS4zNC4xLjE2OTIyNDEzNTQuMjEuMC4w](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP_MCCRVS_2021_8_Add.1_ministerial_declaration_English.pdf?_gl=1*1sogytr*_ga*NjgxMzgxNjU1LjE2ODQyMjQ3NDk.*_ga_SB1ZX36Y86*MTY5MjI0MTMxNS4zNC4xLjE2OTIyNDEzNTQuMjEuMC4w)

25 [https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2015/05/A.RES\\_71.165.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2015/05/A.RES_71.165.pdf)

26 The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was the first disability-specific, internationally binding legal instrument, representing a paradigm shift from the deficit-based biomedical model of disability to a social or human rights model. In the Convention, persons with disabilities are recognized as rights holders and States parties

it is crucial to establish registration centers that are accommodating to persons with disabilities, provide training to staff, and consider alternative registration approaches and flexible registration processes to adapt to individual needs.

- **Registration processes and legislations:** Overly complex or rigid registration legislation and processes can create bureaucratic hurdles that hinder accessibility. For instance, persons with disabilities might face more difficulties adhering to registration procedures because they are unable to have their disabilities medically assessed and legally recognized due to the associated costs or uncertainties over the process for recognizing these disabilities. Laws around registration should aim to be inclusive and universal. Registration procedures and requirements should be simple and easily accessible to all individuals.<sup>27</sup> Finding ways to remove registration burdens to individuals, such as integrating civil registration into other services, has the potential to increase registration coverage and completeness.
- **Costs associated with registration:** Registration fees, time and travel expenses can be a significant barrier to accessibility, particularly for low-income individuals or those living in remote areas.<sup>28</sup> Abolishing or waiving registration fees, introducing mobile or online registration or finding ways to reduce these costs can greatly enhance the accessibility to registration processes.
- **Geography:** Physical location of registration centers can significantly impact an individual's ability to register vital events. This results in reduced accessibility for remote communities.<sup>29</sup> By taking geographic factors into account, authorities can implement mobile registration units, outreach programs, integrate registration in communities, or implement online registration options to make registration services available and accessible regardless of the location. Inclusive CRVS system seeks to address these potential accessibility challenges by adopting innovative approaches to reach under-registered populations. Mobile registration units, outreach programs, and technologies (such as mobile applications or online registration platform), for example, can all help dismantle barriers to registration and increase the coverage<sup>30</sup> and completeness<sup>31</sup> of civil registration.

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are obliged to prohibit all discrimination and guarantee to persons with disabilities equal and effective legal protection against discrimination on all grounds.

<sup>27</sup>[https://crvssystems.ca/sites/default/files/assets/images/CRVS%20in%20Conflict%2C%20Emergencies%20and%20Fragile%20Settings\\_Full%20Compendium\\_e\\_WEB.pdf](https://crvssystems.ca/sites/default/files/assets/images/CRVS%20in%20Conflict%2C%20Emergencies%20and%20Fragile%20Settings_Full%20Compendium_e_WEB.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> <https://crvssystems.ca/sites/default/files/assets/images/CRVS-Systems-Improvement-Framework%20-%20EN.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> <https://getinthepicture.org/sites/default/files/resources/5%20CRVS%20Health.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> *Coverage* is used as a spatial metric to indicate the geographical reach of CRVS systems. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12870/4323>

<sup>31</sup> *Completeness* is a metric used to evaluate the proportion of vital events that are captured in the CRVS systems. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12870/4323>



## *Inclusivity in the CRVS*

### Regional Action Framework

The Regional Action Framework on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific sets goals, targets and a shared vision for countries in Asia and the Pacific. Inclusivity is clearly built-in in two of these goals and is intrinsically related to the third goal.

#### *Goal 1: Universal civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events*

Goal 1 is an expression of the internationally accepted principle of universal civil registration. CRVS systems should register all vital events occurring in the territory and jurisdiction of the country or area, including hard-to-reach and marginalized populations. This safeguards legal identity for individuals and facilitates inclusive development for these communities.

The focus on universality 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 into the registration processes.

#### *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*

Inclusive practices for the provision of legal documents entail ensuring that they must be easily accessible to all individuals. By ensuring that individuals of all backgrounds can receive their legal documentation, countries can safeguard access to rights and services for all individuals.

