

Session 6: Implementing gender-sensitive civil registration and vital statistics systems through a life cycle approach

Statement given by: Ms Fathimath Riyaza, Deputy Statistician, Maldives Bureau of Statistics

Good afternoon. Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. Let me begin by updating you on Maldives work towards implementing a gender-sensitive civil registration and vital statistics systems.

The Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system of Maldives stands as an example of a well-rounded system continuously delivering on its main task of ensuring universal birth and death registration of a population residing in its territory. The legal framework for civil registration in the Maldives is to be mostly found in the law on birth registration and death certification, enacted in 1993. Given the progress and modernizations to systems since, let me state that the government is in the process of reviewing this law, and a proposal is in place to formulate a national Civil Registration Act that has a more holistic view.

According to VRS regulation of 2016, births have to be registered within seven days of their occurrence and there is no exception made between boys and girls. The establishment of the online birth and death platform GEMEN in 2019, (an online application built on the Government Network of Maldives or GNM (e-government platform)) has helped in improving the registration system, but some challenges remain. Along with the ratification of the amendments to the decentralization act, local councils and healthcare facilities are vested with the role of updating the data in the system. Here lies one of our biggest challenges, the capacity of local council and health facility staff to operate and address the day-to-day “bugs” of this new system.

Overarching policy of the government remains the same - that no gender discrimination is made in birth registration, death registration and birth certificate issuance. Birth registration rate in

Maldives is close to universal converge, and death registration completeness was estimated to be around 99% in 2019. Though there is complete coverage of birth registration in the country, delays in reporting from the local authorities to the central system still exist. However, few cases remain for neglecting to issue birth certificate. Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services gives top priority in attending to these neglected cases.

Vital Statistics are published annually and statistics are presented by gender. With the new integrated GEMEN system, we are facing delays in publishing vital statistics with the implementation of the new system. Ministry of Health, together with National Centre for Information Technology and Local Government Authority is working closely to resolve these issues.

Similarly, it is mandatory to register marriages and divorces with the courts with no except among male and female. Maldives has also made progress in enforcing legal age of marriage. The Child Protection Act ratified on 20th November 2019 prohibits marrying any child below the age of 18. This is a milestone towards the fulfilment of children's right in Maldives in line with Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Maldives has low prevalence of child marriage and it is important to closely monitor the age of first birth among young women as a means of monitoring unregistered early marriages in the country.

The Government of Maldives is committed to invest in our people to accelerate and scale up our progress towards Sustainable Development Goals and 'getting everyone in the picture'. We believe COVID-19 has also offered us an opportunity for innovation and transformation and to strengthen partnership. We are committed to a success story to ensure our commitment continues to implement gender-sensitive approach in the registration of births and deaths.