

CSO Joint Statement on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific

Excellencies, colleagues, ladies, and gentlemen,

It has been seven years since we were gathered for the First Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics. Since 2014, there have been developments and improvements on CRVS in the region as countries have started adapting the Regional Action Framework into their national strategies.

In 2019, 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. This is a result of the rapidly increasing birth registration completeness in several countries. But although there were encouraging results, we still see key areas to improve on as we look forward to the end of the CRVS Decade in 2024.

In the context of the current realities that we face because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an increasing need for every person to be recognized, to be counted and to be included. CRVS provides countries with records needed for vaccine rollout. It provides governments with the information needed to account for the entire population and their needs.

Today, I speak on behalf of over eighty representatives of 52 civil society organizations who participated in the Regional Forum of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific. It is my honor to represent these CSOs and share our messages to the governments present here today.

As CSOs, we recognize the crucial role we can play in advocating for better CRVS systems in our respective countries and in the region. We believe that the collective action and coordination of governments, development partners, private sector and civil society are needed to ensure that everyone is counted and that no one is left behind.

Acknowledging the obligation of States to ensure birth registration of its citizens without prejudice or discrimination and reasserting everyone's right to recognition as a person before the law, the delegates of the Regional Forum Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific call for:

The Reaffirmation of the Commitment of Governments to work on improving national CRVS systems as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 Agenda. States must acknowledge that CRVS is a basis of good governance of a country and its resources,

towards progress and development without compromising on personal safety, well-being and development of its citizens.

The Creation of Simple and Accessible Civil Registration Processes to ensure that all citizens are reached and provided access to civil registration services. Capacity must be strengthened at both national and subnational levels of governance to guarantee that everyone, including marginalized sectors from geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities can access CRVS procedures. Wherever possible, we also call for removing or minimizing fees required to obtain records and certificates.

- CRVS systems must be understandable and accessible to everyone, regardless of their physical and economic abilities, language, race, age, gender and conditions of vulnerability (e.g. refugees, migrants, stateless, persons/children with disabilities)
- Governments must build the capacity of personnel working on CRVS in providing people-friendly services and innovating new processes based on the needs of the population
- Review of current practices to improve coordination within governments and streamline processes in the bureaucracy for better execution
- Intergovernmental cooperation to create CRVS processes that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of stateless persons, refugees, and migrants

Child-Rights Responsive CRVS Systems, which secures the rights of children to legal identity and provides them access to education, healthcare, and other public services

- Children must be included in consultations for improving CRVS processes. Channels for dialogue and communications with the direct participation of children must be created
- Governments must form a body that focuses on ensuring that child rights are considered in the legislation, implementation, and monitoring of CRVS policies and procedures
- Governments must continuously strive to have all members of their population considered in their evidence-based programming and budgeting in addressing child rights issues

Partnership with CSOs in CRVS advocacy work and implementation. Governments should tap CSOs in bringing CRVS closer to the public through information dissemination and education campaigns. CSOs must also be involved in the preparation and coordination of national and local CRVS plans.

- Include CSOs and the sectors and communities they represent in the design and conduct of consultations aimed at improving CRVS systems
- Provide spaces for CSOs to engage governments in meaningful dialogues and collaborate for better civil registration practices

As we support governments in the realization of inclusive, responsive, and effective CRVS systems in the region, we, CSOs in the Asia and the Pacific commit to:

Advocate for improvements in CRVS policies and procedures. We will participate in the development, review, and risk analysis of innovations that will amplify the link between CRVS to every individual's basic human rights.

Lead advocacy campaigns to raise awareness and reach disenfranchised groups and communities on the importance of CRVS, and how to access civil registration services. We will ensure that the communities and sectors we represent and work with are aware of their rights and the procedures for obtaining civil registration records.

Conduct research on CRVS and share the results to governments, to surface how CRVS practices can facilitate the upliftment of the quality of lives of different communities and sectors. We will also fulfill responsibilities as CSOs to provide checks and balances to ensure there are no discriminatory practices in place.

Collaborate with different stakeholders in mainstreaming rights-based approaches to ensuring inclusivity of CRVS systems, which will lead to the public's better understanding of policies and easier access to services.

As we look forward to a future where no one is left behind, we, the CSOs in Asia and the Pacific, pledge to work alongside governments, communities, the private sector and other stakeholders to improve Civil Registration and Vital Statistics practices in our respective countries and in the region. With this in mind, we encourage governments to guarantee that CRVS systems and legal identification practices are inclusive, and that the process of attaining records is not exclusionary and discriminatory on anyone or any sector.

Governments must ensure due diligence in mitigating the potential risks that CRVS services may have on different individuals and sectors in their country. We must put a stop to cases where obtaining legal identity documents has led to more harm to individuals, especially stateless persons and refugees. To get everyone in the picture, all of us must have access to our own records and be able to fully exercise our human rights.

We are living in unprecedented times. More than ever, governments, development partners and civil society must work together to create a better future for all, where everyone is counted. Let's continue the great work that we have been doing and strive to ensure that by the end of the CRVS decade we achieve a comprehensive, inclusive and responsive CRVS system for everyone in the region.

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