

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**  
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**Regional initiatives: Civil registration and vital statistics****Make every life count: Regional strategic plan for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific\*\*****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

Pursuant to the support expressed by the Committee at its second session for the development of a regional programme to improve vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the secretariat has worked with United Nations organizations and other development partners to prepare the draft regional strategic plan for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific, as contained in the present document.

Bearing in mind the supplementary information contained in E/ESCAP/CST(3)/6 and E/ESCAP/CST(3)/INF/9, the Committee may wish to consider the draft regional strategic plan for endorsement.

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\* E/ESCAP/CST(3)/L.1/Rev.1.

\*\* Late submission due to the timing of expert consultations.

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## I. Introduction

1. The draft regional strategic plan for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific represents a commitment by countries and development partners to make sustained and coordinated efforts to improve the coverage and completeness of civil registration and the availability and quality of vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific by 2020.

2. The impetus for the regional strategic plan arises from recognition among countries and development partners in the region of the following:

(a) Functional and reliable civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems are an important national resource as they facilitate services and produce statistics that are the foundation for building a modern, efficient and informed public administration system and play a key role in efforts to realize human, legal and economic rights as well as to provide for social protection and achieve integration;

(b) Many countries in Asia and the Pacific lack adequate CRVS systems and of the ones that do exist, many of them are in urgent need of improvement;

(c) Concerted improvement is definitely achievable;

(d) As concisely stated by former World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Lee Jong-wook, “to make people count, we first need to be able to count people.”<sup>1</sup>

3. Bearing in mind the opportunities and challenges, the regional strategic plan aims to achieve eight feasible and measurable outcomes:

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence K. Altman, “The doctor's world; rising from the ranks to lead the W.H.O.”, *New York Times*, 22 July 2003.

- (a) Enhanced *public awareness* of the value of civil registration and vital statistics systems and actions taken to remove barriers to registration at all levels;
- (b) Sustained *political commitment* to support the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems;
- (c) Sufficient and sustainable *investments* towards making incremental improvements in civil registration and vital statistics systems;
- (d) Improved and strengthened *policies, legislation and implementation of regulations* for civil registration and vital statistics systems;
- (e) Improved availability and quality of *legal documentation* for all individuals;
- (f) Increased capacity of countries in Asia and the Pacific to record, compile, analyse and disseminate complete and reliable *statistics on vital events*;
- (g) Mechanisms established for effective *coordination among key stakeholders* within civil registration and vital statistics systems;
- (h) Increased capacity of countries in Asia and the Pacific to *effectively use vital statistics*.

4. The regional strategic plan supports national action for improving CRVS systems in Asia and the Pacific by bringing countries and development partners together to share knowledge, experiences and resources. It aims to raise awareness of the benefits and feasibility of improving CRVS systems, particularly with regard to developing countries, and the regional support that is available from many development partners that cover a wide range of issues and perspectives.

5. Reflecting the multi-sectoral nature of CRVS systems, the regional strategic plan brings together relevant government stakeholders, such as civil registration offices, national statistics offices (NSOs) and ministries of health, as well as civil society. Improved coordination and collaboration within countries, and among development partners, is both the means and an expected outcome of the regional strategic plan.

6. The regional strategic plan recognizes that improving the quality, coverage and efficiency of CRVS systems is increasingly feasible due to the availability of advanced technologies, resource kits, tools and methods, and a better understanding of how they can be applied.<sup>2</sup> For example, innovations, such as mobile technology, have the potential to facilitate at a lower cost speedier and higher quality collection, transmission, storage and dissemination of data, as well as be instrumental in addressing the physical and logistical challenges of civil registration in remote areas.

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<sup>2</sup> Health Information Systems Knowledge Hub, “Strengthening practice and systems in civil registration and vital statistics: a resource kit”, University of Queensland: HISHub Working Paper Series, No. 19, January 2012. Available from [www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/WP\\_19.pdf](http://www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/WP_19.pdf).

## A. The roles of civil registration and vital statistics systems

7. Civil registration consists of the compulsory, permanent, continuous and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events.<sup>3</sup> From the perspective of individuals, civil registration systems are a unique and crucial service. Through the official recording of births, deaths, marriages, divorces and adoption, individuals have the documentary evidence often required to secure recognition of their legal identity, their family relationships, their nationality and their ensuing rights. In turn, access to public services, such as health, education, social welfare and protection, is strengthened and statelessness may be prevented. Most countries require an identity document. Therefore, legal proof of identity is necessary to bring individuals into the modern economy by enabling them to seek employment, exercise electoral rights, claim inheritance, transmit property, open bank accounts, access credits, obtain passports and obtain driving licenses.

8. Universal civil registration is crucial because it helps safeguard human rights. Every individual has the right to obtain documentary evidence of identity from birth, and for that proof of identity to be securely registered and to publicly recognize family relationships. In March 2012, the Human Rights Council reaffirmed, "...the human right of everyone to be recognized everywhere as a person before the law..."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, by providing legal identity to individuals and contributing to their social identity, civil registration enables individuals to access benefits, as internationally agreed on, *inter alia*, in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,<sup>5</sup> the United Nations Millennium Declaration<sup>6</sup> and the Declaration on the Right to Development.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, civil registration is especially important for individuals in poverty, migrants, ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups as individuals from these groups represent the majority of the undocumented.

9. Civil registration systems generate administrative data that can be compiled to produce vital statistics that serve the needs of multiple sectors. A well-functioning civil registration system that records vital events, such as births, deaths, marriages, divorces and adoptions is the most effective and efficient data source of vital statistics.<sup>8</sup> Unlike other sources of vital statistics, such as censuses or household surveys, the timely and accurate reporting by civil registration systems to well-functioning vital statistics systems generates statistics on population dynamics and health indicators on a continuous basis for the country as a whole and at a local level for its administrative subdivisions.

