Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific
Bangkok and online, 16–19 November 2021
Items 2 and 10 of the provisional agenda*”

Review of the progress and existing challenges in accelerating the implementation of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific
Towards a shared vision of universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitate the realization of rights and support good governance, health and development

Support from development partners in the first half of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024)

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The multiple development partners involved in the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership have significantly contributed to progress towards the shared vision that, by 2024, everyone in the region will benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitate the realization of rights and support good governance, health and development.

The present document contains an outline of development partners’ support for countries between 2015 and the beginning of 2021, and a description of the various thematic areas of support.

The Second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific may wish to provide further information on national progress towards the shared regional vision.

I. Introduction

1. The Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific facilitates collaborative action at the local, provincial, national and international levels by enabling stakeholders to align and prioritize efforts and by monitoring progress towards the shared vision that, by 2024, everyone in the region will benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitate the realization of

* ESCAP/MCCRVS/2021/L.1.
rights and support good governance, health and development. A key principle of the Regional Action Framework is that action by member States and partners must be based on collaboration and coordination.

2. Members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) have, by themselves or with support from development partners and donors, worked towards the three goals of the Regional Action Framework.

3. The present document contains a summary of the activities of global and regional partners, including the progress achieved or under way in key action areas and examples from countries from the period 2015–2021. A related information document (ESCAP/MCCRVS/2021/INF/1) contains a summary of the mandates and key activities of the partners.

II. Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership

4. The Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership, established in 2013, supports Governments to reach their nationally set targets. It brings together United Nations entities and development partners with mandates to help to strengthen national civil registration and vital statistics systems and achieve the goals of the Regional Action Framework, including the following founding partners: ESCAP; International Organization for Migration (IOM); United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); World Bank Group; World Health Organization (WHO); Asian Development Bank (ADB); Pacific Community; Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century; Plan International; and World Vision International.

5. Additional partners have joined since 2014, including the following: Brisbane Accord Group; Data for Health Initiative of Bloomberg Philanthropies; Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems; Statistics Norway; Regional Support Office of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents.

6. Subregional initiatives have been created to address the variability of civil registration and vital statistics systems in the Asia-Pacific region. The Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan (2011–2014) was developed by the Pacific Community to support one of the four priority areas of the Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy 2011–2020, and the Brisbane Accord Group is supporting its implementation. Subregional networks, including the Pacific Civil Registrars Network and the Civil Registration Professionals of South Asia, are actively promoting subregional cooperation.

7. The Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the membership of which is composed of Governments and development partners, functions as the custodian of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024). The ESCAP secretariat performs the secretariat functions for the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership and the Regional Steering Group, both of which provided significant support for the completion of the baseline and midterm reports on the Decade.
8. The Partnership has focused considerable attention on advocacy and communicating civil registration and vital statistics developments within the region and beyond. The ESCAP secretariat maintains a dedicated website (www.getinthepicture.org) which serves to summarize the activities of member States and partners as well as subregional initiatives. The secretariat also issues a monthly newsletter, *CRVS Insight*, on behalf of the Partnership, which provides updates on available resources, upcoming events and recent developments related to priority topics.

9. The Asia-Pacific region has faced challenges with regard to addressing inequalities in access to registration among refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons and persons of undetermined nationality. In response, partners in the region developed the Bali Process Civil Registration Assessment Toolkit, which helps interested member States to assess and improve their systems in order to record all births, deaths and marriages that occur in their territory among these populations.

10. The members of the Partnership are also involved, collectively and individually, in such global efforts as the Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Group and the United Nations Legal Identity Task Force. In addition, the Partnership is working with other regional initiatives, notably the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics.

11. In collaboration with the Brisbane Accord Group, UNFPA, Statistics Norway and the European Free Trade Association, ESCAP hosted workshops in the region to improve the capacity of national civil registration and vital statistics systems to produce and disseminate vital statistics.

### III. Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Group

12. The Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Group was formed in 2014 to enhance coordination. It brings together international and regional organizations to forge strategic alliances and strengthen national civil registration and vital statistics and related systems through coordination and collaboration on global and regional initiatives and the exchange of information.

