

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

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Regional initiatives: civil registration and vital statistics**“Get Every One in the Picture”: Progress in strengthening
civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific****Note by the secretariat *****Summary*

The Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was established under the Committee on Statistics in September 2013 pursuant to Commission resolution 69/15. With its primary function being to provide strategic guidance on efforts to improve civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) in the Asia-Pacific region, the Regional Steering Group comprises high-level representatives of Governments and relevant development partners.

The present report provides an overview of the Regional Steering Group's activities from its establishment until the convening of the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which was held in Bangkok from 24 to 28 November 2014.

In the report, the need for the Committee to continue to play a leading role in the regional initiative to improve CRVS in Asia and the Pacific is stressed. The Committee is invited to provide further guidance on how this can be achieved, particularly with regard to how it can support the implementation of the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference.

In a separate document (E/ESCAP/CST(4)/5), the Committee will have before it a revised terms of reference for the Regional Steering Group, which was prepared by the Regional Steering Group and supported by the Ministerial Conference. The Committee may wish to recommend that the revised terms of reference be submitted to the Commission for possible endorsement at its seventy-first session, which is scheduled to be held in Bangkok from 25 to 29 May 2015.

* E/ESCAP/CST(4)/L.1.

** The present document was submitted late due to the need to include the issues raised during the latest discussions on the development agenda beyond 2015; in particular, the recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Statistics and Data for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and the Secretary General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development.

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Background.....	2
II. Terms of reference and establishment of the Regional Steering Group	3
III. Activities of the Regional Steering Group.....	4
A. First meeting	4
B. Supporting the Ministerial Conference	5
IV. Moving forward: implications for the Committee.....	6
V. Issues for consideration	7
Annex Members of the Regional Steering Group for CRVS in Asia and the Pacific	9

I. Background

1. The Committee on Statistics at its first session, which was held in 2009, noted the importance of improving civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific.¹ In response, the secretariat began working with development partners,² and hosted a regional forum in June 2010 with development partners and member States to develop the key elements of a regional programme for CRVS, which were subsequently endorsed by the Committee at its second session³ in December 2010. This momentum led to member States adopting resolution 67/12, in May 2011, in which the Executive Secretary was requested to convene a high-level regional meeting of relevant stakeholders to raise awareness and foster increased commitment to improving CRVS, an action that would chart a path for a regional CRVS initiative.

2. The High-level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was held in Bangkok on 10 and 11 December 2012. Convened by ESCAP and the World Health Organization and co-organized with 18 other development partners,⁴ the High-level

¹ See E/ESCAP/CST/10.

² The development partners involved were: Asian Development Bank; Australian Bureau of Statistics; United Nations Children's Fund; United Nations Population Fund; University of Queensland Health Information Systems Knowledge Hub; and World Health Organization.

³ See E/ESCAP/CST(2)/9.

⁴ The co-organizers of the High-level Meeting were: Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women; Asian Development Bank; Australian Bureau of Statistics; Government of Thailand (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Public Health, and National Statistical Office); Health Metrics Network; International Organization for Migration Asia and Pacific Regional Office; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century; Plan International; Secretariat of the Pacific Community; United Nations Statistics Division; United Nations Children's Fund; United Nations Development Programme Asia-Pacific Regional Centre; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Bangkok Office; UN-Women; United Nations Population Fund; and University of Queensland Health Information Systems Knowledge Hub.

Meeting brought together representatives from the civil registration, health and statistics sectors of 43 member States and 23 development partners. Participants at the High-level Meeting reached consensus on a regional strategic plan and recommended the following: the convening of an intergovernmental ministerial conference in order to gain political commitment for further action as part of the regional initiative and the establishment of a regional steering group to provide strategic guidance moving forward. The Committee on Statistics at its third session, which was held in Bangkok from 12 to 14 December 2012, strongly endorsed the regional strategic plan, strongly recommended the convening of a meeting of relevant ministers and development partners and decided to establish a steering group to guide the implementation of the regional strategic plan.

3. Member States endorsed the outcomes of the High-level Meeting through Commission resolution 69/15 in May 2013 by requesting the Executive Secretary to convene a ministerial conference on civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific in 2014 and to establish the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, initially under the auspices of the Committee on Statistics.