10. Vital statistics generated from civil registration significantly contribute to the formulation of effective and efficient evidence-based policy across multiple sectors. Reliable information on births, fertility and deaths enable the calculation and production of timely and accurate population

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, *Handbook on Training in Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems*, 1973, Sales No. 02.XVII.10.

<sup>4</sup> See Human Rights Council resolution 19/9.

<sup>5</sup> See General Assembly resolution 21/2200.

<sup>6</sup> See General Assembly resolution 55/2.

<sup>7</sup> See General Assembly resolution 41/128, annex.

<sup>8</sup> *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 2*, 2001, (United Nations publication, Sales No. 01.XVI.10).

estimates and other demographic and health statistics, which are basic requirements for effective policymaking for inclusive and sustainable development, efficient resource allocation and accurate evaluation and monitoring.

11. Well-functioning CRVS systems, including the timely and accurate reporting by civil registration systems to the national statistics system, enhance the credibility of national and local administrators and their capacity to deliver services by helping them to identify what services are needed and by whom. High-quality vital statistics makes it possible for governments and donors to consider the direction of resources to the areas of most need within a country, and allow citizens, governments and donors to evaluate the use of scarce resources. For instance, gender statistics, including sex-disaggregated data, assist in the formulation of evidence-based health policy and in addressing issues related to gender equality and equal opportunities.

## **B. The impetus for regional action**

### **1. Aligning with a growing global movement**

12. In 2000, the General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration, which emphasized the link between human rights, good governance and development.<sup>6</sup> The global commitment to the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals that were subsequently established has led to increased recognition of the critical need for reliable, continuous and comparable vital statistics to monitor progress, and created momentum to improve these data. As the world gets closer to 2015, attention is mounting towards understanding and addressing the challenges posed by the post-Millennium Development Goal agenda, especially with regard to human rights, equity, sustainable development and access to basic services. With this attention, it is becoming even more apparent that the long neglect of CRVS systems in some countries has had a detrimental impact on their ability to develop and monitor targeted development policies.<sup>9</sup>

13. Launched in 2010, the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health (COIA) was convened by WHO at the request of the Secretary-General. The COIA 2011 report recommended that all countries, as a priority, increase their efforts to strengthen their CRVS systems.<sup>10</sup> COIA is focusing its support on 74 high-priority countries globally, of which 20 are in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>11</sup> The Health Metrics Network (HMN)—a global partnership of countries, development agencies and the private sector<sup>12</sup> to strengthen health information systems—is the lead partner for implementing this recommendation.

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<sup>9</sup> Data on births and deaths provide inputs for deriving 42 out of the 60 Millennium Development Goals indicators.

<sup>10</sup> World Health Organization, *Keeping Promises, Measuring Results*, Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health (WHO, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Afghanistan; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Cambodia; China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; India; Indonesia; Kyrgyzstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Myanmar; Nepal; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Solomon Islands; Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; Uzbekistan; and Viet Nam.

<sup>12</sup> A complete list of partners is available from [www.who.int/healthmetrics/network/partners/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/healthmetrics/network/partners/en/index.html).

14. At the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, which was held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 29 November to 1 December 2011, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (PARIS21) presented the Busan Action Plan for Statistics,<sup>13</sup> which recognized that “reliable and accessible statistics provide the evidence needed to improve decision making, document results, and heighten public accountability”. In the first of five action points in the Plan, countries were called upon to address weaknesses in vital registration systems. PARIS21, with support from HMN, is drafting implementation arrangements, which will include actions to improve CRVS systems.

15. A regional initiative to improve CRVS systems is already well underway in Africa. Since 2010, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) have been sponsoring ministerial and expert working group meetings on CRVS and have thus far developed the Regional Medium Term Plan: 2010-2015<sup>14</sup> to support reforms and improve CRVS systems in Africa. The Regional Medium-Term Plan can be used as a guide for countries and regional and international organizations in managing interventions and monitoring the progress made in strengthening CRVS systems in Africa. Most recently, at the Second Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, which was held in Durban, South Africa, on 6 and 7 September, the Ministers urged all ECA member States to undertake a comprehensive assessment of their CRVS systems and to develop national action plans for improvement.<sup>15</sup>

16. The Americas are also undertaking a comparable regional initiative. The Pan American Health Organization has been implementing the Regional Plan of Action for Strengthening Vital and Health Statistics<sup>16</sup> since 2008 as part of broader efforts to strengthen health information systems in that region. The Inter-American Development Bank has worked on civil registration issues for a decade, and is financing projects that seek to improve the interconnectivity and interoperability between civil registries and vital statistics agencies to ensure timely and complete reporting of vital events as part of the Institutions for Growth and Social Welfare Strategy, approved in 2011. Two of the pillars in the strategy are registry and identity management and national statistics systems.

17. For the Pacific islands, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) has developed the Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy (TYPSS) 2011-2020, with the improvement of CRVS featured as one of four priority areas under phase I of this strategy. In line with this, the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan (PVSAP) 2011-2014 was developed by 11 development partners, which form the Brisbane Accord Group (BAG).<sup>17</sup> The Group’s objectives are

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<sup>13</sup> PARIS21, *Statistics for Transparency, Accountability and Results: A Busan Action Plan for Statistics*, (Paris, 2011). Available from [www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/Busanactionplan\\_nov2011.pdf](http://www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/Busanactionplan_nov2011.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> ECA and AfDB, “Reforming and Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in Africa, Regional Medium-Term Plan: 2010-2015”, February 2011. Available from [www.unescap.org/stat/vital-stat/vs-May12/Reforming-improving-CRVS-in-Africa.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/stat/vital-stat/vs-May12/Reforming-improving-CRVS-in-Africa.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> See <http://new.uneca.org/Portals/crmc/2012/documents/CRVS-Conference-Ministerial-Statement-clean.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> See [www.paho.org/English/GOV/CD/cd48-09-e.pdf](http://www.paho.org/English/GOV/CD/cd48-09-e.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> An outline of the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan is available at [www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/Brisbane-Accord-Group/vital-stats-outline-final.pdf](http://www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/Brisbane-Accord-Group/vital-stats-outline-final.pdf).

to coordinate, facilitate and support vital statistics (specifically births, deaths and cause-of-death) investments in the region through collaborative activities.