13. The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat performs the secretariat function of the Group, which has more than 25 members. The Group also coordinates and collaborates on two regional civil registration and vital statistics initiatives: the Get Every One in the Picture initiative, with ESCAP as the secretariat, and the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, supported by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

14. The objectives of the Group include the following:

   (a) To take stock of progress made on the improvement of the civil registration and vital statistics systems in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals;

   (b) To contribute to the implementation of the Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Scaling Up Investment Plan 2015–2024;

   (c) To explore and leverage opportunities to accelerate the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems;
To promote the importance of civil registration and vital statistics in the global development agenda;

to support coordinated country-level engagement by the respective institutions that is consistent with the global civil registration and vital statistics agenda.

15. The Group has drawn increased attention to civil registration and vital statistics in major global forums such as the annual meetings of the Statistical Commission. The combined weight of the agencies involved in the Group helped to ensure that birth and death registration was included among the Sustainable Development Goal targets and indicators.

16. In addition, the Group has facilitated the work of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in updating key guidance documents on civil registration and vital statistics systems such as the Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation and Maintenance, Revision 1, issued in 2018.

17. The Group also collaborated with the World Bank on its Open Learning Campus and the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Republic of Korea in a major effort to build national capacities for civil registration and vital statistics development through a comprehensive civil registration and vital statistics e-learning course, first launched in May 2017. The primary target audiences are policymakers, personnel working on civil registration and identification systems, health-care workers, and officials in national statistical offices. As of December 2020, more than 4,400 learners from 137 countries had enrolled in the course, including particularly large numbers from Myanmar and the Philippines.

IV. United Nations Legal Identity Task Force

18. Recognizing that the issue of legal identity for all is of paramount importance to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Deputy Secretary-General initiated the establishment of the United Nations Legal Identity Expert Group in September 2018.

19. The Expert Group focused on expanding the existing international methodological framework for civil registration and vital statistics to cover identity management under one system, ensuring legal identity for all from birth to end of life. The Expert Group transitioned into the United Nations Legal Identity Task Force in December 2019. The Task Force continues to develop the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda and activities related to its implementation.

20. The purpose of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda is to achieve a coordinated United Nations position and approach with regard to the implementation of legal identity systems with a view to generating evidence for action; enhancing high-level advocacy and engagement; mobilizing technical support; and financing national implementation efforts. The Agenda reflects a proactive stance on the importance of safeguarding civil registration and vital statistics operations during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. It includes recommendations for civil registration authorities to ensure operational continuity during the pandemic and allow for the continued production of comprehensive vital statistics.¹

21. The Agenda was adopted by the Statistical Commission in March 2020 and by the Economic and Social Council in June 2020 as an extension of international standards and recommendations for civil registration and vital statistics.

22. The Task Force has published a series of documents and guidelines and continues to support the implementation of the Agenda, with the goal of ensuring universal civil registration of all vital events, translated into reliable vital statistics, and legal identity for all from birth to death, by 2030.

V. Thematic area support from development partners

23. Under the Regional Action Framework, Governments have assigned national civil registration and vital statistics focal points to support communication among ESCAP, development partners and the stakeholders in each country. The secretariat has conducted training sessions for selected national focal points and regularly updates the focal point network on new tools, guidelines and activities. The focal points have also been essential in identifying target countries for technical assistance, setting national targets, and completing baseline and midterm reports in the context of monitoring the Decade.

VI. System-wide approach to civil registration

24. Since 2014, partners have taken a holistic approach, acknowledging that national civil registration systems need to capture all vital events. To address the region’s significant need for system-wide support for civil registration and vital statistics, UNICEF has documented policies and procedures for birth, death and marriage registration in South Asia in *Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in South Asia Countries*. The issues covered include the legal framework for civil registration; organization and accessibility; costs of registration; and a comparison between the key information collected in the countries and that which should be collected according to international standards.

25. The Pacific Civil Registrars Network is fostering innovative collaboration among countries. For example, 19 member States in the Pacific are working together to build a single civil registration network that will enable data on vital events to be accurately captured and shared across borders. Such a network would help to overcome problems that arise when Pacific islanders, who are often highly mobile, find themselves in one country for one vital event and another country for the next, so that a person’s birth could be registered in one country and their marriage or death in another. The result can include problems for the families and inaccurate data sets for vital statistics and government planning.

26. The Network has provided a forum for discussing challenges such as how to maintain or rebuild civil registration and vital statistics systems following disasters or emergencies. For example, it held a workshop to examine the role of civil registration and vital statistics systems in planning and responding to natural disasters and other emergencies. Ensuring proper backup and archiving of civil registration records is an essential component of planning for such emergencies.