4. Under the theme “Get every one in the picture”, the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was convened in Bangkok from 24 to 28 November 2014 by ESCAP and co-organized with seven other development partners⁵ in collaboration with six other organizations.⁶ The Conference benefited from extensive consultations with member States and development partners, including through the dissemination of the draft outcome documents to member States in April 2014 and a civil society forum and an intergovernmental regional preparatory meeting for member States, both of which were held in August 2014. This was a process designed and guided by the Regional Steering Group. As the first-ever intergovernmental and ministerial-level meeting on CRVS in the region, the Conference was an historic occasion and reached significant outcomes, including the adoption of the most comprehensive outcome document on CRVS agreed at the international level in the form of a ministerial declaration, a regional action framework to implement the ministerial declaration, and the proclamation of 2015-2024 as the Asia-Pacific CRVS Decade. In total, 44 member States were represented at the Conference, including 20 at the ministerial-level, and 17 international and non-governmental organizations participated as observers.⁷

II. Terms of reference and establishment of the Regional Steering Group

5. Following the adoption of Commission resolution 69/15 in May 2013, the Bureau of the Committee endorsed the terms of reference for the Regional

⁵ The co-organizers of the Ministerial Conference were: United Nations Children’s Fund; United Nations Development Programme; United Nations Population Fund; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; World Health Organization; Asian Development Bank; and Plan International.

⁶ The other organizations involved were: Asia Pacific Observatory on Health Systems and Policies; Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health; Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century; Secretariat of the Pacific Community; World Bank Group; and World Vision International.

⁷ More information about the Ministerial Conference is available at www.getinthepicture.org/.

Steering Group in June 2014.⁸ The Regional Steering Group initially reports to the Committee. The terms of reference, however, mandated it to consider and propose a more appropriate governance structure for facilitating the necessary engagement with relevant CRVS stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific and at the international level, particularly those from the civil registration, planning and health sectors.

6. The Executive Secretary and Chair of the Committee issued a joint call for nominations to the Regional Steering Group from member and associate members by official letter to Seats of Government in July 2013. By September 2013, 71 nominations were received from 36 members and associate members with a good sectoral balance (see below for the breakdown) and six from development partners, representing the greatest response ever received by the Statistics Division for such a call for nominations.

Nominations received for the Regional Steering Group

	Civil registration	Statistics	Health	Total
South-East Asia	4	7	5	16
North and Central Asia	5	4	3	12
South and South-West Asia	8	6	6	20
East and North-East Asia	1	3	1	5
Pacific	6	5	6	17
Non-regional members	-	-	1	1
Total	24	25	22	71

7. In September 2013, the Bureau met to decide on the final membership of the Regional Steering Group. Considering the overwhelming response by members and associate members and the need for the Regional Steering Group to be relatively limited in size to function effectively, the Bureau opted to limit membership to 26 members (including representatives of 19 members and associate members and 6 development partners and the Chair of the Committee), with the remaining nominations forming a regional expert network that would act as a body for broader consultations through electronic means as and when needed.

8. The list of members of the Regional Steering Group, as it was formed in September 2013, is available in the annex

III. Activities of the Regional Steering Group

A. First meeting

9. The Regional Steering Group held its first meeting, which was open to observers from the regional expert network, in Bangkok from 9 to 11 December 2013. Importantly, consensus was reached by the Regional Steering Group on an approach for moving forward with preparations for the

⁸ The terms of reference for the Regional Steering Group are available from www.unescap.org/resources/terms-reference-regional-steering-group-civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-asia-and.

Ministerial Conference, particularly on the objectives of the event and its preparatory process and on the features of the draft ministerial declaration and regional action framework.⁹

10. Dr. Neil Sharma, Minister of Health, Fiji, was elected Chair of the Regional Steering Group. Mr. Chandramouli Chandrasekaran, Registrar-General and Census Commissioner of India, Mr. Peter Harper, Deputy Australian Statistician, and Dr. Enrique Tayag, Assistant Health Secretary, the Philippines, were each elected as Vice-Chairs.

11. The key outcomes of the first meeting, were as follows:

(a) The Regional Steering Group determined its vision to be that: “all people in Asia and the Pacific benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitate their rights, and support good governance and development”;

(b) In pursuance of this vision, the Regional Steering Group made five strategic recommendations:

(i) The years 2015 to 2024 be declared the “CRVS Decade” to galvanize governments and development partners to take collective action to achieve the Regional Steering Group’s vision;

(ii) A target of “universal civil registration and high quality vital statistics” be included in the development agenda beyond 2015;

(iii) The 2014 Asian and Pacific intergovernmental ministerial meeting on CRVS build on current momentum for improving national CRVS systems by ensuring commitment for a regional action framework;

(iv) Resources for countries and regional support mechanisms, both from within countries and from development partners, need to be allocated to support the improvement of national CRVS systems;

(v) An accountability and monitoring framework for the Regional Strategic Plan for the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific be developed;

(c) The Regional Steering Group agreed that the secretariat should explore how the Group in the longer term could report directly to the Commission rather than to the Committee on Statistics.