18. In October 2010, TYPSS was endorsed by the fortieth Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA), the governing body of SPC, the subsequent ministerial conference and the Pacific Islands Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting. The implementation of the PVSAP is overseen by the Pacific Statistics Steering Committee (PSCC), which is comprised of national, regional and international stakeholders, and reports regularly to the Pacific Ministers of Health Meeting and CRGA.

## 2. The realities on the ground

19. Many countries in Asia and the Pacific cannot meet minimum international standards in vital statistics.<sup>18</sup> Registration coverage is often incomplete, vital events are not recorded properly and registration records do not reach the vital statistics system in a timely manner. Even when vital statistics are available, they are often not adequately used to guide decision-making. As a result, many countries have resorted to using alternative sources of data on vital events, such as population censuses, household sample surveys and health and demographic surveillance in sentinel sites or sample registration systems, to generate vital statistics. Although these sources do provide important information on vital events, they cannot replace civil registration records as a source of data that is available on a continuous and universal basis and disaggregated to a level that enables decision makers to identify marginalized groups and vulnerable areas. Moreover, these sources do not bring the legal and human rights benefits of civil registration.

20. As of November 2012, some 34 countries in Asia and the Pacific had conducted a rapid self-assessment of their CRVS systems with overall scores ranging from 7 per cent functional to 96 per cent functional. This reveals the wide variation that exists across the region. Four countries<sup>19</sup> in the region had completed a comprehensive assessment, and an additional twelve countries<sup>20</sup> are at various stages of completing the process. The assessments are being conducted using standards-based tools<sup>21, 22</sup> developed by the University of Queensland Health Information Systems Knowledge Hub (HISHub)<sup>23</sup> and

<sup>18</sup> Lene Mikkelsen, "Rapid assessment of vital statistics systems: evaluation of the application of the WHO/ HISHub tool in 26 countries in the Asia-Pacific region", University of Queensland: HISHub Working Paper Series, No. 10, November 2010. Available from [www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/WP10/HISHUB-WP10-08-WEB-3Oct12%20A.pdf](http://www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/WP10/HISHUB-WP10-08-WEB-3Oct12%20A.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Maldives, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Timor-Leste.

<sup>20</sup> Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Tajikistan, and Thailand.

<sup>21</sup> Rapid self-assessment tool: WHO and HISHub, "Rapid assessment methods for vital statistics systems", University of Queensland: HISHub Working Paper Series, No. 2 (Geneva, WHO, 2010). Available from [www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/WP02/WP\\_02.pdf](http://www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/WP02/WP_02.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Comprehensive assessment tool: WHO and HISHub, *Improving the quality of birth, death and cause-of-death information: guidance for a standards-based review of country practices* (Geneva, WHO, 2010). Available from [www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/WP01/WP\\_01.pdf](http://www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/WP01/WP_01.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> HISHub is one of four knowledge hubs for health funded by the Australian Agency for International Development that work with development partners committed to supporting the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific.

WHO. E/ESCAP/CST(3)/INF/9 contains more details on the rapid self-assessment results.

21. Based on the rapid self-assessment tool's classifications, only 11, or less than one third, of the 34 countries in the region that have taken the rapid self-assessment possess satisfactory CRVS systems and 33 per cent of them have CRVS systems that are classified as weak or dysfunctional.

22. Other troubling conclusions can be drawn from the rapid self-assessments conducted thus far in Asia and the Pacific. With regard to CRVS systems infrastructure, 50 per cent of the countries have issues with inadequate equipment for civil registration offices to carry out their functions, and the same proportion have insufficient training. In terms of completeness of registration, 32 and 44 per cent of countries, respectively, have reported that coverage of birth and death registration is below 90 per cent.<sup>24</sup> In addition, 24 per cent of the countries reported that absolutely no training on International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and death certification had been given to doctors, while 44 per cent indicated that interagency coordination was limited or that the coordination in place faced data quality issues, bottlenecks or duplication of work.

23. The findings of the rapid self-assessments confirm the urgent need to implement the regional strategic plan.

### **3. Leveraging regional diversity**

24. The regional approach that characterizes the regional strategic plan is motivated by the large diversity in the state of development and maturity of CRVS systems among countries in Asia and the Pacific. The rapid self-assessment results only demonstrate a fraction of those disparities. In some countries, CRVS systems are well-established and complete, covering all persons and generating both reliable legal documentation and sound vital statistics. At the other extreme, the CRVS systems in other countries are barely functioning and serve neither the needs of individuals for legal documentation nor the needs of governments and economic and social sectors for statistical information. It is disconcerting that in some settings, the coverage and quality of CRVS have declined, especially among poor and marginalized populations.

25. For the regional strategic plan, the extent of diversity in Asia and the Pacific presents an opportunity to draw upon and share a wealth of experience and knowledge to facilitate CRVS capacity development in the region. The regional strategic plan will establish a regional platform that has been designed to catalyse the sharing of expertise from across the region and globally. It will achieve this by stimulating and fostering partnerships, networking and collaboration to more effectively leverage obtainable resources for the benefit of the 61 per cent of the world's population who consider Asia and the Pacific their home.