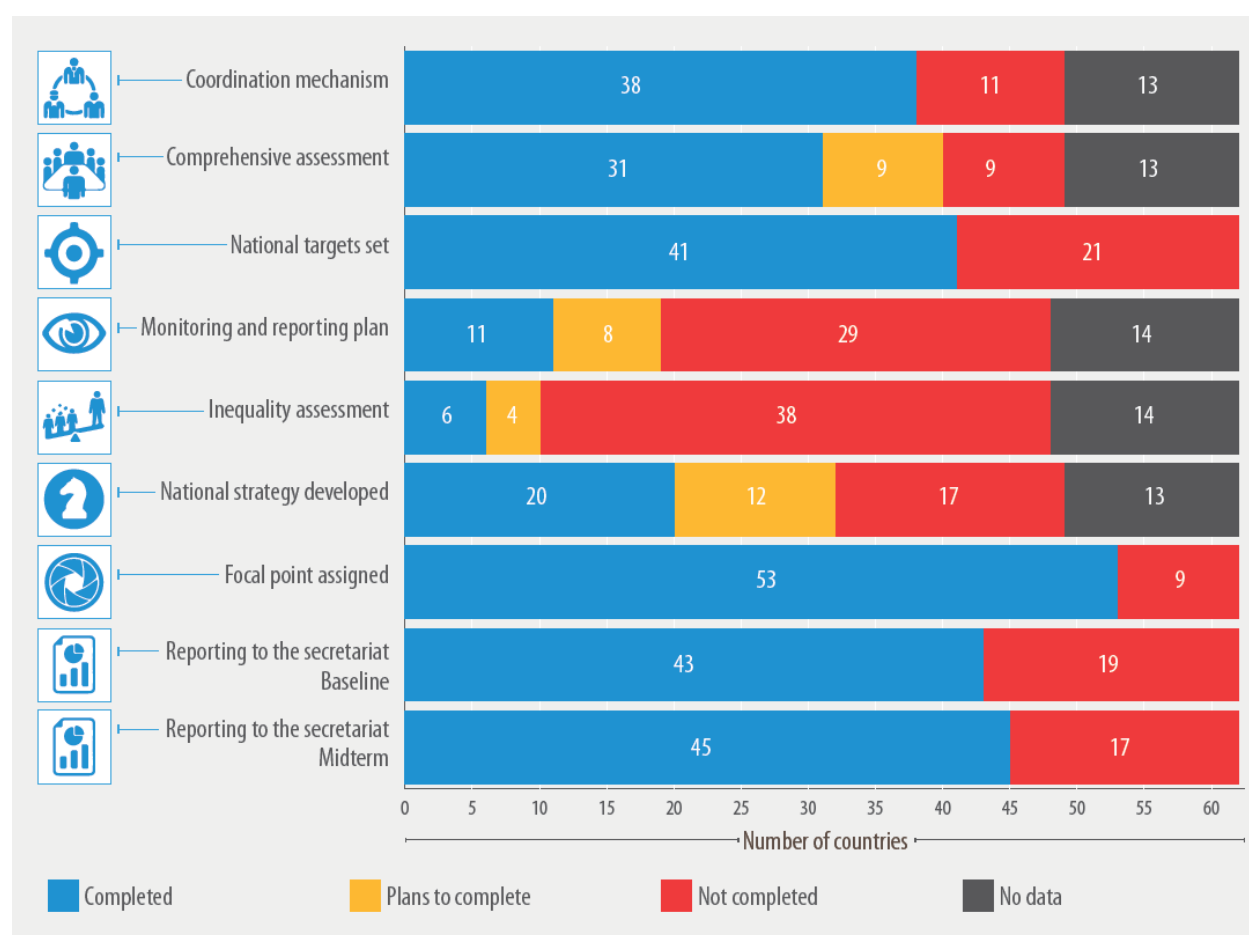
#### *Goal 3: Accurate, complete and timely vital statistics (including on causes of death) are produced based on registration records and are disseminated*

The production of vital statistics should allow for key disaggregation, namely by age, sex, geographic area, administrative subdivisions, other subgroups where possible such as migratory status, and characteristics of the vital event, such as cause of death, using the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). By having the ability to break down data in this way, policymakers gain insight into which groups are affected by which type of event, enabling them to craft targeted measures that address specific needs and challenges, increasing inclusivity of the CRVS system and thus evidence-informed national policies.