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Civil registration and vital statistics systems play a central role in replacing identity documents following a disaster and providing the documentation needed to reunite families who may have been separated during the emergency. Systems also need to continue to provide for ongoing registration of births and deaths, especially for displaced populations who may be accessing government services at alternative locations.

VII. Birth registration

Recognizing the important role that birth registration can play in protecting children from situations of exploitation and violence, such as child marriage and child labour, regional and global partners are supporting member States to increase birth registration as part of their efforts to ensure child rights and protection. Plan International, UNFPA, UNHCR and UNICEF are powerful advocates for a rights-based approach to civil registration and vital statistics that is designed to facilitate children’s and adults’ access to protection under the law, services and entitlements, and social and economic opportunities, and that can improve their ability to exercise their civil rights.3

In that regard, UNICEF has played an important role in tracking birth registration completeness at the national level based on data from household surveys, such as its Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and Demographic and Health Surveys.

While many partners have supported campaigns to raise community awareness of the importance of birth registration in the past, there is now growing momentum to tackle supply-side issues, notably the physical, economic and cultural accessibility of registration services. For example, in order to increase birth registration in Vanuatu, UNICEF has supported the following interventions: improvement of the registration database; decentralization of data collection by shifting it to the provinces; mobile birth registration campaigns; finalization of the national civil registry and vital statistics policy; review and amendment of the Civil Status (Registration) Act; and provision of supplies. In addition, UNDP has supported the Government in establishing an integrated civil registration and identity management system.

Furthermore, UNICEF has called on governments to cover the costs of civil registration systems and ensure those services are accessible and confidential.4 Parents should not be prevented from registering their children owing to financial barriers, such as late fees or other additional costs.

Many partners are working with member States to link civil registration to other systems, including identity, health, social protection and education systems, in order to increase the chances that unregistered children will be identified and registered. For example, UNICEF and WHO jointly published Health Sector Contributions towards Improving the Civil Registration of Births and Deaths in Low-Income Countries: Guidance for Health Sector Managers, Civil Registrars and Development Partners, in which opportunities are outlined for health-care providers to provide support and guidance for birth registration alongside the first vaccines that infants receive, especially


4 UNICEF, Birth Registration for Every Child by 2030: Are We on Track? (New York, 2019).
providers of reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health care, including immunization.

33. In South Asia, UNICEF has supported the following efforts: legal and policy reform; civil registry strategic planning; capacity-building and raising awareness; community-based registration and social mobilization campaigns; integration of birth registration into other services, such as health, social protection and education; and development of online birth registration information systems.

VIII. Death registration and cause of death

34. In general, births are more likely to be registered than deaths. Improving the registration of deaths and data on cause of death requires a series of interventions on multiple fronts. For example, the Data for Health Initiative of Bloomberg Philanthropies, through the University of Melbourne in Australia, is working with the Government of Papua New Guinea to introduce a range of interventions, including the formation of key national committees to provide oversight and governance for the civil registration and vital statistics system; bringing together the disparate mortality data collections into one coherent national mortality surveillance system that includes the consolidation of unique death records and the integration of verbal autopsy data for community deaths; and training to build capacity in hospitals to correctly certify deaths, competently assess data quality and conduct basic analyses of mortality data. In Solomon Islands, the Data for Health Initiative is providing support that is designed to complement the national civil registration and vital statistics plan, including the following: advisory and technical support to the national mortality committee; improving the quality of medical certification and coding of cause of death; introduction of verbal autopsy; and development of national capacities, skills and knowledge.

35. Several of the Sustainable Development Goals relate to reducing overall and cause-specific mortality, and demand for mortality data has increased as a result. The pandemic has further accentuated the need for reliable and timely information on deaths and their causes.

36. The Data for Health Initiative and WHO have developed guidance and training materials for use in building capacities among physicians to correctly complete the WHO International Form of Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, which is now being implemented in several Asia-Pacific countries, including Bangladesh, Solomon Islands and Sri Lanka. To build national capacities on ascertaining cause of death, the Brisbane Accord Group and partners, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Fiji National University, the Pacific Community, the Queensland University of Technology, UNFPA and WHO, organized subregional training sessions for doctors on medical certification of cause of death. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Data for Health Initiative and WHO have also developed

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training materials for statistical coders who translate underlying causes of death into alphanumeric codes.