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<sup>24</sup> UNICEF has estimated, based on data sources covering the years 2000 to 2009, that 44 per cent of children aged between 0 and 5 years in Asia (excluding China) are registered (State of the World's Children 2011, Adolescence: An Age of Opportunity (Sales No. E.11.XX.1), statistical table on birth registration, p.120).



26. Given the overall socioeconomic development of Asia and the Pacific over the past half-century, and the modernization in areas of public policy and administration, the current reality of poor or declining CRVS systems in the region must be addressed as soon as possible. The benefits of improving CRVS systems are indisputable and far outweigh the costs.

#### **4. Building regional momentum**

27. As indicated above, the regional strategic plan is part of a global movement stimulated by increased recognition of the value of CRVS as an important national resource for individuals and society in every country. The heightened commitment of a wide range of development partners has resulted in an array of resources available for and targeted initiatives directed at promoting the development and improvement of CRVS both globally and also specifically in Asia and the Pacific.

28. The regional strategic plan is a broad initiative driven by practitioners, governments and the development community. This initiative began in February 2009 at the first session of the Committee on Statistics, which noted the importance of improving CRVS systems in the region (E/ESCAP/CST/10). As a result, in June 2010, the secretariat, in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), HISHub and WHO, organized a regional forum of development partners and representatives of civil registration offices, NSOs and ministries of health of 20 countries, which explored ways and means of improving CRVS systems in Asia and the Pacific.

29. Based on the call from the first session of the Committee on Statistics and the recommendations of the regional forum, the Committee on Statistics at its second session, which was held in December 2010, endorsed the main components of a proposed regional programme for improving vital statistics systems in Asia and the Pacific and recommended that the secretariat fully develop the regional programme in close collaboration with countries and other relevant development partners (E/ESCAP/CST(2)/9).

30. The Commission, in its resolution 67/12 of 25 May 2011, encouraged all members and associate members to review and assess the functioning of their CRVS systems, and recommended that the results of those assessments be utilized by members and associate members and stakeholders to develop and implement comprehensive national strategies or plans to strengthen CRVS systems. It also requested the Executive Secretary to consider collaborating closely with relevant partner agencies to coordinate and harmonize global, regional and country resources to support these efforts.

31. In the same resolution, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to convene a high-level regional meeting of decision makers from NSOs, civil registration offices, ministries of health and other relevant stakeholders to raise awareness and foster increased commitment to improving CRVS.

### **C. A broad development partnership**

32. Epitomizing the diverse development interests in and commitment for improving CRVS systems in Asia and the Pacific, 20 partners<sup>25</sup> are contributing to the regional initiative that embodies the regional strategic plan. E/ESCAP/CST(3)/INF/9 presents the mandate and contribution of those partners.

## **II. Goal and scope**

33. The goal of the regional strategic plan is, through improved civil registration and the increased availability and use of reliable vital statistics derived from civil registration systems, to contribute to the improvement of evidence-based policymaking, efficiency in resource allocation and good governance, as well as the progressive realization of the basic rights of all individuals.

34. In pursuance of this goal, countries have committed to, over the period 2012-2020, processes and actions to generate political commitment for, assess the current status of, develop and implement multi-sectoral action plans for improving, disseminating and using vital statistics for policy and programming, and monitoring and evaluating the quality, completeness and timeliness of CRVS systems. Development partners have committed to support these actions in a cost-effective and coordinated manner.

35. The regional strategic plan encompasses all ESCAP members and associate members. It recognizes the work already underway under the pre-existing Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan for 2011-2014, including proposed activities and governance arrangements.<sup>17</sup> These plans represent parallel and complementary initiatives, and together form a regional strategy that will support global initiatives such as the Busan Action Plan for Statistics and COIA. Coordination and implementation of activities in the Pacific islands will continue to be managed through the existing PVSAP and the BAG.

## **III. Guiding principles**

36. The development of the regional strategic plan is derived from an ongoing dialogue among country, regional and international partners, the results of which have led to the formation of a set of principles to guide the actions of governments and international development partners:

- (a) Countries take the lead: The regional strategic plan supports country efforts to build political commitment, assess the current status of

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<sup>25</sup> ADB; ABS; Health Metrics Network; International Organization for Migration Asia and Pacific Regional Office; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; PARIS21; Plan International; Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women; Government of Thailand (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Public Health, and National Statistical Office); SPC; Statistics Division, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; UNICEF; United Nations Development Programme Asia-Pacific Regional Centre; ESCAP; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Bangkok; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; UNFPA; University of Queensland: HISHub; and WHO.

CRVS systems and develop and implement multi-sectoral national action plans;

(b) A stepwise approach: The regional strategic plan seeks to harness current strengths in countries and supports the development and incremental implementation of feasible and sustainable improvement strategies;

(c) Flexibility and responsiveness: Recognizing that there is no single blueprint for improving CRVS systems in every setting, the regional strategic plan offers a flexible mix of support activities that are responsive to local needs and circumstances;

(d) Consistency with international legal principles: The regional strategic plan is consistent with the relevant international legal framework and the principles of non-discrimination;

(e) Building on local expertise and strategies: In recognition of regional diversities, the regional strategic plan seeks to harness local knowledge and expertise and ensure that CRVS improvement efforts are aligned with and contribute to existing country and regional health, statistical and development strategies;

(f) Partnerships and coordination: The regional strategic plan relies on partnerships and seeks to improve coordination among key stakeholders at the national, regional and international level, and across all sectors, including, among others, business, education, health, labor and social insurance, etc;

(g) Harmonization and alignment: In order to avoid risks of duplication and overlap, the regional strategic plan fosters harmonization among national, regional and international development partners, and alignment of support around country-led multi-sectoral national action plans and activities.