## Implementation Steps

The implementation steps are a set of logical sequences that enable countries to not only follow the implementation of Regional Action Framework but also form the fundamental cores for their national CRVS system. In particular, the implementation steps assist countries in identifying areas for improvement, establishing their objectives, monitoring their progress against the goals and targets, and reporting to the secretariat. They support the coordination, assessment, organization, and monitoring of CRVS systems and inclusive and sustainable processes and outcomes for CRVS improvement.

Figure 1: Status of implementation steps at the midpoint of the CRVS Decade, among 62 countries in 2019



Source: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2021), *A snapshot of progress midway through the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade*, p. 48. Retrieved from: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12870/4701>

As per Figure 1, the midterm review of countries' progress towards the goals and targets of Regional Action Framework discovered that good progress was made in establishing a coordination mechanism, setting national targets, assigning a focal point, and reporting to the

secretariat. While a few countries reaffirmed their plans to design a monitoring and reporting plan, conduct inequality assessment, and develop a national strategy, several countries have not completed these steps.

By assessing inequalities related to CRVS experienced by subgroups of the population, including among hard-to-reach and marginalized populations, governments can identify which population sub-groups would benefit from inclusive measures. Population subgroups in particular geographic areas and administrative subdivisions would also benefit in the same way. Inequality assessment involves estimating the completeness of registration of vital events and identifying groups that are excluded from registration.<sup>32</sup> After identifying these groups, qualitative assessments should be used in order to gain a better understanding of the groups or communities' barriers to registration.<sup>33</sup> These findings can then be used to find ways to increase CRVS coverage through inclusive policies.

### Action Areas

The action areas in the Regional Action Framework serve as a foundation for Governments and development partners to concentrate and coordinate their efforts in developing and supporting comprehensive national CRVS strategies. They also facilitate structured reporting on activities and progress, allowing for improved knowledge-sharing, regional cooperation, and identification of collaboration opportunities. It is important to confirm that all areas are addressed in some way, even if members and associate members adopt alternative approaches to their CRVS strategies. The Regional Action Framework proposes a list of activities for each of its action area, many of which already include inclusivity-building in some capacity. The following are the action areas presented in the Regional Action Framework, and how they relate to CRVS inclusivity:

#### **Political commitment:**

Political commitment can drive efforts to make CRVS systems more inclusive by encouraging stakeholder engagement and by incorporating inclusive goals into national development plans. At the highest levels of government, political commitment is vital for unifying stakeholders around a comprehensive, multisectoral national CRVS strategy that actively engages all government levels and sectors. This commitment verifies that resources are allocated to address barriers and reach marginalized populations, making CRVS systems responsive and inclusive for all residents, regardless of their background or circumstances.

#### **Public engagement, participation and generating demand:**

Trust and accountability between CRVS authorities and the public are essential. By respecting cultural sensitivities, people will be more willing to declare vital events. Civil registration should be organized and managed in ways that are respectful of cultural and behavioral sensitivities. Further, promoting CRVS can increase awareness of the importance of registration and can help remove registration barriers. Inclusivity makes sure that these efforts reach diverse groups, enhancing awareness and participation of under-registered sub population groups, leading to improved civil registration coverage and vital statistics accuracy. An effective approach to engage diverse population groups is to translate information regarding civil registration processes to their languages. Removing language barrier can trigger interest in civil registration and encourage actions from those population groups to seek support. Partnering with local health, education, other public servants and networks is important and they also play a crucial role in engaging and raising awareness among the public, but it is equally important that partnerships with civil society organizations, the media, and social workers are established and maintained. This collaboration is key for a sustainable and inclusive approach for providing information about the value of CRVS, increasing the likelihood that people would register vital events.