37. In addition, WHO has developed the Start-Up Mortality List for use in countries with limited capacities in cause-of-death certification and coding. The List enables the introduction in such countries of the International Classification of Diseases standards and the generation of sufficient data to inform public health priorities and permit the tracking of progress towards national and international targets and goals. It is designed to be a first step towards standardized cause-of-death reporting in low-resource settings where capacities for more detailed coding of causes.

38. As member States become more aware of the strengths and limitations of the civil registration and vital statistics systems, several are identifying a need for greater research on the way external causes of death are dealt with. For example, although road traffic accidents are known to be increasing in many countries, the increase is not always reflected in the vital statistics. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been working with the civil registration authorities in Mumbai, India, to ensure that deaths caused by road traffic accidents are correctly registered and included in the vital statistics. In order to provide countries with relevant guidance, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is developing a medicolegal death investigation module for inclusion in the civil registration and vital statistics legal and regulatory framework toolkit. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and WHO are collaborating on a resource document to strengthen the link between medicolegal death investigation and civil registration and vital statistics systems.

39. In many low- and middle-income countries, it is not possible for physicians to complete the medical certification of cause of death because deaths occur at home without medical supervision. In response, WHO and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation have developed standardized interview tools for collecting information from family members and caregivers of the deceased person on signs and symptoms prior to death, known as the verbal autopsy. The information from the interview can then be reviewed by a physician, or increasingly through the use of automated algorithms, to determine the probable cause of death. Tools are available for identifying appropriate sample sizes for the conduct of the verbal autopsy and for costing the intervention. The Data for Health Initiative has introduced verbal autopsy methods in Bangladesh and Myanmar, and work is ongoing to bring together cause-of-death data reported by hospitals and verbal autopsy data to inform national policymaking on interventions to address preventable mortality.

40. Through the University of Melbourne and the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, the Data for Health Initiative has contributed training materials and online courses to build capacity on key topics, such as mortality data analysis and use, the International Classification of Diseases, and business process mapping for civil registration and vital statistics systems. A fellowship

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programme has enabled individuals from countries around the world to extend their knowledge of the functioning of civil registration and vital statistics systems and to carry out in-depth analyses.

IX. Addressing disparities in birth and death registration

41. Disparities in the civil registration of vital events are pronounced across the Asia-Pacific region. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys of UNICEF and the Demographic and Health Surveys of the United States Agency for International Development generate important information on the nature and extent of disparities, particularly with regard to birth registration. Recent analyses show that although overall birth registration coverage among children under the age of five has increased, disparities in birth registration based on wealth, urban versus rural location, maternal education and access to health facilities persist. The issue is further assessed in document ESCAP/MCCRVS/2021/4.

42. The Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems has gathered information on the ways in which barriers to the registration of vital events interact in complex ways, especially for women and girls, at the national level. In 2019, the Centre commissioned a series of knowledge briefs on civil registration and vital statistics and gender knowledge with the aim of inspiring a global commitment to integrating gender issues into civil registration and vital statistics systems.

43. The aim of the Bali Process Civil Registration Assessment Toolkit is to help interested member States to assess and improve their national civil registration systems in order to record all of the births, deaths and marriages of refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons and persons of undetermined nationality that occur in their territories. In 2021, ESCAP initiated the project with a view to really “getting every one in the picture” to support countries in assessing inequalities in civil registration and vital statistics.

X. Civil registration and prevention of statelessness

44. The lack of a birth certificate can put people at risk of statelessness, especially in settings of conflict, emergencies and displacement. Some population groups are at particular risk of statelessness because their situation makes it difficult for them to register births or obtain related documents. They include nomadic and border populations, minorities, refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrants. Abandoned, orphaned, unaccompanied or separated children are especially vulnerable and often do not have any documents establishing their identity. In that regard, UNHCR has co-hosted high-level meetings on the prevention of statelessness, including two regional workshops on good practices in birth registration. In Central Asia in 2018 and 2019, UNHCR, in partnership with UNICEF and ESCAP, organized two Regional Conferences on the Right to Legal Identity and Prevention of Statelessness on the theme “Leaving no one behind at birth” to create momentum and accelerate necessary legislative and procedural reform in the five member States in the subregion to address and prevent statelessness, especially childhood statelessness.

