

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**
Committee on Statistics**Eighth session**

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Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*

Progress on strengthening national statistical systems for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: monitoring progress in response to the Get Every One in the Picture initiative on civil registration and vital statistics**Report on the 8th meeting of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The report of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific on its 8th meeting, held on 9 and 10 March 2022, contains a number of recommended actions for the statistical community to take to strengthen the implementation of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific in view of the Ministerial Declaration on Building a More Resilient Future with Inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics and the varying levels of progress made at the country level across the region towards the achievement of the vision of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024).

The Committee on Statistics may wish to take note of the outcomes of the 8th meeting of the Regional Steering Group and provide guidance to the statistical community on implementing the recommendations of the Regional Steering Group.

The Committee may also wish to express its views on the roles and responsibilities of statisticians in achieving the goals set out in the Regional Action Framework.

I. Background

1. The Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024) was proclaimed at the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific in 2014. At that same Ministerial Conference, members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) endorsed the Ministerial Declaration to “Get Every One in the Picture” in Asia and the Pacific, by which

* ESCAP/CST/2022/L.1/Rev.1.

they proclaimed their vision that, by 2024, all people in Asia and the Pacific would benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitated the realization of their rights and supported good governance, health and development. They also endorsed the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific.

2. Since then, many countries have made significant progress towards achieving the goals and targets of the Regional Action Framework. At its seventy-fourth session, ESCAP adopted its resolution 74/8, in which it decided to convene a second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific to review the midterm progress in the implementation of the Regional Action Framework.

3. In June 2021, ESCAP released the midterm report on the Decade entitled *Getting Every One in the Picture: A Snapshot of Progress Midway through the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade*. Through the report, ESCAP showed that the Asia-Pacific region was on the right path to reaching the goals on universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems. Such systems had become much better positioned to respond to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis than they would have been five years earlier. With a further acceleration of efforts, Governments could realize catalytic changes to reach those furthest behind. Moreover, ESCAP reviewed the progress that had been made in countries in the Asia-Pacific region since the beginning of the Decade, expanding on the findings shared with the Committee on Statistics in 2020.¹ ESCAP also highlighted the achievements and challenges remaining for the second half of the Decade.

4. At the Second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which was held in November 2021, members and associate members of ESCAP considered the future direction of efforts, including in terms of promoting civil registration as the foundation for legal identity, aligning the Decade with the current global development context and reiterating the commitment of members and associate members to the Regional Action Framework.

5. Over 400 participants from 48 countries, including 40 government ministers and representatives of 15 international organizations, attended the online meeting, which marked the midpoint in the Decade. In light of the importance of civil registration and vital statistics and the broad impact of this area on sustainable and inclusive development, the Second Ministerial Conference was co-organized by ESCAP in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, the Pacific Community, World Vision International, the CDC Foundation, Vital Strategies and Plan International.

6. Participants in the Second Ministerial Conference reviewed the progress and challenges encountered during the first half of the Decade and provided guidance for the second half of the Decade. A broad range of topics were discussed during the event, including the relationship between civil

¹ See ESCAP/CST/2020/INF/3.

registration and legal identity, the potential of the health sector to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems and the importance of civil registration to leave no one behind. These discussions were all reflected in the report on the Second Ministerial Conference.²

7. The Second Ministerial Conference concluded with the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration on Building a More Resilient Future with Inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics.³ In the Declaration, developed with the support of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, reference is made to the progress achieved since the beginning of the Decade and recent developments in the area of civil registration and vital statistics. It sets out clear actions to accelerate progress towards the shared vision that all people in Asia and the Pacific should benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems. The Declaration reflects the aspiration of the region to achieve universal civil registration and will guide the work of States in the region in improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in the second half of the Decade. While some of the actions set out in the Declaration have already benefited from regional activities and the sharing of experiences, States may need additional support from the Regional Steering Group to implement the listed actions. Thus, at its 8th meeting, the Regional Steering Group focused on those actions in particular.

II. Summary of the discussions held during the meeting

8. The 8th meeting of the Regional Steering Group was held online on 9 and 10 March 2022. The objective of the meeting was to review the actions listed in the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the Second Ministerial Conference and identify how the Regional Steering Group could best support the implementation of those actions. The Regional Steering Group discussed the potential modality of the final review of the Decade.

9. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following States members of ESCAP: Bangladesh; Fiji; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Kazakhstan; Kiribati; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; New Zealand; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; and United States of America. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the following development partners: Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative, represented by Vital Strategies; Pacific Community (on behalf of the Brisbane Accord Group); Plan International; UNHCR; UNICEF; WHO; and World Vision International. Representatives of the Child Rights Coalition Asia, Regional Support Office of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime and UNFPA participated as observers.