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<https://getinthepicture.org/sites/default/files/resources/Bali%20Process%20Civil%20Registration%20Assessment%20Toolkit.pdf>

**Coordination:**

Effective coordination involves various stakeholders, including marginalized communities, to prevent exclusion and make CRVS systems universally responsive. Inclusivity also extends to the establishment of national, and where possible sub-national, CRVS coordination mechanisms. These mechanisms, when inclusive, comprise representatives from all relevant sectors and consider the perspectives of civil society, ensuring comprehensive and equitable CRVS systems that address the needs of all, prevent duplication, and facilitate effective record use for statistical purposes.

**Policies, legislation and implementation of regulations:**

An inclusive legal and policy framework promotes non-discrimination by removing barriers to registration based on factors like ethnicity, marriage or socio-economic status. It defines vital events comprehensively and makes registration compulsory, with accessible civil registration options and incentives for timely reporting. Inclusivity extends to data protection, safeguarding personal information and fostering trust. An enabling legal and policy framework must incorporate inclusivity promotion into relevant provisions and establish an effective implementation and monitoring system to achieve full compliance.

**Infrastructure and resources:**

Inclusive CRVS system should contain the physical and digital infrastructures needed to offer registration services to all population groups. Governments should establish registration offices in local communities to the extent possible, complemented by online and/or mobile registration. Inclusivity also extends to human resources, with a focus on career development, training, and retention of qualified staff. Special attention is given to building technical skills and capacity for healthcare professionals and officials responsible for functions in the CRVS systems, and any other responsible stakeholder. Moreover, inclusivity in investments secures sustainable funding for continuous improvements, with a particular focus on addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by marginalized groups, ultimately making the CRVS system equitable and responsive to diverse populations.

**Operational procedures, practices and innovations:**

Operational procedures should guarantee that civil registration serves everyone, regardless of background or circumstance, offering legal documentation for identity, civil status, and rights. In the context of digital CRVS, inclusivity makes sure that innovations and advancements are applied within a sound legal framework, and well adapted to the diversity of the population it caters to. 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. Information on civil registration procedures should also be translated to all official languages as well as languages of minority population groups to the extent possible.

**Production, dissemination and use of vital statistics:**

Civil registration, when universal, is the preferred source for accurate, timely, and disaggregated vital statistics. Inclusivity guarantees that civil registration, and derived vital statistics, can cover all populations, including marginalized groups. These groups are often the ones most in need of effective evidence-informed targeted policies. Inclusivity can thus make vital statistics more comprehensive and representative.

***Designing and building inclusive CRVS***

Inclusive design is a universal approach aimed at creating products, services, and environments that are adapted to the different needs of diverse individuals, regardless of age, ability, or cultural background<sup>34</sup>. This approach continues to be foundational for much of the research and work on inclusivity in a number of fields and topics. Applying these practices to CRVS systems could greatly help promote accessibility and equitable participation in registration processes. The adoption of inclusive design in CRVS systems leads to accessible and user-friendly civil

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34 UNDESA and Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems incorporated several elements of inclusive design in their guidance for promoting inclusiveness in CRVS systems.

registration processes for diverse populations, including those facing previously mentioned disadvantages or barriers.

There are five main practices of inclusive design<sup>35</sup> in CRVS and they:

**Place people at the heart of the design process:**

In the context of CRVS, this means involving residents, registration officers, and other stakeholders in the design and development of the CRVS system. A people-centric approach can help understand barriers and to what degree they affect certain population groups, providing useful insights to effective design solutions to meet their specific needs.

**Acknowledge diversity and differences:**

CRVS systems must be designed in a way to take into account the diverse backgrounds, cultures, and languages of the population they serve. By acknowledging this diversity, it is possible to establish a culturally sensitive and accommodating civil registration system capable of catering to various population groups.

**Provide access that is convenient to use for everyone:**

CRVS systems should be designed to be user-friendly and easily accessible to the entire population. This means registration should be streamlined and simple. Documents and forms should be easy and straightforward to understand and complete, and access to registration itself should be easy. This could involve geographical and physical accessibility considerations for registration centers, or digital access to online platforms.

**Offer flexibility:**

Inclusive CRVS systems are flexible and adaptable to the changing needs of users and can be adapted for different individuals. This may include updating the system regularly to accommodate new technologies, changing demographics, or adapting to any new needs.

**Offer options where a single design solution cannot accommodate all users:**

Not all users will have the same abilities, access to registration centers or language skills. Inclusive CRVS systems should provide alternative registration methods and channels, such as online and offsite options to accommodate different users' needs.