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45. To provide guidance to member States and partners on how to prevent and address statelessness, UNHCR has developed a series of papers on good practices based on experiences in implementing actions proposed in the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014–2024. For example, the Government of Kazakhstan has amended its Marriage and Family Code, while the Government of Turkmenistan enacted its law on acts of civil status so as to ensure that all children born in the country are registered at birth and issued birth certificates regardless of the legal or documentation status of their parents. In Thailand, since 2008, legal reforms and capacity-building measures have significantly improved birth registration among groups at risk of statelessness. Birth registration has helped many people to acquire Thai nationality and has reduced the incidence of statelessness. With regard to persons who are not eligible for Thai nationality, a birth certificate helps them to establish their legal identity and is a key measure in child protection.

XI. Health and civil registration and vital statistics

46. One of the reasons for the continuing disparities in birth and death registration is that responsibility for registration often lies with individuals and families, who must visit the local civil registrar in person in order to declare vital events. However, registration points may be far away, difficult and costly to reach, and registration processes may be complex and daunting, especially for people who are economically and socially disadvantaged.

47. Partners including WHO and UNICEF are exploring the potential of the health sector as an entry point for helping individuals and families to overcome barriers and ensure that the births and deaths of their loved ones are officially registered. Many births and deaths occur in health facilities and/or with the help of community-based health workers. The health workers can record key information on births and deaths and, where the law permits, can be designated as informants of the occurrence of births and deaths to the civil registrar. Childhood immunization visits also offer valuable opportunities to facilitate birth registration, as demonstrated by experience in Bangladesh, Brazil, the Gambia and New Delhi, with the support of UNICEF. The potential to build upon health services to increase both birth and death registration is discussed in document ESCAP/MCCRVS/2021/3.

48. In 2019, WHO, UNICEF, the Pacific Community and ESCAP facilitated the participation of health officials in a workshop on legal identity and identity security in the Pacific. Key areas of discussion included the role of ministries of health in supporting civil registration and, in particular, the role of health institutions as informants or notifiers of births and deaths to the civil registration authorities.

49. In Bangladesh, the Data for Health Initiative has provided support to harness the potential of community-based health workers to identify the occurrence of births and deaths in the community, help families to complete the necessary forms, and notify the local civil registrar of the events. Following the piloting of this approach in Kaliganj, Bangladesh, in 2016, estimated completeness of birth registration in the area increased from 16 per cent to 83 per cent by the end of 2018, and death registration completeness increased

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13 ESCAP/MCCRVS/2021/3.
The Government of Bangladesh is extending the approach to other areas of the country.

50. The identification and registration of deaths also constitute an entry point for implementing verbal autopsy methods to ascertain probable cause of death in settings where most people die at home without medical attendance. At the same time, the Government of Bangladesh has trained hospital-based physicians to use the WHO International Form of Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, and cadres of statistical coders are being developed so that deaths are classified by cause in line with the standards of the International Classification of Diseases. Bringing together information on cause of death from medical certification and from verbal autopsies will enable a more complete picture of the emerging trends in mortality across the country.

XII. Civil registration, legal identity and identification

51. The World Bank supports member States to strengthen their digital identification and civil registration and vital statistics systems to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including target 16.9 on providing legal identity for all and other targets that legal and digital identity will make more achievable, such as targets on poverty eradication, social safety nets, universal health coverage, financial inclusion and gender equality. The goal of the Identification for Development Initiative of the World Bank is to help member States to realize the transformational potential of digital identification and civil registration and vital statistics systems that are inclusive and trusted to enable all people to gain access to services and exercise their rights. The Initiative unites various parts of the World Bank Group in a holistic and comprehensive approach to strengthening digital identification and civil registration and vital statistics systems, guided by the 10 principles contained in the “Principles on identification for sustainable development: toward the digital age – second edition” of the World Bank.

52. The Initiative has developed a guide to help practitioners to design and implement identification systems that are inclusive and trusted in accordance with the principles, the first of which is to ensure universal coverage for individuals, free from discrimination. A catalogue of technical standards has been developed as a reference work for stakeholders involved with digital identification systems.  

53. Currently, the World Bank is providing financial and technical assistance to the following countries in the Asia-Pacific region to support the development of digital identification and civil registration and vital statistics systems: Afghanistan; Bangladesh; Indonesia; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States of); Philippines; Samoa; Solomon Islands; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Uzbekistan; and Viet Nam.

