

Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

Scaling up Investment Plan 2015–2024

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What is Civil Registration and Vital Statistics?

Civil registration is defined by the United Nations as the “*Universal, continuous, permanent and compulsory recording of vital events provided through decree or regulation in accordance with the legal requirements of each country.*” (UNSD). It is the act of recording and documenting of vital events in a person’s life (including birth, marriage, divorce, adoption, and death) and is a fundamental function of governments.

Why does CRVS matter?

The civil registry provides individuals with the documentary evidence required to secure recognition of their legal identity, their family relationships, their nationality and their ensuing rights, such as to social protection and inheritance. It can help facilitate access to essential services, such as health, education, and social welfare and can contribute to activities such as gaining formal employment, exercising electoral rights, transferring property, and opening bank accounts. The lack of civil registration during crisis or

natural disasters can lead to statelessness. The arrival of new technology in resource-constrained environments has created opportunities for developing more efficient information systems.

Unlike other sources of vital statistics, such as censuses and household surveys, the data from Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems permit the production of statistics on population dynamics, health, and inequities in service delivery on a continuous basis for the country as a whole and for local administrative subdivisions. This provides more accurate information and the ‘denominator’ for assessing progress with plans across sectors for improving economic growth and reducing poverty. Accurate vital statistics and the ability to monitor and respond to causes of death and disability underpin many global targets, including new commitments to universal health coverage and tackling the global epidemic of non-communicable diseases.

Birth registration helps with the identification of population health needs. Birth registration should take place “immediately” following birth, the standard measure being within 30 days of birth. The move to high coverage health services for mothers and children makes universal birth registration at or shortly after birth a realistic goal. It is also central to global efforts aimed at improving early childhood development.

Death registration provides legal rights to the family, for example, in conferring property or other individual or personal transfer rights to remaining family members. Cause of death registration provides

critical information for health and development planning to improve the survival of children and adults. A current example of weak CRVS systems is the lack of credible and coherent maternal mortality statistics in areas where mortality is highest.

Marriage and divorce registration is a largely unrecognized part of well-developed CRVS systems. Having good marriage and divorce registration are frequently required to obtain documents that can contribute to women’s ability to inherit property and register their children in some countries, among other benefits. Registering girls at birth and recording their marriages provides a legal backing against early and forced marriage.

Current state of CRVS

In the past 10 years, there has been an overall increase in global birth registration rates of children under five from 58 percent to 65 percent. However, more than 100 developing countries still do not have functioning systems that can support efficient registration of births and other life events like marriages and death. Around the world, almost 230 million children under the age of five are not registered. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 85 million of these children, while 135 million live in Asia and the Pacific. Monitoring of data on birth registration rates for children under five is no longer considered useful and indicators are now required that help protect the rights of newborn children. This is an urgent area for consensus building, starting with routine monitoring of birth registration rates within a year of birth. Progress with death registration has been much slower globally. In



countries in most need of CRVS, up to 80 percent of deaths that occur outside of health facilities and two-thirds of all deaths globally are not counted.

Why are CRVS systems in such poor state?

Both demand-side and supply-side challenges explain the current poor state of CRVS systems. The demand for registration services can be weak, with many people not aware of the importance of birth and death registration for them and their families and the implications that this has for improving access to core government services. In some countries, there are discriminatory laws, practices, and attitudes that prevent birth registration. Simplifying the process and providing a vital event registration service within the existing structures with which citizens interact can help to dramatically increase registration coverage. Lack of a political priority for CRVS as a system has resulted in inadequate policies and poorly managed, underfunded CRVS systems, deficient in full-time professional staff. Getting the civil registry, health systems, and vital statistics systems to interact efficiently is difficult especially where there is weak administrative capacity. Integrating the different components is also a technical challenge related to standards, protocols, and data exchange, often requiring institutional agreements across many government departments. Modern technology has only progressed piecemeal in many countries and there has been a proliferation of independent databases capturing different information about citizen records.

What progress has been made to strengthen CRVS systems?

The current global momentum is significant. Some countries have seen remarkable improvements in CRVS systems in recent years, for example Brazil and South Africa. Global frameworks such as that established by the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women’s and Children’s Health have helped to catalyze activity in many countries and galvanize global commitments. Regional momentum

and progress is strong, with good progress made in Latin America. Regional leadership is now showing progress in Asia and Africa, with significant ministerial commitments in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Middle East. The private sector has had a major role to play in providing new solutions to improving access to and use of the CRVS system and for providing services. There has been significant progress in rolling out the National Strategies for the Development of Statistics and much learning on the need for secure and confidential sharing of personal information.