***CRVS inclusivity-building***

As previously mentioned, CRVS inclusiveness is not accomplished through a one-size-fits-all approach. Each country faces unique socio-cultural, political, economic, and geographical factors that influence different parts of their population's interaction with their CRVS system. The scope of obstacles and barriers to registration are highly context-dependent, and countries have to provide tailored solutions to improve completeness of vital event registration for specific

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35 This paper took inspiration from the UK Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment's Inclusive Design model which has been influential in promoting inclusiveness in the design of public goods and services. For more information, refer to [the Principles of Inclusive Design. \(They include you.\)](#)

excluded population groups<sup>36</sup>. This requires identifying, understanding, and addressing barriers for registration, while recognizing the potential variability of these barriers among diverse subgroups.

This paper introduces a structured three-step cycle to enhance the inclusivity within CRVS systems. Ideally, countries should follow these steps to correctly assess the nature and the type of inclusive measure they might have to implement to bolster the inclusiveness of their civil registration systems.

- 1. Inequality assessments:** The initial step is the identification of population groups with lower registration rates and the magnitude of the gap with the rest of the population. This means understanding who is left out of registration and to what degree. After identifying population groups that tend not to be registered, understanding the reasons behind that inequality in registration rate can provide insights into why that population is excluded from registration as well as providing additional contextual insights about these communities (socioeconomic conditions, cultural differences, varying ability, etc.). This enables CRVS authorities to identify barriers to registration for specific groups. Assessing inequalities can be done using either quantitative or qualitative methods or a combination of both. The Regional Support Office of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons, and Related Transnational Crime developed a civil registration assessment toolkit to provide a qualitative approach to measure inequalities in both births and deaths<sup>37</sup>. WHO also developed their *Analysing Mortality and Causes of Death 3 (ANACoD3)* tool to offer a quantitative review process of the quality of mortality and cause of death data<sup>38</sup>.
- 2. Design and implementation of inclusive measures for removing barriers to registration:** As excluded groups and their barriers to registration have been identified, registration authorities can tailor policies and programs to overcome and dismantle barriers to registration, while taking a contextually aware approach. It is worth noting that these specific policies and programs must maintain the same data protection, privacy and confidentiality principles as the overarching CRVS improvement policies and programs. By using the findings and insights of the inequality assessments, different barriers can be addressed, aiming to increase the accessibility of registration for the identified population groups.
- 3. Monitoring and evaluation:** After implementing inclusive measures, programs or policies, their efficacy should be measured, making sure that they are effective, that data from hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations are protected and kept private, and that the targeted population groups are increasingly engaged in registration. There should be a notable improvement in the registration rate for this group, and adaptive adjustments can be made if necessary. This requires continuous monitoring and periodic (re)evaluation of the registration rate of the population groups and gives

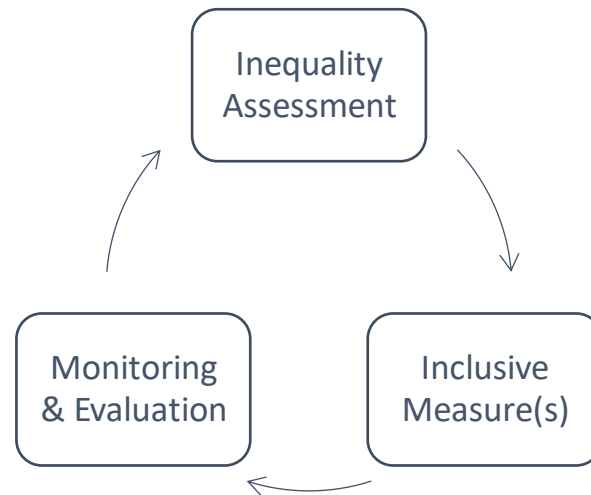
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<sup>36</sup> For country experiences on integrating inclusivity into CRVS systems, please refer to the [country stories](#) page on the [getinthepicture](#) website.

<sup>37</sup> The Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime. [Bali Process Civil Registration Assessment Toolkit](#). 2018.

<sup>38</sup> World Health Organization. [Analysing Mortality and Causes of Death 3 \(ANACoD3\)](#). 2021.

further insight on how newly identified barriers to registration could be subsequently addressed, and if further inequality assessments would be needed.