54. In the course of that assistance, gender inequities in access to identification have been identified through the Identification for Development-Findex Survey, which was first carried out in 2017 and is in progress for the period 2020–2021. According to the 2017 results, in low-income countries, an average of 45 per cent of women do not have any

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identification, compared to 30 per cent for men. In Afghanistan, almost twice as many men as women have an identification. In Pakistan, women aged 18 to 40 are 6 per cent less likely than men to have an identification card, after adjusting for gender differences in education and marital status, and the gap is widest in the poorer quintiles. In Indonesia, only half of all women in poor households have an identification card.

55. In both Cambodia and the Philippines, ADB has supported the development of national identity systems by providing necessary technical assistance and is currently preparing to apply use cases in both countries in public service areas including social protection, health and education. It has also facilitated civil registration services with an emphasis on promoting women’s right to access them. Other ADB activities include the following: social protection development project in Pakistan; commune council development project in Cambodia; and gender equality and empowerment of women project in Nepal.

56. In Afghanistan, IOM has been providing capacity-building support to the Government on passport and visa issuing systems. The support was also aimed at streamlining the identity verification process by using digitized records and establishing an identity verification platform to serve as the basis for services requiring identity verification (e.g. issuance of passports and national identity cards) within the country and at consulates abroad.

57. In the Marshall Islands, IOM is conducting a needs assessment and developing training materials on legal identity and identity management, as well as assisting the Government in mainstreaming health-related data and identity management at the border. In Armenia, IOM contributed to the improvement of the identity management system.

XIII. Vital statistics

58. The ability of member States to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and other national and international development targets depends on data on births, deaths and cause of death, disaggregated by sex, age and administrative area.

59. To support the production of statistics from civil registration systems at the national level, ECA, ESCAP, Statistics Norway and Vital Strategies developed guidelines and a template for the production of national vital statistics reports. The guidelines served as a basis for support provided to 14 countries on the use of civil registration data for vital statistics. As a result, the Governments of Georgia, Timor-Leste and Bhutan published their national reports, while other Governments are working on publication. An updated version of the guidelines and template has been published by the Data for Health Initiative, ESCAP, the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Statistics Norway.

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17 Cate Sumner and Santi Kusumaningrum, AIPJ Baseline Study on Legal Identity: Indonesia’s Missing Millions (Jakarta, Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice, 2014).

60. The Pacific Community works with the Brisbane Accord Group and the Pacific countries to prepare national vital statistics reports. During the period 2018–2020, reports were produced by the Governments of Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, with the latter’s national vital statistics report being its first ever.

61. As part of its technical support mandate, the Statistics Division conducts regional workshops on vital statistics. The workshops provide opportunities to share experiences and also to track progress in key indicators such as birth and death registration completeness. They included several workshops to introduce the third revision of the Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System. The Statistics Division has also supported subregional workshops in collaboration with ESCAP and the Brisbane Accord Group.

62. To assist member States in better understanding the quality of available mortality and cause-of-death statistics, researchers have developed the vital statistics performance index and the vital statistics performance index for births.

63. More detailed technical guidance on the interpretation of data on mortality and cause of death has been made available,19 and electronic tools have been developed that greatly facilitate the analysis.20

64. With support from WHO, the University of Melbourne and the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, such analyses of mortality and cause-of-death data have been completed or are under way in the following countries: Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; China; Fiji; Georgia; Indonesia; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Malaysia; Maldives; Mongolia; Myanmar; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Samoa; Solomon Islands; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tuvalu; Vanuatu; and Viet Nam. On the basis of the analyses, a number of recommendations have emerged on how to strengthen the production, quality and dissemination of vital statistics on births and deaths, and improvement plans are now being implemented in several countries.

XIV. Digitization of civil registration and vital statistics

65. The potential of digital technologies to rapidly scale up birth and death registration is being harnessed in several countries with support from development partners and technical experts. For example, UNICEF has supported the Government of Bangladesh to introduce an online birth registration information system in 2010, which was later expanded to include death registration. In addition, UNICEF provides support in Pakistan to increase birth registration rate using mobile technology under the digital birth registration project.

66. Plan International has also supported the introduction of digital systems. The technical experts from Plan International, UNICEF and WHO

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worked together in 2014 to prepare a document entitled “Smart ICT investment for CRVS: a global business case”. Subsequently, Plan International collaborated with the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics on the development of a civil registration and vital statistics digitization guidebook, which provides a roadmap for member States to align information and communications technology (ICT) with civil registration and vital statistics business needs using enterprise architecture methodologies, which are presented in a simplified and easy-to-use format.