#### IV. Outcomes and activities

37. The regional strategic plan will be implemented through a combination of national and regional activities. While multi-sectoral national action plans will be developed within the framework of the regional strategic plan, each country will determine its own priorities and may choose not to pursue all eight outcomes of the regional strategic plan. The country actions outlined below are therefore indicative. Similarly, the regional support activities listed for each outcome below are contingent upon the establishment and resourcing of a regional support office (RSO) and a regional steering and coordination group (RSCG). See the governance and coordination section for more details.

##### **Outcome A: Public awareness**

*Enhanced public awareness of the value of civil registration and vital statistics systems and actions taken to remove barriers to registration at all levels*

38. Civil registration depends upon individuals and families registering vital events. Well-functioning CRVS systems are built upon a relationship of mutual trust and accountability between national authorities and the public. Complete CRVS systems are respectful of cultural and behavioral sensitivities and actively seek to raise public awareness of the importance of registration and the value of sound vital statistics.

39. *Potential country actions:*

(a) Develop national advocacy strategies for CRVS targeting diverse audiences and stakeholders and focusing in particular on communities, marginalized groups and remote populations;

(b) Develop national communications strategies and outreach to women and underserved groups;

(c) Develop multi-sectoral national action plans that include strategies to identify and remove barriers to registration, in particular those that impede access by persons from marginalized groups;

(d) Include civil society and NGO representation on national CRVS coordination committees.

40. *Regional support activities:*

(a) Launch a regional advocacy campaign to heighten the visibility and importance of CRVS, such as through the declaration of a year/decade for CRVS and other similar region-wide advocacy channels and instruments;

(b) Provide technical and advisory services to support country outreach efforts to women and underserved groups;

(c) Provide technical and advisory services to support country advocacy events;

(d) Establish a regional platform, comprising a web repository and other interactive features, such as a web-based forum, to be complemented by knowledge exchange seminars and facilitation of exchange visits. The platform will be aimed at promoting the exchange of experiences and information on strategies and plans to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems, reporting on accomplishments, compiling lessons learned and fostering South-South and peer-to-peer cooperation to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems.

**Outcome B: Political commitment**

*Sustained political commitment to support the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems*

41. High-level political commitment is a powerful force that can galvanize all stakeholders and levels of society around the need for well-functioning CRVS systems. Importantly, it plays an essential role in ensuring that relevant government agencies effectively play their part in CRVS systems. In terms of allocating resources, political commitment is critical to break the perpetuating circle of neglect of underinvestment in CRVS systems. Weak and dysfunctional CRVS systems are unable to generate vital statistics or provide documentary evidence for legal purposes and, as a result, there is little support for allocating resources to improve the system.

42. *Potential country actions:*

(a) Issue a high-level declaration on the importance of CRVS for all individuals;

(b) Conduct a comprehensive multi-stakeholder assessment of CRVS systems;

(c) Develop a prioritized multi-sectoral national action plan to improve CRVS systems detailing commitments required to implement those plans.

43. *Regional support activities:*

- (a) Encourage and support countries in conducting a rapid self-assessment;
- (b) Support countries in carrying out a comprehensive multi-stakeholder assessment of CRVS systems;
- (c) Support countries in formulating results-oriented multi-sectoral national action plans to accelerate the improvement of CRVS systems;
- (d) Convene a ministerial-level regional forum of decision-makers to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of CRVS;
- (e) Through the regional platform, establish a regional web-based repository of assessments of CRVS systems and multi-sectoral national action plans to direct development partners in developing and implementing capacity development programmes that support national priorities, and to facilitate technical cooperation among countries in the region.

**Outcome C: Investments***Sufficient and sustainable investments towards incremental improvements in civil registration and vital statistics systems*

44. The benefits of well-functioning CRVS systems, including improvements in public administration and the efficiency of resource allocation, and enabling individuals to realize their human, legal and economic rights, far outweigh the costs. With mounting research and development interest in the area of CRVS at regional and global levels, there is a growing movement that is creating evidence to support the case of governments investing in improving CRVS systems.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, many CRVS systems in Asia and the Pacific suffer from underinvestment, sometimes as a result of resource allocation to alternative data-collection methods that have a number of limitations compared to well-functioning CRVS systems.

45. *Potential country actions:*

- (a) Analyse the business processes within CRVS systems with a view to identifying options for enhanced cost-effectiveness as well as resource gaps;
- (b) Allocate adequate national financial resources for the implementation of CRVS multi-sectoral national action plans;

46. *Regional support activities:*

- (a) Produce evidence that proves the value of investing in CRVS systems to support advocacy for improving CRVS systems at the national level, particularly in terms of the costs versus the benefits;
- (b) Develop a CRVS business process analysis tool and assist countries in applying it to identify resource gaps and efficiency improvement opportunities;

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<sup>26</sup> Anneke Schmider, "Advocating for civil registration: guide to developing a business case for civil registration", University of Queensland: HISHub Working Paper Series, No. 15 (Health Information Systems Knowledge Hub, November 2011). Available from [www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/WP15/HISHUB-WP15-FULL-10-WEB-6Mar12.pdf](http://www.uq.edu.au/hishub/docs/WP15/HISHUB-WP15-FULL-10-WEB-6Mar12.pdf).

- (c) Develop a business case tool for investing in the improvement of CRVS systems and assist countries in applying it for national resource mobilization.

#### **Outcome D: Policies, legislation and implementation of regulations**

*Improved and strengthened policies, legislation and implementation of regulations for civil registration and vital statistics systems*

47. A sound and supportive legal framework provides the basis for well-functioning CRVS systems. The legal framework for registration of vital events makes registration compulsory, and defines the functions, duties and responsibilities of local registrars and of those who are obliged to register, thus helping to ensure the completeness of registration and to improve the accuracy of information held in civil records. In terms of vital statistics, legislation ensures that stakeholders in CRVS systems have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, which assists in ensuring the compliance, quality, timeliness and completeness of the vital statistics produced.

