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Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific: statistics

Ministerial Declaration on Building a More Resilient Future with Inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Ministerial Declaration on Building a More Resilient Future with Inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics was adopted at the Second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific. Taking into account progress made since the beginning of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024) and recent developments in the area of civil registration and vital statistics, the Conference set out clear actions to accelerate progress towards the shared regional vision that, by 2024, all people in Asia and the Pacific should benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems.

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific may wish to endorse the Declaration.

We, the ministers and representatives of members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific assembled at the Second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok and online from 16 to 19 November 2021,

1. *Reaffirming* our shared vision that, by 2024, all people in Asia and the Pacific benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitate the realization of their rights and support good governance, health and development,
2. *Recalling* General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015 entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, in which the Assembly recognized the need to build peaceful,

* ESCAP/78/L.1/Rev.1.

just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights, including the right to development, on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions,

3. *Affirming* that universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems have a critical role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the following:

(a) Providing documents and records for individuals to establish their legal identity in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal target 16.9, and that the issue of legal identity for all is of paramount importance in terms of fulfilling the 2030 Agenda, in accordance with the national policies of each member State,

(b) Assisting in the implementation of universal health coverage and providing the most reliable data to monitor and address health and well-being at every stage of the life cycle in support of the achievement of Goal 3, including maternal, neonatal, infant and under-five mortality rates, mortality rates due to specific diseases and causes, and the adolescent birth rate,

(c) Supporting the achievement of the Goals, in accordance with the national policies and priorities of each member State, to ensure that all children have access to education without discrimination through the promotion of the issuance of legal documentation of civil registration,

(d) Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women through the provision of documents with regard to family relations and civil status, and producing sex-disaggregated and gender statistics, including for monitoring Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls,

(e) Increasing the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data and thereby the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in accordance with Goal targets 17.18 and 17.19, including supporting policymaking at subnational and national levels to ensure no one is left behind,

4. *Recalling* General Assembly resolution 71/165 of 19 December 2016 on inclusive development for persons with disabilities, in which the Assembly emphasized that the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities was integral to the full and inclusive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and recognizing that persons with disabilities face particular barriers to civil registration,

5. *Recalling also* Commission resolution 71/14 of 29 May 2015 on the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024), in which the Commission endorsed the Ministerial Declaration to “Get Every One in the Picture” in Asia and the Pacific, adopted by the First Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok in November 2014, and Commission resolution 75/9 of 31 May 2019 on navigating policy with data to leave no one behind,

6. *Welcoming* the endorsement by the Statistical Commission of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda, at its fifty-first session,¹ and subsequent decision 2020/211 of 18 June 2020 of the Economic and Social Council, in which it took note of the Agenda,

¹ *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2020, Supplement No. 4* (E/2020/24-E/CN.3/2020/37), chap. I, sect. C, decision 51/113.

7. *Noting* that the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda refers to the holistic approach to civil registration of all vital events, production of vital statistics, the establishment and maintenance of population registers and identity management apparatus from birth to death and that there should be full interoperability between these functions in a simultaneous manner, according to the national legislation and policies of each member State and international standards and recommendations,

8. *Recalling* the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030² and the need to substantially reduce disaster risk and the loss of life, livelihood and health as well as of the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries, and the role of civil registration and vital statistics in providing disaggregated and timely data for crisis response, and recognizing that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is one of the greatest global challenges in the history of the United Nations and that it has negatively impacted the civil registration of births and deaths, in particular for individuals lacking legal identification, and that civil registration needs to be robust and resilient to pandemics, crises and other disasters,

9. *Acknowledging* further the importance of civil registration systems and identity management to build resilience and facilitate access to essential services in response to and recovery from disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises and in this regard, recalling Commission resolution 77/1 of 29 April 2021 on building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific,

10. *Noting and recognizing* the importance of digitization in ensuring the civil registration and vital statistics of births, deaths, and causes of deaths,

11. *Acknowledging* that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for special attention on building national capacities to notify and register deaths, record, medically certify and code causes of death to International Classification of Diseases standards, and implement verbal autopsies using standard procedures such as a structured questionnaire for deaths taking place outside of a health facility and without the attention of a medical practitioner,

12. *Recognizing* the importance of vital statistics from civil registration to design, implement and monitor public policies and to understand the rapidly changing demographics of the region,

13. *Recognizing also* the significant progress made by countries to improve their civil registration and vital statistics systems through the implementation of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific³ as reflected in the midterm report for the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, entitled *Getting Every One in the Picture: A Snapshot of Progress Midway through the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade*,

14. *Deeply concerned* that despite continuous efforts, an estimated 64 million children under the age of five within the region have not had their birth registered, that millions of other vital events, including deaths, are not

² General Assembly resolution 69/283, annex II.

