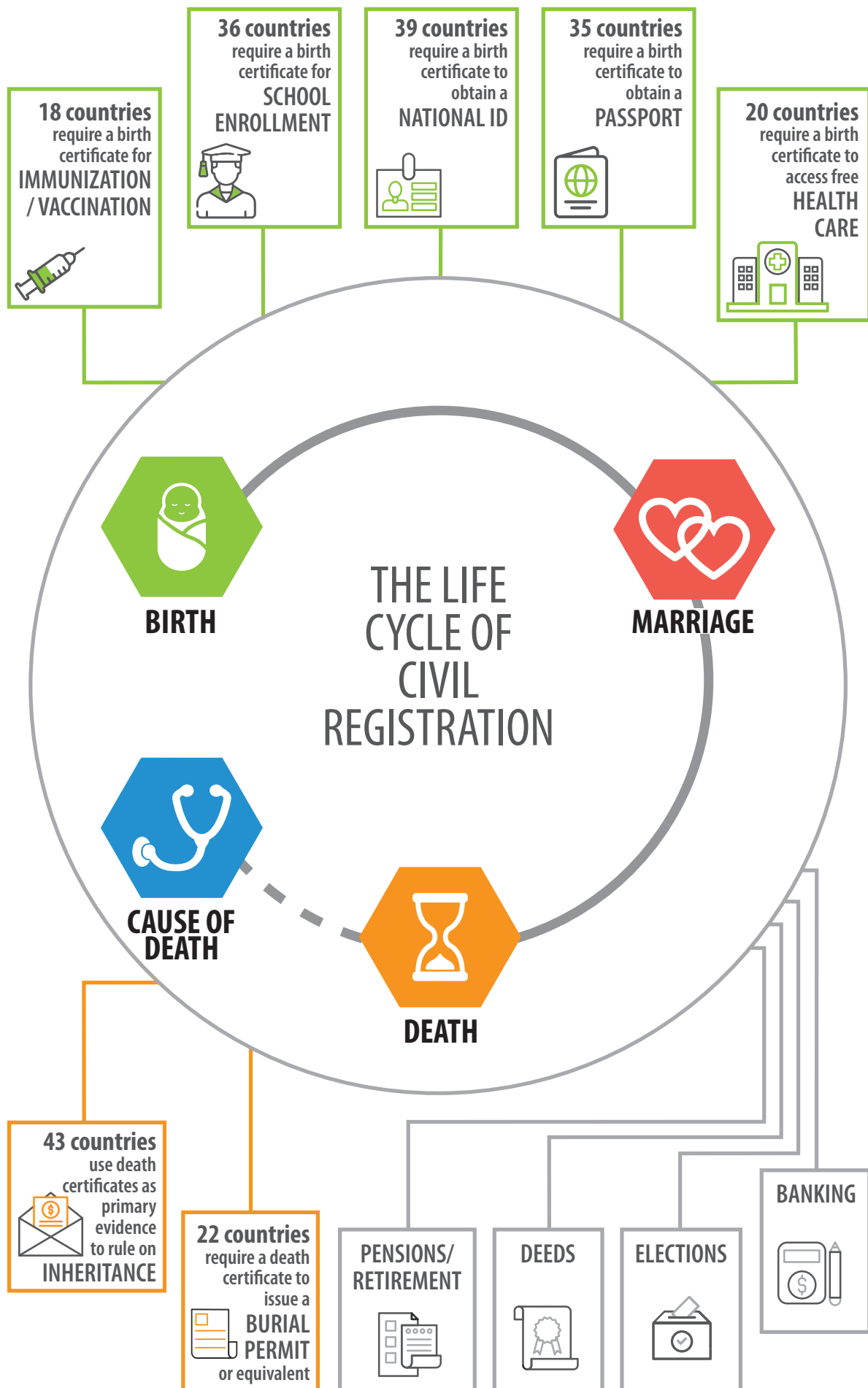


Overview



Civil registration is closely connected to a person's legal identity. Birth registration provides an official and permanent recognition of a child's existence. Later in life, the proof of legal identity provided by the official birth certificate enables individuals to exercise their rights and access services. At the end of life, the death certificate represents a final and permanent record of the fact of death, which next of kin need to manage the legal or financial consequences of death. Registration records can also be harnessed for vital statistics on births, deaths, including on causes of deaths, and marriages. These statistics are critical to design, implement and monitor public policies, and to monitor the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