67. Plan International and the Government of Bangladesh are collaborating to develop an open-source digital solution for civil registration and vital statistics systems, OpenCRVS, designed to address the current gap in the market for a user-centric and rights-based civil registration and vital statistics system.

68. The use of digital technology to accelerate birth and death notification is backed up by WHO recommendations on digital interventions for health system strengthening. Whatever the medium used to collect and transmit the data from the health system, be it paper, a short message service from a low-end mobile phone, a tablet application or a laptop, the key principle must be to follow the defined standards from the national data dictionary, the data registry and interoperability procedures to reach the goal of an integrated data system.21

69. It is essential to account for the critical importance of individual privacy and data confidentiality to protect children and their families. To address this concern, in particular in low- and middle-income countries, Plan International has published Identifying and Addressing Risks to Children in Digitised Birth Registration Systems: A Step-by-Step Guide.

XV. Civil registration and vital statistics costing and financing

70. The Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Scaling Up Investment Plan 2015–2024, released in 2014 by the World Bank and WHO, helped to set the stage for increasing resources for civil registration and vital statistics. In 2015, the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents was launched, offering a financing platform in support of the Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health (2016–2030) and the Sustainable Development Goals. Since its launch, the Global Financing Facility has pioneered a country-led process for preparing investment cases and developed companion monitoring frameworks, working with member States to prioritize their activities on the basis of sound data; adequately fund the highest-impact activities; mobilize their resources to ensure that investments are sustainable; and ensure that strong and sustainable underpinning systems are in place. Key actions of the Global Strategy include ensuring that all countries have a functioning civil registration and vital statistics system, so that births, marriages and deaths and their causes can be registered and monitored, and ensuring regular monitoring and audits of deaths of women and children. The Global Financing Facility, therefore, has prioritized the strengthening of civil registration and vital statistics systems, providing support in countries to develop investment cases that include the systems as strong components and co-financing investments via the Global Financing Facility Trust Fund, matched with financing from the International Development Association or the International Bank for Reconstruction and

Development. As of March 2020, the Global Financing Facility, in collaboration with the World Bank, has been providing support on strengthening civil registration and vital statistics to Indonesia and Viet Nam, with plans under way to extend the support to Pakistan.

**XVI. Institutional support for civil registration and vital statistics systems**

71. Several global and regional partners have supported systemic interventions designed to improve the legal basis, organizational structure and functioning of civil registration and vital statistics systems, the core standards for which are contained in the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*. In preparation for the First Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific held in 2014, development partners worked with almost all member States to conduct an assessment using internationally developed guidance tools.22 Development partners have continued to support member States to develop comprehensive multisectoral national strategies to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics.

72. Vital Strategies and ESCAP have collaborated to introduce business process mapping and improvement techniques into the analysis of national civil registration and vital statistics systems. In several countries, including Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Niue and Maldives, business process management techniques have been introduced to identify gaps and bottlenecks in the systems, allowing stakeholders to work collaboratively to identify solutions and targeted interventions.23 The national experiences have been synthesized in the formulation of ten milestones that must be achieved in any civil registration and vital statistics system.24

73. In response to the need for updated guidance on institutional arrangements for the interface between civil registration, vital statistics and legal identity, the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has initiated a revision of the major institutional guidance on civil registration and vital statistics systems in the *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation and Maintenance*.

74. In addition, the Statistics Division, Vital Strategies and technical experts have worked to update the international *Guidelines on the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management*. The *Guidelines* provide support for member States considering a reform of their civil registration and vital statistics laws by drawing attention to the importance of the legal framework and describing its key elements and the hierarchical structure of the sources of formal law. It also lays out the processes for assessing civil registration and vital statistics laws and preparing new legislation or amending existing laws.

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75. Building upon the Guidelines, Vital Strategies and the Global Health Advocacy Incubator, with financial support from Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, developed a Legal and Regulatory Review Toolkit to guide the assessment of current legal provisions for civil registration and vital statistics systems and identify gaps or areas requiring legislative modification. The Toolkit has been used in Bangladesh.