48. *Potential country actions:*

- (a) Assess compliance with international legal frameworks and standards through multi-stakeholder reviews of CRVS legislation;
- (b) Include reform of legislation and regulations in multi-sectoral national action plans;
- (c) Implement legislative and regulatory reform in line with international legal frameworks and standards;
- (d) Ensure linkages with related national strategies, such as national strategies for the development of statistics (NSDS), development strategies and sectoral plans.

49. *Regional support activities:*

- (a) Provide technical advisory services to support country efforts in strengthening legislation;
- (b) Ensure that the international legal frameworks relating to civil registration are reflected in national legislation;
- (c) Promote the provision of sufficient registration infrastructure and support the development of skills and capacities for the registration of events and compilation of vital statistics;
- (d) Through the regional platform, facilitate the exchange of good practices in civil registration laws;
- (e) Support stronger links between CRVS legislation and policies and related national strategies, such as NSDS.

#### **Outcome E: Legal documentation**

*Improved availability and quality of legal documentation for all individuals*

50. An essential function of civil registration is to provide documentary evidence from which to base claims of identity, legal status and ensuing rights. Without this documentation, individuals are likely to face difficulties in realizing their human, legal and economic rights, as have been established by numerous international conventions, or to access public services such as

health and education. With documentary evidence of identity and status, individuals are brought into the modern economy because they are able to, for example, transfer property, apply for passports, possess driving licenses, open bank accounts and vote.

51. *Potential country actions:*

(a) Improve the capacity of the civil registration system to issue legal documentation on appropriately evidenced vital events;

(b) Harness the capacity of hospitals, health centres, religious institutions and schools that can play significant roles in registering vital events;

(c) Enhance the capacity of CRVS systems to issue legal documentation of a high quality, including the information required to establish an individual's nationality;

(d) Increase national capacity to assure the safe and secure long-term management and archiving of legal records.

52. *Regional support activities:*

(a) Through the regional platform, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and good practices that ensure accuracy and completeness in the reporting of vital events and in the compilation, management and archiving of registration records;

(b) Through the regional platform, facilitate the exchange of good practices in improving registration in remote areas and among poorly covered sub-populations, as well as the registration of specific types of vital events, including through the use of information and communications technology (for example, community birth and death reporting using mobile phones);

(c) Strengthen the capacity of the national civil registration to provide high quality legal documentation to all persons, including the information required to establish nationality.

**Outcome F: Statistics on vital events**

*Increased capacity of countries in Asia and the Pacific to record, compile, analyse and disseminate complete and reliable statistics on vital events*

53. It is becoming increasingly feasible to overcome the technical and logistical challenges that countries face to record, compile, analyse and disseminate complete and reliable information on vital events. The use of information and communications technology, including mobile technology, can facilitate the registration of vital events in remote, isolated, small island and mountainous areas. In addition, advances in technology enable more secure storage and protection of civil registration archives from natural catastrophes, war and cyber-attacks. Institutional and human resource capacities can be enhanced by drawing upon hospitals, health centres, religious institutions and schools that can play significant roles in registering vital events. The health sector, in particular, can play an important role in the notification of births and deaths to the registration authorities, and in encouraging families to register births and deaths.

54. *Potential country actions:*

- (a) Expand infrastructure availability, quality and equitable distribution, especially in poorly serviced areas and population groups;
- (b) Enhance CRVS human resources availability and distribution;
- (c) Provide training and skills enhancement on key aspects of CRVS, covering all aspects of vital events (including causes of death) recording, data reporting compilation, archiving and analysis;
- (d) Improve the completeness of birth registration in line with a nationally determined target;
- (e) Improve the completeness of death registration in line with a nationally determined target;
- (f) Improve the quality of cause-of-death certification and coding in line with international standards as defined by WHO;
- (g) Develop and test, in collaboration with academic and research institutions, innovative and efficient methods and tools for accelerating the improvement of CRVS systems.

55. *Regional support activities:*

- (a) Through the regional platform, promote the sharing of technical knowledge, expertise and resources to overcome the technical and logistical challenges facing countries to record, compile, analyse and disseminate complete and reliable information on vital events;
- (b) Develop training curricula and assist national training institutions in strengthening their capacity to deliver training on the skills and knowledge needed to improve technical capacities of countries to record, compile, analyse and disseminate complete and reliable information on vital events;
- (c) Support the strengthening of capacity of national training institutions to deliver effective training on ICD-compliant medical certification and coding to improve the quality of cause-of-death data;
- (d) Work with regional academic and research groups, support a research and development programme on the basis of identified gaps in country assessments, and facilitate the sharing of research and study results and formulate guidelines on their potential application.

**Outcome G: Coordination among key stakeholders**

*Mechanisms established for effective coordination among key stakeholders within civil registration and vital statistics systems*

56. Coordination is the hallmark of well-functioning CRVS systems. It must take place among the various responsible agencies in countries, between development partners, and between countries and partner agencies. At the national level, effective coordination among different agencies involved in reporting, registering and recording the occurrence of vital events is essential. Good management at each functional level within each part of the system is not enough; good coordination is crucial across sectors in order to minimize duplication of functions across different areas of government and facilitate the effective use of registration records for statistical purposes.



57. *Potential country actions:*

- (a) Establish a representative and functioning multi-sectoral committee responsible for CRVS coordination;
- (b) Hold regular and productive meetings of the national CRVS coordination committee;
- (c) Assign the national CRVS coordination committee with the task of overseeing the implementation of the multi-sectoral national action plan;
- (d) Issue regular updates on improvement progress and report, when relevant, to the National Statistical Council.