There is strong commitment to civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific with the Ministerial Declaration to "Get Every One in the Picture" adopted in 2014. In the Ministerial Declaration, governments proclaimed the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, 2015–2024. The Decade gives a clear timeframe for realizing their shared vision that all people in Asia and the Pacific will benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems facilitating the realization of their rights and supporting good governance, health and development. They also endorsed the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific to accelerate and focus efforts to achieve the shared vision. Acting upon their commitment to implement the Regional Action Framework, member States and associate members have improved their CRVS systems and strived to realize their shared vision.



Number of countries out of the 44 countries that responded to the midterm questionnaire

This report presents an overview of the progress countries have made towards the three goals of the Regional Action Framework (universal civil registration, provision of legal documentation, and vital statistics from civil registration) and the 15 nationally set targets supporting them (see Box 1). The report also describes activities conducted by countries to improve their systems and showcases their success stories. It is based on reports submitted by 45 member States and associate members at the midpoint of the Decade in 2019–2020, and it will be a basis for the discussions at the Second Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific, which will be convened in November 2021.

The targets of the Regional Action Framework represent the range of areas covered by CRVS and the priorities countries identified in 2014. Targets were endorsed on birth registration and the issuance of a

birth certificate, death registration and the issuance of a death certificate, the recording of causes of death and the quality of the information collected, and finally the use of this information for vital statistics. Figure I shows the action status for key targets of the Regional Action Framework under the four above-mentioned categories. It indicates a contrasting picture of achievements and needs across targets. Targets on vital statistics, which are dependent on improvements in civil registration, all require action. Nevertheless, even 'actioned' targets may require efforts in some countries which were not able to provide data for them.

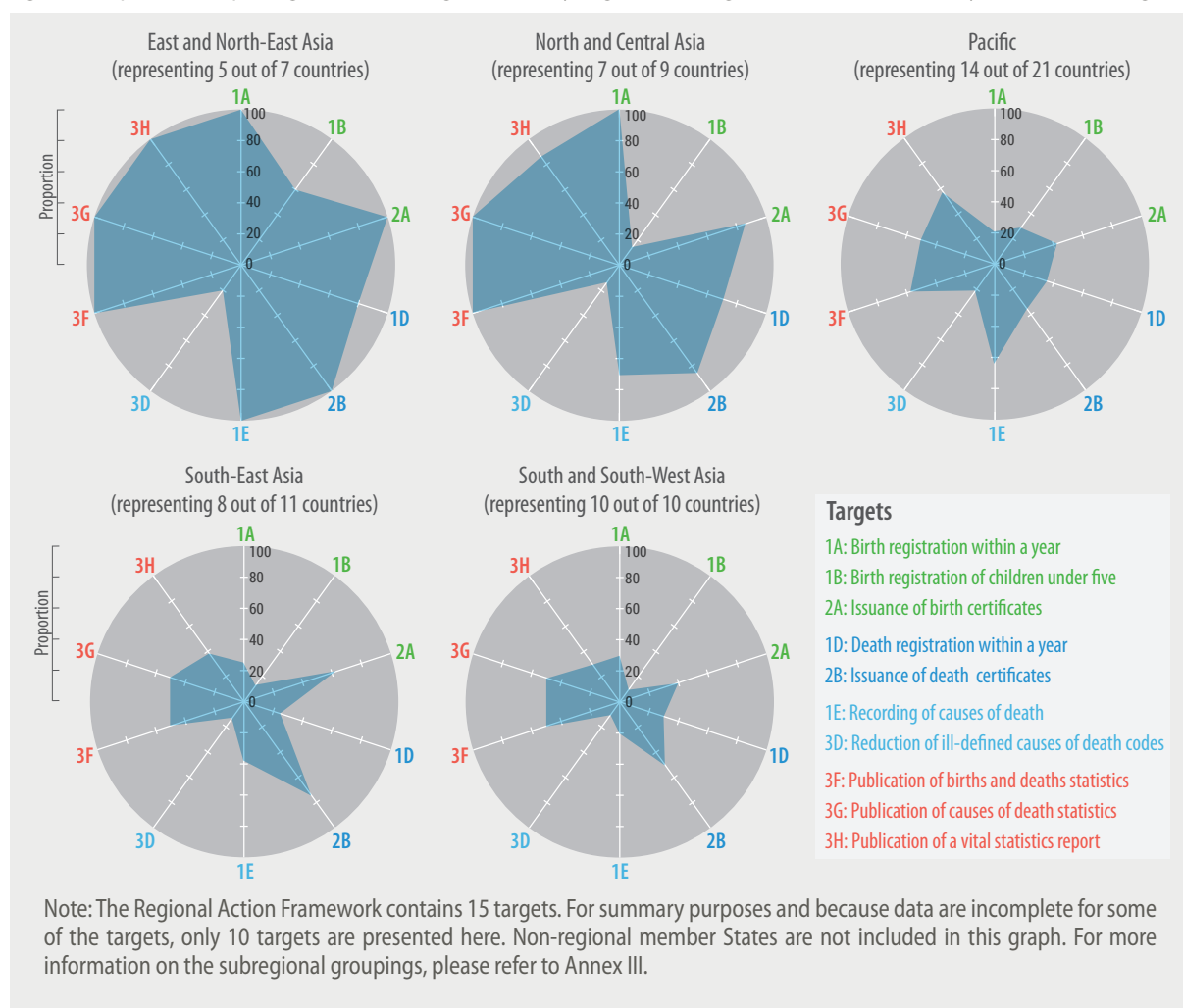
The level of development of CRVS systems varies greatly in Asia and the Pacific. The bird's-eye view of CRVS displayed in Figure II highlights major differences in the achievements of the targets of the Regional Action Framework in the five Asia-Pacific subregions. Most of the countries in East and

