

Did you know?

- About 230 million, or 35 percent of children under the age of five do not have registered births. Most of these children are in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.¹
- Globally, two-thirds (38 million) of 56 million annual deaths are still not registered.²
- More than 100 developing countries still do not have functioning systems that can support complete registration of births, marriages, divorce and death.³

CRVS to Leave No One Behind

Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems record statistics about life events, such as births, deaths, marriages, and divorces. Through civil registration, individuals are granted formal legal status, which allows them to access fundamental services such as healthcare, education, and financial services, while vital statistics, produced by these systems, provide basic demographic and health data for governments that inform policy and investments in programs. Despite the many benefits of strong CRVS systems, CRVS is extremely weak globally, and limited data exists on registration.

CRVS and Gender

CRVS is particularly beneficial to women and girls, both because vital statistics provide sex-disaggregated demographic data on key issues such as population distribution and maternal mortality, and because civil registration makes it easier to access crucial services such as health, education, and political representation. Birth registration is one of the most important channels for establishing proof of identity and individual legal records. In one long-term study from Indonesia, birth registration was positively correlated with immunization rates and levels of schooling, and negatively correlated with early marriage, young age at first child's birth, and adverse health outcomes.⁴ Additionally, birth certificates are often required to obtain identity documents that facilitate access to services and exercise of civic rights. Registration is particularly crucial for women who are already disadvantaged, such as single mothers, widows, migrants, refugees, and members of minority ethnic or religious

groups, who may already find it difficult to exercise their rights or access services.



Death registration can also be used to improve health policies that impact women. Less than half of all deaths in the world are registered and data from China and Rajasthan, India indicate that female deaths are less likely to be registered than male deaths.⁵ When deaths are not registered it can be more difficult for families to inherit, or for the surviving spouse to legally remarry. Finally, if the deaths of women and girls go unregistered, governments cannot identify preventable causes of death. Conversely, if deaths are registered with accurate cause of death information, it can reveal diseases for which women bear a disproportionate burden, helping policymakers develop targeted public health interventions.



Marriage and divorce registration contributes to a woman's ability to inherit property and other assets. Without formal marriage registration, upon a husband's death, default inheritance may go to other male relatives, stripping women of economic security. Divorce certificates facilitate access to a pension, alimony, child support, and

a fair share of the assets acquired in marriage. Additionally, marriage registration can help prevent child marriage by proving the age of the child upon marriage.



Data2X's work on CRVS

Recognizing the immense value that CRVS has for women, and as a source of gender data, Data2X has facilitated events to highlight gender dimensions of CRVS, produced communications materials on the links between CRVS and women's wellbeing, carried out research on gender differences in birth registration in Africa, and built partnerships with regional organizations working on CRVS.

Most recently, Data2X has conducted research that uses Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) in Sub-Saharan Africa, showing that the greatest determinants of a child's registration are place of birth and the mother's level of education. Additionally, this data highlights specific barriers to registration. For example, in the study, 60 percent of mothers reported that their main constraint to registering was that they did not know how to obtain a birth certificate for their child. Other characteristics of mothers are important — those who are young, in polygamous marriages, and who give birth outside a hospital are least likely to register their infants.

What is needed

More work is needed to help facilitate access and improve CRVS systems. The WHO-led CRVS comprehensive and rapid assessment tools have been used to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of current CRVS systems.⁶ A recent publication from ESCAP suggests a wide range of research opportunities and needs, including researching the effectiveness of incentives and penalties for registration, barriers to functional CRVS systems, capacity needs and innovation, and how to shift knowledge to action.⁷

Further, the existing research from Data2X highlights the need for more data on CRVS access. Improvements in data collection, including requiring verification of birth registration could improve data quality. Additional survey data on death and cause of death, marriage, and divorce registration paired with demographic information, could help policymakers better understand the connections between different forms of registration and outcomes — in some countries, for example, mothers need a valid marriage certificate to register a child. Finally, the expanded use of GPS in surveys to identify communities can help in understanding how registration varies by geography and access to facilities, and inform targeted registration programs.

Improving CRVS systems will require collaboration. International organizations can provide funding for research and technical assistance, research organizations can evaluate interventions and understand factors impacting access, and civil society can help to illuminate the ways in which CRVS impacts men, women, and children's lives. Together, we can improve CRVS systems and move closer to achieving gender equality.

Read more at data2x.org/partnerships/crvs

1 United Nations Children's Fund. 2013. Every Child's Birth Right: Inequities and trends in birth registration. UNICEF.

2 WHO Media Centre. 2014. "Civil registration: why counting births and deaths is important."

3 World Bank and the World Health Organization. 2014. Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Scaling up Investment Plan 2015–2024.

4 Knowles, James and Gayatri Koolwal. 2017. "Gender Issues in CRVS and Access to Adult Identity Documentation." Data2X.

5 Ibid.

6 WHO. "Civil Registration and Vital Statistics." <http://www.emro.who.int/civil-registration-statistics/assessment/crvs-assessments.html>

7 Get Everyone in the Picture. 2017. "The role of research in strengthening CRVS systems." ESCAP.