These steps lay out a comprehensive, yet general pro-active approach for the design of inclusive measures. It is essential to bear in mind that this iterative process may need to be revisited multiple times. While the intention is for policies, programs and measures to embody inclusivity, their application can present challenges at times. The iterative process of conducting inequality assessments, designing and implementing new inclusive measures, and subsequently monitoring and evaluating their impacts will consistently enhance the inclusiveness of the CRVS system. Moreover, recognizing the dynamic nature of barriers to registration is crucial. As societies evolve, so do the challenges associated with CRVS inclusion, and authorities need to continually assess and adapt their strategies to remain responsive to changing conditions and adapt to new types of marginalization and exclusion that might occur. Implementing an inclusivity building cycle within registration system will continuously aim at engaging the participation of unregistered individuals, progressing towards universal registration.

#### Example of inclusive measures

Promoting inclusivity within CRVS systems involves a multifaceted pro-active approach encompassing various strategies. Tailored solutions addressing specific issues for specific groups, while maintaining continuing access for all is key to registration inclusiveness. Inclusive measures governments can apply to improve inclusivity of registration systems include the following:

- **Awareness and engagement campaigns:** Conducting awareness and engagement campaigns targeted at marginalized communities can promote the importance of CRVS and break down cultural or social barriers that hinder registration. Emphasizing the tangible benefits of registration, such as access to education, healthcare, social services, and legal protections, can motivate individuals to register willingly. An inclusive approach

to CRVS involves addressing the broader societal context that may contribute to the lack of willingness to register.

- **Legal reforms:** Reviewing and reforming existing legal frameworks to be more inclusive allow CRVS system to recognize diverse family structures and identities. Adapting institutions to new realities and established cultural practices also leads to accurate reflection of everyone's civil status, contributing to social acceptance and inclusion.
- **Integration into community services:** Integrating CRVS into public, religious, and communal services enable civil registration to be more accessible to marginalized groups. For instance, birth registration services could be integrated into healthcare facilities, religious ceremonies, or community gatherings, making it convenient for parents to register their children promptly, and be adapted around cultural practices of different communities.
- **Increasing accessibility and streamlining registration processes:** Administrative and documentation requirements, coupled with costly travel and registration fees, can put up significant barriers disincentivizing individuals from registering vital events. A streamlined, and user-friendly registration process reduces barriers and promotes inclusivity. The Regional Action Framework states that “legal documentation should contain just the minimum set of information required for legal and administrative purposes as the national legal framework dictates.”<sup>39</sup> Simplifying paperwork, offering simple registration options, and making registration forms and information guides available in multiple languages can accommodate individuals who may not be fluent in the official language, increasing their participation in CRVS.
- **Consider specific measures to register hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations:** Specific measures designed to facilitate registration of their vital events and recognizing their rights to access essential services should be prioritized to achieve an inclusive CRVS system. Collaborating with relevant agencies and adapting registration processes to address the unique circumstances of these population groups can help establish and safeguard their legal identity, protection, and access to support.
- **Removing geographic barriers:** Strategically expanding the number of access points of registration, including the implementation of mobile registration units in remote communities, can significantly increase CRVS coverage. Taking registration services directly in-person or virtually to areas with lower registration rates can eliminate travel barriers and encourages more individuals, including marginalized groups, to register vital events.

When addressing barriers with any of these measures, it is important to analyse how gender, age, migrant status, and/or disability may affect the barriers and how to overcome them. For instance, establishing dedicated communication channels to support persons with disabilities and teen or single mothers to register their and their children's vital events can help them manage the stigmas and increase their registration rates. Leveraging community services such as childbirth also provides opportunities for unregistered parents to register, along with their children's, vital events. This is particularly impactful for population groups in which women are

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39 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2014). Regional Action Framework on civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific, p. 6. Retrieved from <https://getinthepicture.org/resource/regional-action-framework-civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-asia-and-pacific>



less likely to have their vital events registered due to socio-cultural norms and stigmas against teen or single mothers.