76. Technical assistance for civil registration and vital statistics in the Pacific is coordinated by the Brisbane Accord Group and includes the following:

   a. Development of regional best practice guidelines and country-level support for their implementation in areas such as legislation, data sharing and ICT systems;

   b. Creating awareness and promoting the use of the Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System;

   c. Capacity-building on analysis and interpretation of civil registration data, medical certification of cause of death and coding of causes in line with the standards of the International Classification of Diseases.

77. The Brisbane Accord Group also provides platforms for knowledge and experience sharing through South-South cooperation, thematic workshops and research based on common issues identified through country assessments and regional sectoral engagement. The Pacific Community has produced a document on model legislation for civil registration and vital Statistics containing an outline of topics to be addressed in a related legislative framework.

78. In 2018, the Brisbane Accord Group and the Pacific Civil Registrars Network worked with Archives New Zealand, the National Archives and Ministry of Justice of Fiji and the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives to organize a South-South study exchange programme focused on strengthening the capacity of civil registration officials in selected Pacific island countries in the management of civil registration records and documents, including the principles of release and archiving of individual civil registration records and documents.

79. The Pacific Civil Registrars Network is also fostering innovative approaches to share civil registration information across borders using cloud-based software, which could be advantageous in smaller countries where there may not be sufficient resources to support national online systems.

**XVII. Research and evaluation**

80. As part of the preparations for the First Ministerial Conference, ESCAP commissioned an overview of the potential momentum that research could lend to action on strengthening civil registration and vital statistics. The article included a call for greater evaluation or system-wide research on interventions to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. It also served to highlight the need for research to support policy and financial decision makers and for more applied research on

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addressing key barriers including, for example, the role of ICT in rapidly scaling up and accelerating the registration of vital events.

81. While no recent systematic analysis of civil registration and vital statistics research is available, there is evidence of an increase in research on the strengthening of civil registration and vital statistics, much of it focused on the implementation and evaluation of interventions. In 2019, a first systematic review and synthesis of findings from research studies on policy interventions for strengthening birth and death registration was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Health Statistics with inputs from the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNICEF, Vital Strategies, the World Bank and WHO. In the review, it was noted that there was a continuing paucity of well-conducted evaluations of civil registration and vital statistics interventions and of documented experiences, especially with regard to policies that had neutral or negative effects.

82. It is particularly important to evaluate the feasibility of innovations and new approaches with regard to improving the notification of births and deaths and the ascertainment of cause of death. The verbal autopsy methods introduced in several countries are aimed at improving the availability of cause-of-death information in settings where deaths occur in communities rather than in health facilities. One example is the pilot approach in Kaliganj, Bangladesh, supported by the Data for Health Initiative. Following an initial implementation period, Brac University was commissioned by Vital Strategies to conduct implementation research on the lessons learned from the Kaliganj approach. The findings included valuable insights into birth and death registration and to the feasibility of linking death registration with the routine implementation of verbal autopsies in rural settings. The University of Melbourne has also supported efforts to evaluate the introduction of verbal autopsy methods and the improvement of medical certification of cause of death in several countries.

83. In addition, the 2020 Asia-Pacific Statistics Week included a session on civil registration and vital statistics to facilitate the dissemination of related research.

XVIII. Conclusion

84. International, regional, subregional, national and local development partners, including international organizations, non-governmental and civil society organizations, academic institutions and professional societies, have a key role to play in supporting members and associate members to realize the shared regional vision. The implementation of the Regional Action Framework includes advocacy; technical assistance; capacity-building; dissemination of

26 Amitabh Bipin Suthar and others, “Evaluation of approaches to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems: a systematic review and synthesis of policies in 25 countries”, *PLOS Medicine*, No. 16 (September 2019).

27 Brac University, “Implementation research on birth and death registration process in Bangladesh: lessons from Kaliganj model” (2020).

information; application of ICT; research; innovation; and facilitation of the exchange of knowledge and best practices in the region.

85. The strong Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership involves many development partners and has significantly contributed to progress towards the three goals of the Regional Action Framework.

86. Each partner contributes specific technical abilities in specific focus areas, with shared goals, information-sharing and transparency at the core of their efforts. In this way, partners have successfully supported country efforts to “get every one in the picture”.

XIX. Issues for consideration

87. The Ministerial Conference may wish to provide further information on national progress towards the shared regional vision.

88. The Ministerial Conference may also wish to comment on development partners’ support for members and associate members and provide further guidance on the partners’ work.