

CRVS Insight

July 2021



Launch of the Getting Every One in the Picture - a snapshot of progress midway through the Asian and Pacific CRVS Decade

The Asia-Pacific region has reached the midpoint of the [Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade](#) (2015-2024). The Decade is dedicated to achieving universal and responsive CRVS systems because CRVS systems provide individuals with a legal identity, facilitate access to public services, and support governments by producing better data to guide decision making.

To take stock of the progress made during the first half of the Decade and better understand the remaining challenges, ESCAP published a report titled "[Getting every one in the picture - A snapshot of progress midway through the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade](#)". Additionally, ESCAP created a [Midterm Report microsite](#) where users can access a disaggregated form of the report, as well as review [Country Stories](#) highlighting accomplishments from around the region.

The report shows that the Asia-Pacific region is on the right path to reaching the goals of universal and responsive CRVS systems and countries are much better positioned to respond to crises than they would have been five years ago.

Building upon the momentum generated by the launch of the Getting Every One in the Picture report, ESCAP also coordinated a regional launch, as well as four sub-regional launches, to highlight regional progress, articulate key messages from the report and inform the ongoing preparations for the Second Ministerial Conference on CRVS between 16-19 November 2021. For those unable to attend the launches, videos and presentations are now available on www.getinthepicture.org.



Preparations for the Second Ministerial Conference on CRVS moving forward

In addition to the understanding that civil registration needs to be the basis for legal identity systems, the current COVID-19 crisis also shed light on the need for resilient civil registration systems that can continue operating under stressful situations. As a result, preparations for the [Second Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific](#) are adapting to reflect a new programme for the Conference.

Some documents' publication and meetings are still expected to occur in the build-up to inform stakeholders and leave space and time for discussions on how to best address remaining challenges to achieving the [CRVS Decade goals and targets](#). However, preparations for the Conference are developing on pace for **16 - 19 November 2021**. The content of the different sessions were discussed at previous [Regional Steering Group](#) meetings, and both partners and countries are now working to ensure maximal participation by high-level stakeholders at the Conference.

Interested participants can follow the preparations by visiting www.getinthepicture.org, and can now [register for the Conference at this address](#). Visitors to the website can also gain early access to [Conference documents](#) such as the Provisional agenda (中文 | English | Français | Русский), the Annotated provisional agenda (中文 | English | Français | Русский) and the ESCAP Resolution calling for the Second Ministerial Conference.



WHO releases annual report tracking health-related SDG indicators

In May 2021, the [World Health Organization](#) released its annual report on [World Health Statistics 2021: Monitoring Health for the SDGs](#). As the name suggests, the report aggregates the latest data for 50+ health-related indicators from the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDG) and the [WHO Triple Billion targets](#).

Unlike previous annual reports though, the 2021 report additionally focuses on the human toll and impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, highlighting the importance of tracking inequalities and the urgency to accelerate progress to get back on track and recover equitably with the support of robust data and health information systems.



CRVS Champion: Carla AbouZahr

Each month, our community newsletter puts a spotlight on one person from Asia-Pacific who has gone above and beyond in their efforts to support CRVS programmes, raise awareness of CRVS issues or lead CRVS improvement efforts in their home country. This month we are happy to highlight Ms. Carla AbouZahr.

What is your current (and maybe previous) title and role?

Currently, I am a consultant, working mainly with Vital Strategies, Bloomberg Data for Health Initiative, and with the World Health Organization (WHO). In fact I was a WHO staff member for over 20 years until retirement in 2011.

Can you please share with us a particular experience which highlighted the importance of CRVS to you?

My interest in CRVS systems started during my time at WHO when we were trying to estimate levels and trends in maternal mortality and realising how challenging that was for countries with weak CRVS systems. A maternal death is a family tragedy but thankfully it is a relatively rare event. Generally, there are far more deaths among babies (including stillbirths) and infants than among pregnant women. This means that while there are good methods for estimating infant and child mortality through household surveys, the same methods do not work as well for estimating maternal mortality. Maternal mortality estimates derived from sample surveys tend to have wide margins of uncertainty so it is difficult to be sure of the direction of trends and very hard to disaggregate by geographic area or by household income, as is commonly done for

mortality in children. So it seems obvious that the solution is to count every maternal death and that leads directly to counting every death, which only a CRVS system can do. The continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal nature of civil registration mean that it generates vital statistics that are complete, detailed and ongoing. And of course, the civil registration of vital events has an important legal purpose also; the civil registration of a birth or a death is an acknowledgement that every individual matters. Every birth and every death should be counted in recognition of the inherent value of every life.