### ***Incorporating inclusivity into the 2024 review of the decade***

At the ninth meeting of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, members agreed to incorporate inclusivity into the 2024 review of the CRVS Decade. Members expressed the need to highlight the importance of leaving no one behind and measuring progress towards getting everyone in the picture.

As inclusivity is a new theme, identifying important dimensions and developing a scientific framework for incorporating inclusivity into the 2024 review of the CRVS Decade is relatively challenging. As a result, a set of qualitative or contextual questions is proposed to measure countries' progress in promoting inclusivity in CRVS. The design of the questions drew influence from the dimensions of inclusivity outlined in the earlier sections while complementing questions already included in the questionnaire.

### ***Proposed questions***

[Note]: \* This is an existing question in the questionnaire.

Line	Question	Answer	Comment
<b>1. Inequality assessment</b>			
1.1.	Has your country completed an inequality assessment related to CRVS? Please provide a link to the inequality assessment report as applicable.*		
If yes, please answer the question(s) below.			
1.1.1.	Which methodology was used to conduct the assessment? Please provide a brief summary for each of the methodologies selected.*		
1.1.2.	Have findings from inequality assessment been used in policymaking to increase coverage and completeness of vital event registration? If yes, please provide a brief summary and link(s) to the document(s).*		
Please answer the question(s) below irrespective of your answer to 1.1.			
1.2.	Are you aware of other studies or reports looking into the reasons behind under-coverage and incomplete registration in your country? Please provide a brief summary and link(s) to the document(s) as applicable.*		
<b>2. Registration of non-citizens</b>			

2.1.	What documents are required for registering vital events?		
2.2.	Does your country civil registration system allow for the registration of vital events for non-citizens?		
If yes, please answer the question(s) below.			
2.2.1.	Are there any differences in the registration process of non-citizens compared to citizens? If yes, please provide more information and link(s) to relevant document(s) in the comments.		
<b>3. Ability to register</b>			
3.1.	Is information on registration process translated into different non-official languages? If so, please identify all of the languages.		
3.2.	Are your registration centers and procedures adapted for individuals with physical and mental disabilities? If so, please explain.		
3.3.	Is timely registration of births free of charge?		
3.4.	Is timely registration of deaths free of charge?		
3.5.	Is there a fee or other penalty for late or delayed registration of vital events? Please provide a brief explanation and link(s) to relevant document(s).	No	
3.6.	Are birth certificates free for timely registrations?		
3.7.	Are death certificates free for timely registrations?		
<b>4. Geographic and administrative barriers</b>			
4.1.	Have you implemented other special measures to register unregistered populations? If yes, please give more details about these measures in the comments.		
4.2.	Have you employed mobile registration to increase access to registration services? If yes, please provide more details and link(s) to relevant information/document(s).*		
4.3.	Do you have an online platform or mobile phone application for registration of vital events? Please provide more details and link(s) to relevant information/document(s).*		
<b>5. Stakeholder engagement</b>			
5.1.	Are any non-governmental groups* supporting individuals in the process of registering vital events? Please provide a brief summary of their involvement and link(s) to the relevant document(s).		

	*These could be associations representing various sectors or stakeholders such as religious or indigenous associations, groups of/for persons with disabilities, older persons' associations, women- and girl-led associations, or refugee groups.		
5.2.	Have you undertaken national or subnational campaigns to encourage registration of vital events? If yes, please add a link and summarize the campaigns in the comments (including who were the target groups).*		
5.3.	Have you established incentives (financial, non-financial, or both) to increase registration rates of vital events? If yes, please summarize these and when they were introduced.*		
5.4.	Do you have penalties (financial, non-financial, or both) for late or delayed registration of vital events? If yes, please summarize these and when they were introduced.*		
5.5.	Since 2015, have you reviewed incentives and/or penalties to increase registration rates of vital events, including for hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations? If yes, please summarize what you have done in the comments.*		
<b>6. Gender inclusivity</b>			
6.1.	Is gender inclusivity in CRVS explicitly mentioned in your national CRVS strategy? If so, please provide a brief summary and link(s) to relevant document(s).		
6.2.	Have you conducted studies to identify potential CRVS gender gaps and their causes?		
6.3.	Have any other measures been implemented to address gender gaps in CRVS in your country? If yes, please briefly summarize the measure(s) and provide a link to relevant documents if any.		