58. *Regional support activities:*

- (a) Promote the establishment of a national coordination structure or mechanism comprised of key institutions and stakeholders of the civil registration and vital statistics system;
- (b) Actively support the inclusion of the improvement of CRVS in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF), through outreach to United Nations Country Teams;
- (c) Provide technical advisory services to support country efforts in strengthening coordination;
- (d) Through the regional platform, identify, review and compile good practices in the coordination of civil registration and vital statistics functions, and facilitate the exchange of good practices in coordination mechanisms, documentation and online/offline dissemination;
- (e) Through meetings of RSCG and interim support from RSO, coordinate and cooperate on ongoing and planned activities among relevant development partners involved in the regional strategic plan;
- (f) Through periodic reports from RSO, ensure that countries are informed of and actively contribute to the coordination of capacity-building activities.

**Outcome H: Use of vital statistics***Increased capacity of countries in Asia and the Pacific to use vital statistics effectively*

59. High quality, standards-based registration of vital events enables the production of reliable and complete vital statistics, which support national and local decision-making across a range of social and economic sectors to facilitate evidence-based policy.<sup>27</sup> The contribution of vital statistics to evidence-based decision-making is dependent upon timely dissemination to and appropriate uptake by the relevant decision-makers.

<sup>27</sup> The *United Nations Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System* states that the compilation of vital statistics should have as its ultimate minimum goal: (a) the provision of total monthly or quarterly summary counts of live births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages and divorces on a time schedule prompt enough to provide information for health intervention and population estimation programmes; and (b) the production of detailed annual tabulations of each type of vital event cross classified by its demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. *Source:* United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 2*, Sales No. E.01.XVII.10, para. 62.

60. *Potential country actions:*

(a) Include vital statistics derived from civil registration systems in national statistical, health and development plans for planning and monitoring purposes;

(b) Make available in the public domain, within one year of the end of the reporting year, the reports of numbers and distribution of total births and deaths by age and sex;

(c) Make available in the public domain, within two years of the end of the reporting year, reports of the major causes of death by age and sex at national and subnational levels;

(d) Report up-to-date vital statistics to United Nations entities, including the Statistics Division and WHO.

61. *Regional support activities:*

(a) Provide training on guidelines and recommendations for the analysis, dissemination and use of vital statistics, as contained in the *United Nations Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 2*;

(b) Through the regional platform, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and good practices that ensure timeliness in the collection and compilation of civil registration records for statistical purposes;

(c) Through the regional platform, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and good practices on how vital statistics have been used to guide policy and programmes, including through documentation and offline/online dissemination;

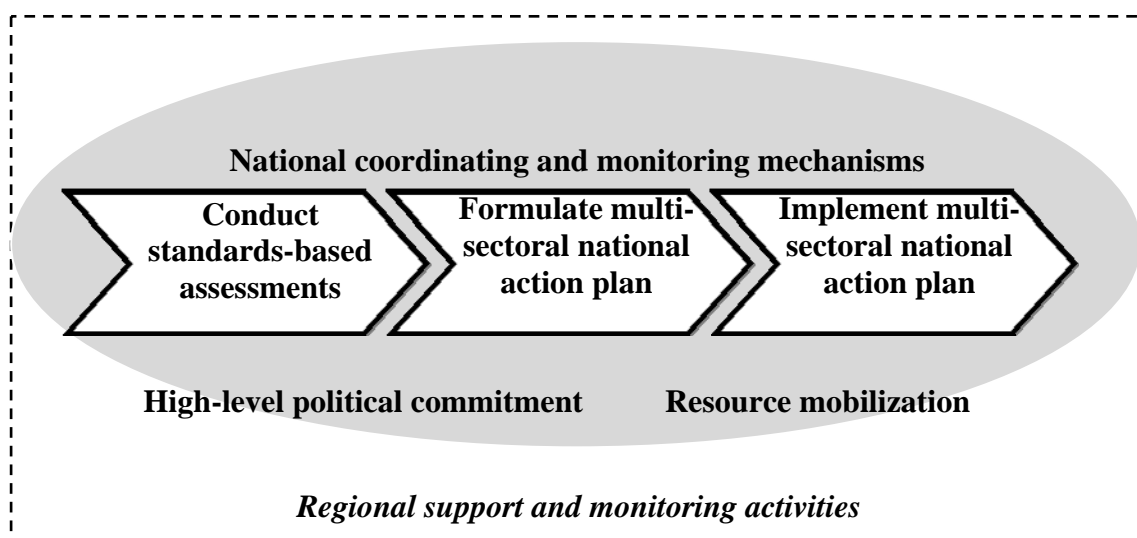
(d) Provide technical advisory services to countries to support the implementation of principles and recommendations, including the development of an engagement strategy to regularly discuss data needs with the main data users, the preparation of analytical reports and the development of dissemination strategies and policy;

(e) Develop training curricula and assist national training institutions in strengthening their capacity to deliver training on the skills and knowledge needed to improve the analysis of vital statistics data.

## V. Steps for implementation

62. Based on the experiences of countries that have successfully embarked on efforts to improve CRVS systems, major actions required by countries in implementing the regional strategic plan comprise key steps, most of which may take place in parallel or be iterative in nature (see figure). Relevant regional activities will support countries during each step of the process.

Figure  
Implementation of the regional strategic plan, 2012-2020



63. Although circumstances in countries vary, there is a general logical process of three steps that countries should take to improve their CRVS systems:

- (a) Conduct a standards-based assessment of current status, capacities and resources;
- (b) Formulate a multi-sectoral national action plan that addresses the range of challenges and defined feasible, measurable results within the framework of the outcomes of the regional strategic plan;
- (c) Implement the multi-sectoral national action plan.