Figure I: Status of action for key targets of the Regional Action Framework at the midterm of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade

| Areas | Actioned | Being actioned | Need for action |
|---|----------|----------------|-----------------|
| Birth registration | 2A | 1A 1B | |
| Death registration | 2B | 1D | |
| Cause of death recording | 1E | | 3D |
| Vital statistics | | | 3F 3G 3H |
| Targets 1A: Birth registration within 1 year 1B: Birth registration for children under five 2A: Issuance of birth certificate 1D: Death registration within 1 year 2B: Issuance of death certificate 1E: Recording of causes of death by the health sector 3D: Reduction of ill-defined causes of death codes 3F: Publication of births and deaths statistics 3G: Publication of causes of death statistics 3H: Publication of a vital statistics report | | | |

Note: The Regional Action Framework contains 15 targets. For summary purposes and because data are incomplete for some of the targets, only 10 of them are presented here. The classification of targets was based on the trends showed by country reporting data between the baseline and midterm years: if fewer than 1 in 10 countries showed stagnation or regression, the target was considered 'Actioned'. If fewer than 1 in 3 countries were in the same situation, it was considered 'Being actioned'. If more than 1 in 3, it was considered 'Need for action'. More details on how progress was assessed are provided in the notes to Figure III and Figure VIII and in technical report (<https://getinthepicture.org/resource/technical-report-crvs-decade-midterm-report>).

Figure II: Proportion of reporting countries having achieved key targets of the Regional Action Framework, by Asia-Pacific subregions



North-East Asia and North and Central Asia benefit from well-functioning CRVS systems as almost all births and deaths are registered and registration records are used for vital statistics. The situation in the Pacific, South-East Asia and South and South-West Asia is vastly different, where many countries have weaker systems and progress is still needed to achieve the vision of universal and responsive CRVS systems by the end of the Decade. Although these differences are long-standing, they are decreasing over time.