³ Commission resolution 71/14, annex, sect. B.

registered and that safe access to health facilities for pregnant women to ensure timely registration is not emphasized,

15. *Recognizing* that most members and associate members of the Commission still need to take additional actions to ensure civil registration coverage among 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, persons with disabilities, foundlings and persons without documentation, among others, in accordance with national context, regulations, and priorities,

16. *Recognizing also* that the direct or indirect cost of registration creates barriers for registration, in particular among low-income groups and people in vulnerable situations, which are currently experiencing significantly lower registration rates in many member countries,

17. *Recognizing further* the need for a gender-inclusive approach to civil registration and vital statistics to ensure universal registration for all, allowing everyone, in accordance with national legislation and policies, to access services and opportunities, to realize their rights, including to inheritance and property, and providing protection from harmful practices such as child marriage and consanguineous marriage, where applicable, as well as ensuring that parents' marital and civil registration status does not affect the right to register their children's births, including by expanding the benefits of birth registration such as health insurance for every birth from lower-income families,

18. *Acknowledging the importance* of harnessing the potential role of the health sector, including the provision of essential health services, to strengthen the momentum towards the goals of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific by strengthening health interlinkages with civil registration and vital statistics, as well as the important role of the health sector as a notifier of births and deaths,

19. *Acknowledging* that the digitization of data and other technological developments, including in biometrics, further necessitates the protection of personal data and the rights of the individual to privacy and consent with due respect to confidentiality, including with regard to issues on how data are processed, managed and accessed by both public and private bodies,

20. *Acknowledging also* that civil registration and vital statistics systems need to be resilient and considered an essential public administration service of the government in order to protect the rights of everyone to be registered and to have access to official documentation at all times, including in times of disasters, pandemics and other crisis,

21. *Noting* the important role of the civil registration and vital statistics partnership in Asia and the Pacific and the added value of international, regional and subregional organizations and initiatives in supporting the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in countries through collaboration, advocacy, technical assistance, financial assistance, capacity-building, dissemination of information, research, innovation, and facilitation of the exchange of knowledge and best practices,

22. *Recognizing* that non-governmental organizations, civil society, professional associations, media and the private sector also play an important role in supporting the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in many countries in the region,

23. *Noting with appreciation* the leadership of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific in bringing the region together and acting as the custodian for the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade and also for its efforts in overseeing the preparations for the Second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and the midterm review of the Decade, and expressing appreciation to the co-organizers of the Second Ministerial Conference,

24. *Proclaim* our continued commitment to our shared vision that all people in Asia and the Pacific 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, and recognize the need to accelerate efforts for improvements to achieve our shared goals;

25. *Encourage* member States to implement the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda as a matter of priority, and encourage the inclusion of identity management agencies, where they exist, as part of national civil registration and vital statistics coordination mechanisms or civil registration agencies in coordination mechanisms for identity management, as appropriate, and a holistic approach to legal identity in national comprehensive strategies;

26. *Call upon* members and associate members:

(a) To strengthen the capacity of key civil registration and vital statistics stakeholders to exchange lessons learned with their counterparts in other countries about ongoing civil registration work, including projects related to record management systems and digital recordings;

(b) To share experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, in strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems to support resilience from disasters and ensure inclusive recovery strategies from COVID-19 and other crises, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(c) To strengthen national governance and coordination structures for civil registration and vital statistics systems to promote efficient design, encourage coordination and collaboration between government and other stakeholders, and enable the full impact of technical efforts to strengthen such systems;

(d) 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, such as women and children, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, internally displaced persons, domestic workers, foundlings and persons without documentation;

(e) To strengthen the vital event notification capacity of the public and private sector health service provider, including through the provision of essential health services and information technology solutions for online registration of births and deaths;

(f) To build national capacities to accurately medically certify and code causes of death in accordance with International Classification of Diseases standards and ensure that verbal autopsies are conducted on a representative sample of deaths that occur outside of a health facility and without the attention of a medical practitioner;

(g) To facilitate data sharing among government agencies, as appropriate, to produce accurate and timely vital statistics based on civil registration records;

(h) To work to increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable statistics, including maternal, neonatal, infant and under-five mortality rates, and their dissemination to the public;

(i) To consider adoption of comprehensive data protection, confidentiality and privacy laws that secure the personal data of individuals that are held by member States, as well as to develop robust legal frameworks, regulations and strategies to govern the implementation of civil registration activities and to facilitate interoperability, as appropriate;

(j) To ensure sufficient financial resources for civil registration and vital statistics, including by allocating sufficient spending on the development of information technology infrastructure necessary for recording vital events;

(k) To build civil registration and vital statistics systems in accordance with the principle of respecting and ensuring human rights, considering civil registration of vital events as an essential public administration service and that providing such services should be implemented with adequate financial resources and essential infrastructure at all times, including during disasters, pandemics and other times of crises, and in this regard strongly urge to refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, in light of concerns over the constraining nature and development implications of such measures that negatively impact the well-being of populations and can impede the full achievement of economic and social development in the concerned States;

27. *Call upon* development partners to maintain or expand assistance to countries in a coordinated manner that is conducive to a comprehensive and integrated approach to improving civil registration and vital statistics;

28. *Request* the Executive Secretary:

(a) To accord priority to supporting members and associate members in the implementation of the present Declaration and the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework and COVID-19 recovery in cooperation with other concerned entities;

(b) To submit the outcome of the Second Ministerial Conference to the Commission at its seventy-eighth session.