64. The following processes will contribute significantly to the successful completion of each of those steps. These processes are fundamental to any effort to improve CRVS systems:

- (a) Establishing a national coordination mechanism to oversee and monitor improvement efforts, including monitoring and evaluating the multi-sectoral national action plan once developed;
- (b) Generating high-level political commitment for improving CRVS systems;
- (c) Mobilizing the resources needed, including human, technical and financial resources.

## VI. Governance and coordination

65. The regional strategic plan aims to achieve its goal and outcomes through the sharing of expertise from across the region and globally. It establishes a regional platform for leveraging support and resources in a coordinated and effective manner. Therefore, a key purpose of the governing and coordination structure outlined below is to guide, stimulate and foster partnerships, networking and collaboration among the multitude of national, regional and international organizations with a stake in the improvement of CRVS systems in the region. E/ESCAP/CST(3)/INF/9 presents the mandate of and some of the support available from development partners.

## **A. Regional steering and coordination group**

66. An RSCG will be established to provide strategic guidance and oversight to the implementation of the regional strategic plan. It will function within the framework defined by the regional strategic plan, consistent with mandates of involved governments and other national and international development partners.

67. RSCG will bring together country implementing agencies, civil society, development partners and training and research institutions. Coordination and implementation of activities in the Pacific islands will continue to be managed through the existing Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan and BAG, including existing governance and reporting structures. BAG will be represented in RSCG to facilitate coordination with related activities in Pacific island States that are being carried out under PVSAP.

68. RSCG will ensure coordination and integration of the implementation of the regional strategic plan with other related capacity development activities for synergy, complementarities and greater impact at the regional level. It will review progress in the implementation of the regional strategic plan and ensure that actions to implement the regional strategic plan uphold the seven guiding principles agreed to by the country, regional and international partners in this initiative.

69. Subject to the mechanisms of its formal establishment, RSCG may report to the Commission or if so delegated, to the Committee on Statistics.

## **B. Regional support office**

70. An RSO will be set up. It will report to and act as the secretariat for RSCG and be tasked with coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the regional strategic plan in close consultation and partnership with countries and development partners.

71. The primary role of RSO is to coordinate and facilitate country assessments and the implementation of multi-sectoral national action plans. In carrying out this function, RSO will serve as the “one-stop” access point for countries and development partners for the implementation of the regional strategic plan. RSO will actively liaise with international, regional, and subregional offices of development partners operating in Asia and the Pacific in order to coordinate their support to countries, thereby avoiding duplication of efforts and ensuring that international standards are being followed.

72. RSO will function as the regional platform aimed at promoting the exchange of expertise, experiences, resources and other information on improving CRVS systems. It will report on accomplishments, compile lessons learned and foster South-South and peer-to-peer cooperation to improve CRVS systems.

73. The regional platform will comprise a web repository and other interactive features, such as a web-based forum, to be complemented by the organization of knowledge exchange seminars and facilitation of exchange visits to promote and demonstrate the use of the platform. The web repository will include a directory of CRVS stakeholders, such as development partners and experts, and a resource base, comprising training and advocacy materials, computer-based resource kits, and assessment and analysis tools. The repository will also contain completed assessments of CRVS systems and multi-sectoral national action plans.

74. RSO will be hosted by one of the regional development partners committed to the regional strategic plan.

### **C. National coordination**

75. Broad-based and high-level political support is necessary for the successful implementation of multi-sectoral national action plans, especially as regards resource allocation and legislative reviews. The establishment of a national multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism to coordinate the assessment and the development and implementation of a multi-sectoral national action plan is therefore of critical importance for ensuring the long-term results of the regional strategic plan. The mechanism should be able to directly involve or reach out to all relevant stakeholders within the country's CRVS systems.

76. Core agencies at the national-level comprise those with responsibilities for registration, such as civil registration offices, local governments and ministries of justice or the interior, those responsible for the production and dissemination of statistics (usually NSOs), and the health sector, which has a particularly important role to play in the notification of vital events. Additional important stakeholders and potential partners are other sectoral agencies, such as the ministries of education, labor, security, public information or foreign affairs, the business and private sectors, donors and development partners, civil society and NGOs, and representatives of communities.

77. Pathways and timescales for the multi-sectoral national action plans will vary greatly across countries according to the current status of their CRVS systems, their institutional and administrative features and state of development. The exact mechanism, such as national statistical councils for coordination, will therefore be decided by each country. If possible, existing coordination mechanisms will be made use of and revised as necessary, rather than establishing new ones.

78. The country coordinating mechanisms will be the entry point for RSO to liaise and communicate with countries.

## **VII. Monitoring**

### **A. Annual progress assessment reports**

79. RSO will monitor the implementation of activities for improving CRVS systems, whether they are conducted by national, regional or international partners. On this basis, annual progress assessment reports presenting an overview of efforts by all stakeholders will be prepared for review by RSCG. The annual progress assessment reports will be produced on the basis of information that has been provided to RSO by partners.

### **B. Periodic monitoring reports**

80. While the framework and approach of the regional strategic plan is regional, improvement of CRVS systems will ultimately happen at the national level and be primarily driven by countries. Hence, progress towards achieving the outcomes of the regional strategic plan will be evidenced in the national context. It is therefore proposed that the annual activity-level progress assessment reports be complemented periodically, in 2016 and 2020, by a more comprehensive monitoring report.

81. RSO will produce the monitoring report through questionnaires circulated to all countries and development partners operating in the region. As with the annual progress assessment reports, the monitoring reports will be prepared for review by the regional steering and coordination group.

82. A proposed monitoring framework for the regional strategic plan is presented in E/ESCAP/CST(3)/INF/9.

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