A. Building upon the Second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific

10. The Regional Steering Group was briefed on the key outcomes and discussions held during the Second Ministerial Conference, and a presentation by Vital Strategies focused on ensuring commitment through leadership.

² ESCAP/78/26.

³ ESCAP/78/26/Add.1.

11. Following those presentations, the Regional Steering Group discussed the key takeaways from the Second Ministerial Conference and which actions should be taken during the second half of the Decade.

B. Supporting the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Building a More Resilient Future with Inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

1. Session on strengthening the capacity to exchange lessons learned, including on record management systems and digital recordings

12. The session built on the information document entitled “Legal identity systems in Asia and the Pacific: civil registration, vital statistics and identity management”.⁴ The representative of Fiji gave a presentation on the work done in that country to strengthen the exchange of information, including on record management systems and digital recordings.

13. Following the presentation, the Regional Steering Group discussed recommendations on facilitating the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration, in particular paragraph 26 (a), in which members and associate members of ESCAP were called upon to strengthen the capacity of key civil registration and vital statistics stakeholders to exchange lessons learned with their counterparts in other countries about ongoing civil registration work, including projects related to record management systems and digital recordings.

Recommendations

14. The Regional Steering Group recommended increasing data-sharing to facilitate a much broader use of civil registration data to enable government services and programme delivery, such as the needs assessment and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines and the planning and delivery of social protection. Increasingly, States were using civil registration data as the backbone for electoral rolls, social protection schemes and health service provision. In that regard, the increased use of administrative data for statistics (including civil registration data) and the need for additional attention to quality assurance were highlighted.

15. The Regional Steering Group noted that unique identifiers could play a key role in strengthening the exchange of information.

16. The Regional Steering Group recommended strengthening the capacity of civil registrars. That could be done by facilitating peer-to-peer learning. There was a general need to provide training for stakeholders involved in civil registration and vital statistics. A particular recommendation was made to offer workshops for countries on the use of the eleventh revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems.

17. The Regional Steering Group discussed how international migration made it difficult for civil registration authorities to verify documents, therefore regional and international collaboration was needed.

⁴ ESCAP/MCCRVS/2021/INF/4.

2. Session on sharing experiences in developing resilient civil registration and vital statistics systems, including facilitating the recovery from COVID-19

18. The session built on the discussions held during the Second Ministerial Conference. The representative of Indonesia gave a presentation on developing resilient civil registration and vital statistics systems to facilitate the recovery from COVID-19. Improvements had recently been made to the civil registration and vital statistics system, which had played a role in delivering vaccinations and social assistance during the pandemic.

19. Following the presentation, the Regional Steering Group discussed recommendations on facilitating the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration, in particular paragraph 26 (b), in which members and associate members of ESCAP were called upon to share experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, in strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems to support resilience from disasters and ensure inclusive recovery strategies from COVID-19 and other crises, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Recommendations

20. The Regional Steering Group recommended that civil registration and vital statistics should be part of national disaster risk reduction strategies and plans. Doing so would involve developing resilient civil registration and vital statistics systems, which could facilitate the recovery from and mitigate the impact of future pandemics and other crises. It also recommended providing training or guidance on how to develop disaster recovery plans for civil registration and vital statistics systems, identifying different scenarios, and drawing lessons learned from others, including the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

21. The Regional Steering Group further recommended increasing the use of digital technology to streamline civil registration processes, reduce the burden on parents and families and make systems more resilient to disasters.

3. Session on strengthening national governance and coordination structures and conducting substantive identification and assessment of inequalities

22. The session built on the discussions held during the Second Ministerial Conference. The representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic gave a presentation on strengthening the national civil registration and vital statistics governance and coordination structure. The representative of Pakistan gave a presentation on their work to assess and remove barriers to registration.

23. Following the presentations, the Regional Steering Group discussed recommendations on facilitating the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration, in particular paragraph 26 (c), in which members and associate members of ESCAP were called upon to strengthen national governance and coordination structures for civil registration and vital statistics systems to promote efficient design, encourage coordination and collaboration between government and other stakeholders, and enable the full impact of technical efforts to strengthen such systems, and paragraph 26 (d), in which members and associate members of ESCAP were called upon to conduct substantive identification and assessment of inequalities related to civil registration and vital statistics, in light of national context, regulations and priorities, and take measures to remove all barriers to civil registration of vital events among all hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations, such as women

and children, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, internally displaced persons, domestic workers, foundlings and persons without documentation.

Recommendations

24. The Regional Steering Group recommended that, in larger countries, coordination mechanisms should be established at multiple levels, not just at the national level. The involvement of children and youth and of civil society more broadly was necessary to gain a better understanding of community needs and challenges. Quantitative or qualitative assessments of existing inequalities in access to registration could support efforts to address barriers to registration.