How are you currently involved in CRVS improvements?

With Vital Strategies I work with Bangladesh and Rwanda which are very different in terms of history and organization but which have both been eager to innovate and find new solutions – including digital solutions – to the administrative and organizational challenges of registering births and deaths. Both are making huge progress in improving their CRVS systems, including increasing birth and death registration and generating better quality information on causes of death. Most recently I have been collaborating with WHO to develop a guidance document describing how the health sector can be an active contributor to CRVS. After all, most births and deaths are known to health workers who can provide the information needed by the civil registrar and by the statistics office. They can also support families through the registration process and in obtaining copies of birth and death certificates. The potential to strengthen CRVS by closer collaboration with the health sector is yet to be fully harnessed in many countries.

How would you like to see CRVS in Asia and the Pacific develop by the end of the CRVS Decade?

This is a vast region with many countries and varied levels of performance of CRVS systems. There is always much to learn when countries are able to exchange ideas and look for solutions together. The networks of civil registrars have been really important vehicles for this sharing. The ESCAP partnership has helped move the agenda forward with its monitoring and reporting framework and the great website that contains a wealth of information and country experiences. In these COVID times, the ability to engage personally has been limited and although there is a lot that can be achieved on line, I think that many are looking forward to being able to meet and discuss challenges and solutions and to visit each other to learn how other countries have organised their CRVS systems. It is also important that development partners work in a harmonised way, with shared goals and a framework for the continued development of standards and guidance to meet country needs. Despite progress, there are big challenges remaining, such as grave inequities in access to birth and death registration, particularly among the poorest populations and those affected by conflict, crises and emergencies, such as refugees, displaced persons, and migrants. Addressing the needs of these millions of people for documentary evidence of identity, civil status and family relationships is essential to enable their inclusion in development and reduction in social and economic tensions.

What advice would you give to others trying to improve CRVS systems?

Think long term. Act now in a cross-sectoral, coordinated manner to develop solutions that are locally appropriate and sustainable for the future. The urgent need to be able to monitor deaths and causes of death has been magnified by the COVID pandemic. Civil registration systems and the statistics they generate must be strengthened as core components of the response to COVID-19. Building resilience into CRVS systems will be essential to enable them to better function during future health shocks. High-level, cross party, political leadership will be essential to develop the legal, governance and administrative systems that can maintain CRVS systems.

UPCOMING EVENTS

On **12 August, from 14:30 to 16:30** (India standard time) the WHO SEARO, Vital Strategies, ECA and ESCAP will host a webinar in which three selected countries will share their experiences using the Business Process Improvement methodology to improve their CRVS systems. The Webinar is being organized around the [Civil Registration Day](#) organized by Africa on 10th August of every year and is meant to encourage participating countries to adapt similar approaches in their current endeavor in bringing about major improvements in their CRVS system. Interested readers can [register for the meeting here](#).

NEW RESOURCES

The [Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems](#) recently released a new report on [Constructing the Foundations for Legal Identity in Post-Conflict Settings](#). The new report includes country-specific case studies of Afghanistan, Georgia, Rwanda and South Africa and aims to contribute to the achievement of Target 16.9 under Sustainable Development Goal 16 by analyzing the role of the civil register and the legal underpinnings for identity.

Following its launch on 23 June, the WHO and UNICEF released new, jointly developed guidance for health sector managers, civil registrars and development partners on [improving the civil registration of births and deaths in low-income countries](#). The guidance describes the mutual benefits that would accrue to individuals and societies from enhanced collaboration between the health and civil registration systems and presents some common scenarios in which live births, stillbirths, and deaths occur and outlines key steps that health workers can take to enable them to be registered.

Statistics Singapore recently announced the release of the results from the [Census of Population 2020](#). The census is the most comprehensive source of information on population and households and provides benchmark data for demographic and social statistics for the nation of Singapore.

Feedback

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