The opportunity to transform CRVS

Start with women and children

There is now an opportunity to overcome the many deficiencies in the CRVS system through global attention to improving the health of women and children. Scaled-up coverage of maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) services, combined with the introduction of new technology, is providing many opportunities for strengthening CRVS, as illustrated by many pilot programs globally. Maternal and child health services can be used as entry points to boost birth registration, such as by creating awareness among pregnant women during antenatal care, immediate birth registration of all institutional births, and ensuring all children who are vaccinated at six weeks for DTP1 are registered. National commitments to developing Early Childhood Development services and registration at centers in or near schools will be used for “mopping up” those not registered at birth.

Harness the data revolution

The full value of data from civil registries comes when they are properly integrated within government systems—for example with the statistical institutions, population registers, national ID systems, and voter registration systems. There are now opportunities to do this through 21st century CRVS systems that draw on the wide availability of information and communication technology (ICT) and innovations linking health records with civil registries. New internationally applicable CRVS standards are required for the use of unique identifiers, interoperability of

information systems, and the various tools and devices used to collect and transmit data.

Build on regional leadership and global coordination

Recent years have seen the start of important regional initiatives aimed at strengthening CRVS systems in countries. These provide essential advocacy and accountability for change and create mechanisms to exchange and share technical knowledge and expertise. A global coordination group has recently been established.

Key enabling factors for effective CRVS systems

CRVS is more than the sum of its parts, and its development requires a holistic approach, taking into consideration all events (including births, marriages, deaths, cause of death, and issuing IDs), their supporting information systems, and associated legislation. The goal should be to have one master CRVS system from which data can be accessed for different purposes while ensuring confidentiality and security.

Information Communication Technology

Well-functioning ICT infrastructure, including a reliable power source, internet, and cell phone coverage, provides the enabling environment for developing modern CRVS systems, which in turn provides the platform for interoperable CRVS information systems and databases. While ICT is not a silver bullet, it can provide a means to collect, store and retrieve data in a fast, cost-efficient and user friendly way. Recent advances have been made in areas such as enterprise architecture design and mobile technologies and many synergies can be found with ongoing efforts such as for strengthening national identification systems (NIS) and voter registration

The Scaling Up Plan

What will it take to deliver

The global plan has three key components:

- *National CRVS strengthening*: removing the barriers to birth registration, improving reporting

of deaths and determining cause of death, strengthening CRVS institutions, strengthening national ID mechanisms, and improving the response to deaths and vital statistics.

- *International support for CRVS*: This will focus on strengthening international standards for CRVS, and preparing and sharing guidance based on country experience.
- *Sharing knowledge and building the evidence base*: Programs of implementation research will be encouraged to help respond to barriers to establishing CRVS systems. Rigorous impact evaluation will also be used to share lessons on what works in different situations.

Financing needs

The costs in a number of recent country CRVS investment plans have been used to extrapolate to other countries, including the priority countries involved in the United Nations Commission on Information and Accountability on Women's and Children's Health.

The total cost of scaling up and sustaining CRVS systems in the 73 countries is in the order of US\$3.82 billion. This excludes India and China, as their size requires separate analysis. After excluding estimated domestic sources of funds, there is an estimated US\$1.99 billion financing gap for the global scale-up plan over a ten-year period, or an average of **US\$199 million financing gap per year** for 73 countries.

Financing mechanisms

The key to successful establishment of CRVS systems is strong national leadership overseeing a

country-led plan. The criteria for assessing the readiness of countries for international support will include completed comprehensive assessments; multisectoral costed CRVS plans including an indication of the level of resources that will be committed by the government (budgetary allocation), existing support from development partners and the private sector, and the financing gap. Financial sustainability will also have to be clearly articulated in national plans. A number of different international financing and governance models are under consideration.

What will be delivered and when

Assuming the required domestic and international resources can be mobilized, the following goals and targets will guide the implementation of the global CRVS scaling up plan.

Goal: Universal civil registration of births, deaths, and other vital events, including reporting cause of death, and access to legal proof of registration for all individuals by 2030.

Implementation

As of May 2014, of the 75 priority COIA countries, 25 have national CRVS plans based on comprehensive assessments of their CRVS (including three as part of the regional PAHO CRVS framework). Over a ten-year period these efforts will grow so that all CRVS systems have sufficient investments to ensure universal coverage is reached by 2030.

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