4. Session on considering the adoption of comprehensive data protection, confidentiality and privacy laws

25. The session built on the information document entitled “Privacy and confidentiality in the context of civil registration and vital statistics systems”.⁵ The representative of Australia gave a presentation on how the information collected through the civil registration system provided a foundation for legal identity, connected people with government and enabled disbursements from estates. The data were extensively used as a foundation for population and health statistics, and the number of ways data are used has expanded over time. An outline was provided of policy and legislation to ensure data protection, confidentiality and privacy. In another presentation, the representative of Kiribati outlined the recent development of a data protection policy.

26. Following the presentations, the Regional Steering Group discussed recommendations on facilitating the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration, in particular paragraph 26 (i), in which members and associate members of ESCAP were called upon to consider the adoption of comprehensive data protection, confidentiality and privacy laws that secured the personal data of individuals that were held by member States, as well as to develop robust legal frameworks, regulations and strategies to govern the implementation of civil registration activities and to facilitate interoperability, as appropriate.

Recommendations

27. In several of its recommendations, the Regional Steering Group highlighted that comprehensive data protection was an increasing focus area for many States and that support would be needed from development partners. The increased integration of different data sources necessitated closer attention to data protection, privacy and confidentiality. Additional support could include facilitating knowledge-sharing among States and providing technical assistance.

28. As civil registration and vital statistics systems transitioned to digitized systems with digital certificates as a core element, due consideration should be given to ensuring that individuals were granted the right to share their own data.

⁵ ESCAP/MCCRVS/2021/INF/5.

5. Session on strengthening the vital event notification capacity of the health sector

29. The session built on the note by the secretariat on the potential of the health sector to catalyse accelerated improvement in civil registration and vital statistics.⁶ The presentations by the representatives of WHO and Sri Lanka focused on strengthening the vital event notification capacity of the health sector and producing vital statistics.

30. Following the presentations, the Regional Steering Group discussed recommendations on facilitating the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration, in particular paragraph 26 (e), in which members and associate members of ESCAP were called upon to strengthen the vital event notification capacity of the public and private sector health service provider, including through the provision of essential health services and information technology solutions for online registration of births and deaths.

Recommendations

31. The Regional Steering Group made several recommendations, including that coordination between different relevant agencies and interministerial collaboration should be supported through, for example, legislative frameworks (or, if needed, memorandums of understanding) and the interoperability of databases. Depending on the national setting, these recommendations may need to be implemented at the subnational level.

32. The Regional Steering Group highlighted that the decision of where to place the registration function was strategic and important in terms of who was involved, such as local health workers. The aim should be to limit the burden on families and to build on the network of health facilities and community health workers, which was widespread and trusted even in remote areas.

33. Finally, the Regional Steering Group recommended that digital applications and information technologies should be harnessed to standardize and streamline the vital event notification process.

6. Session on ensuring sufficient financial resources for civil registration and vital statistics

34. The session built on discussions held during the Second Ministerial Conference. The representative of Bangladesh gave a presentation about civil registration and vital statistics leadership that was followed by an intervention by the representative of New Zealand.

35. Following the presentations, the Regional Steering Group discussed recommendations on facilitating the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration, in particular paragraph 26 (j), in which members and associate members are called upon to ensure sufficient financial resources for civil registration and vital statistics, including by allocating sufficient spending on the development of information technology infrastructure necessary for recording vital events.

⁶ ESCAP/MCCRVS/2021/3.

Recommendations

36. The Regional Steering Group highlighted that while investments were being made in information and communications technology, additional funding was still needed. The Regional Steering Group made several recommendations, including on the establishment of a strong coordination mechanism, which could play a crucial role in ensuring sustainable funding for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems.

37. The Regional Steering Group highlighted that the timely allocation of investments from development partners was crucial in that work, although the majority of the funding should come from the Government. Alternative ways of securing additional funding for registration activities could include developing commemorative birth certificates that civil registration authorities might offer to raise funds, although standard birth certificates should be provided for free.

38. Under certain circumstances and with appropriate data privacy considerations, the sale of registration data might provide a source of funding.

7. Session on looking ahead towards the end of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024)

39. The secretariat briefed the Regional Steering Group on the timelines for the Decade and the resolutions governing the implementation of the Regional Action Framework and the work of the Regional Steering Group.

Recommendations

40. The Regional Steering Group recommended holding a ministerial conference in 2025 for the final review of the Decade.

41. The Regional Steering Group discussed the potential of extending the Decade to align with the 2030 Agenda or establishing a second decade focusing on universal registration rather than national targets and increasing the focus on marriage registration.

III. Issues for consideration by the Committee

42. The Committee may wish:

(a) To take note of the outcomes of the 8th meeting of the Regional Steering Group;

(b) To provide guidance to the statistical community on implementing the recommendations of the Regional Steering Group;

(c) To express its views on the roles and responsibilities of statisticians in achieving the goals set out in the Regional Action Framework.