Encouraging trends are visible in the region. First, the percentage of births registered, also called birth registration completeness, is rapidly increasing in countries which had low birth registration rates at the beginning of the Decade. This is true for all subregions. For example, from 2014 to 2018, birth registration completeness increased from 40 to 66 per cent in Cambodia. Other countries

such as Afghanistan and Fiji also made significant progress over the same period, increasing from 32 to 46 per cent and 64 to 72 per cent, respectively (see figure V, p.17). These countries are closing the gap with the 26 countries that are already registering more than 90 per cent of their births.

As a result, the number of children under five years old in Asia and the Pacific whose birth was never registered decreased from 135 million in 2012 to 64 million in 2019.¹ Out of the 64 million unregistered children in the region, about 50 million of them live in South and South-West Asia, and they represent 27 per cent of all children under five. The Pacific subregion has the highest percentage of children under five not registered (30 per cent). Nevertheless, even for countries with high birth registration completeness, it is not

1 UNICEF (2019). *Birth Registration for Every Child by 2030: Are we on track?* Available at www.unicef.org/media/62981/file/Birth-registration-for-every-child-by-2030.pdf.

clear if they have truly achieved universal registration and even one unregistered birth is one too many.

The registration of deaths followed the same trend as the registration of births, with countries from the Pacific, South-East Asia and South and South-West Asia that had low death registration completeness at the beginning of the Decade catching up with countries that already achieved high registration completeness. From 2014 to 2018 Fiji improved the percentage of deaths registered from 73 to 88 per cent while Lao People's Democratic Republic improved from 33 to 42 per cent. Nevertheless, in many countries, death registration is still less common than birth registration. This can be partially explained by fewer incentives to register deaths.

Another reason for the low completeness of death registration in the region is that many deaths take place outside of health facilities or without the attendance of a medical practitioner. These deaths are often not recorded by the health sector and thus do not have a medically certified cause of death. Moreover, six countries reported lacking legislation stating the cause of death must be medically certified. A third of all deaths taking place in 33 countries in the region (those that provided midterm reports) have a medically certified cause of death. For the other deaths, information on the cause can be partially obtained using verbal autopsy on a sample of the deaths without a medically certified cause of death. Verbal autopsy involves interviewing persons familiar with the deceased to determine the likely cause of death. This is currently used by 13 countries, and more are planning to do so by the end of the Decade.

The provision of a medical certificate of cause of death alone does not mean the information available on the certificate is sufficient to accurately classify the cause of death. The lack of training for medical professionals is one reason for this. Among the countries that provided midterm reports, 17 countries did not have any regular training for doctors or coroners

on medical certification of cause of death. Further, 22 countries did not have regular training provided on cause of death coding (necessary to enable statistical use), and nine of those countries did not have ad hoc training either. Figure II shows that countries in all subregions have yet to achieve their targets on reducing the use of ill-defined codes for causes of death, although some have more ambitious targets than others. This is important for the many countries in the region where a medically certified cause of death is recorded for few deaths and causes of death are often ill-defined. The implications of this are significant as this information is key to understanding mortality in the region, including the impact of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

As civil registration improves, more countries can use it for vital statistics. In Asia and the Pacific, 32 countries reported that they are already producing vital statistics based on civil registration. Nevertheless, 17 countries have yet to do so, and they are all located in South and South-West Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific. Furthermore, dissemination practices have also changed recently in many countries. The Regional Action Framework emphasizes annual releases of vital statistics, however, many countries are going further and releasing key vital statistics such as the number of births or deaths on a quarterly or monthly basis. This trend towards more timely releases took on new relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic which created a need for almost instant information on mortality.

This report provides an overview of progress made by countries and showcases their success stories. Nevertheless, as the region starts the second half of the Decade, it is obvious that universal registration has yet to be achieved and some people have been left behind. Moreover, the quality of the information on deaths and their causes must be improved for the region to be prepared for future health crises. This report therefore highlights where progress is still needed and possible solutions to overcome the challenges to *getting every one in the picture*.



Encouraging trends are visible in the region. Birth registration completeness is rapidly increasing in countries which had low birth registration rates at the beginning of the Decade. As a result, the number of children under five years old in Asia and the Pacific whose birth was never registered decreased from 135 million in 2012 to 64 million in 2019.