B. Supporting the Ministerial Conference

12. To carry out its work to guide and support preparations for the Ministerial Conference, the Regional Steering Group established two technical subgroups to develop the goals and targets and the action areas of the regional action framework. During January and February 2014, the two subgroups met electronically. Based on their discussions, the secretariat prepared a zero draft regional action framework that was approved by the Regional Steering Group in March 2014 and subsequently distributed to Seats of Government for feedback from member States and associate members in April 2014. By June 2014, 12 submissions were received and a preliminary draft regional action framework, taking into account the feedback received, was approved by the Regional Steering Group for submission to the Regional

⁹ The report of the first meeting of the Regional Steering Group is available from www.unescap.org/resources/meeting-report-first-meeting-regional-steering-group-civil-registration-and-vital.

Preparatory Meeting for the Ministerial Conference on CRVS for negotiation. During May and June 2014, the Regional Steering Group prepared and approved the preliminary draft ministerial declaration, which also was to be submitted for negotiation at the Regional Preparatory Meeting.

13. The three Vice-Chairs of the Regional Steering Group were elected as officers of the Regional Preparatory Meeting, held in August 2014. In the absence of the Dr. Sharma (Chair of the Regional Steering Group), Mr. Chandrasekaran was elected Chair of the Regional Preparatory Meeting. Mr. Jeff Montgomery, Registrar-General, New Zealand and a member of the Regional Steering Group was elected as rapporteur. The Regional Preparatory Meeting reviewed the preliminary draft outcome documents and recommended their submission to the Ministerial Conference, while entrusting the Regional Steering Group to incorporate general comments to the text of the documents and ensure that the documents were technically sound. The Regional Steering Group undertook further electronic consultations on those draft documents and approved a draft revised terms of reference for submission to the Ministerial Conference.

14. As with the Regional Preparatory Meeting, the Vice Chairs and Mr. Montgomery were elected to serve as officers for the senior officials segment of the Ministerial Conference. Deliberations on the draft outcome documents went smoothly, with a number of delegations, in their country statements, commending the Regional Steering Group for developing high quality draft documents and overseeing a comprehensive and successful consultation process. The Ministerial Conference also expressed support for the revised terms of reference for the Regional Steering Group.¹⁰

IV. Moving forward: implications for the Committee

15. Discussions to develop a regional initiative to improve CRVS in Asia and the Pacific began in 2009 at the first session of the Committee on Statistics. This is an indication of the substantial challenges faced by national statistical systems, even in developed countries, to produce accurate, complete and timely vital statistics, which are a critical decision-making tool for all areas of public policy. It is worth noting that the regional initiative has evolved to focus on the administrative data from civil registration as the preferred source of vital statistics, and promoting CRVS systems as key components of public administration. This evolution has been in response to the outcomes of various meetings over the last five years, and has been solidified by the ministerial declaration from the Ministerial Conference:

Emphasizing that, when universal, civil registration is the best source of vital statistics, and that, while household surveys have considerable value, they cannot replicate the strengths of civil registration as a data source, namely universality in coverage, permanence, continuity, archiving of records and cost-effectiveness over time, and are thus not a long-term substitute for civil registration and vital statistics systems¹⁰

16. Although in many countries this holistic approach may shift national leadership for CRVS away from national statistical offices to ministries of planning, ministries responsible for civil registration or ministries of health, the regional initiative is intended to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of designing, developing and maintaining CRVS systems that fully

¹⁰ E/ESCAP/MCCRVS/4.

utilize the potential for producing vital statistics. This, consequently, ensures a key role for national statistical offices, as they will potentially provide technical expertise and guidance to other stakeholders and thus should contribute to the designing of national improvement plans and be members of national coordination committees. Importantly, national statistical offices must be involved in monitoring the performance and coverage of the CRVS system, including supporting and possibly leading the reporting on progress in achieving the goals and targets of the regional action framework. It is absolutely critical for the success and sustainability of any CRVS improvement activities that national statistical offices have a central role in those activities, and that CRVS systems are closely linked with national statistical systems.

17. In recognition of the above, goal three of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which was endorsed by the Ministerial Conference, is that, “accurate, complete and timely vital statistics (including on causes of death) are produced based on registration records and are disseminated”. Cognizant of the fact that countries are at different stages of preparedness to move towards civil registration and other administrative records as the primary sources of vital statistics, the Regional Action Framework invites countries to set their own target year for when this can be achieved for different vital statistics, such as births, deaths and causes of death, during the Asian and Pacific CRVS Decade, 2015-2024. Furthermore, the Regional Action Framework addresses statistical aspects of CRVS systems in each of its seven action areas, with action area G focusing exclusively on production, dissemination and use of vital statistics.¹⁰

18. In terms of oversight for the Regional Steering Group, reporting directly to the Commission, as proposed by the draft revised terms of reference, would allow for the multisectorial engagement, which is required for ensuring comprehensive, coordinated and concerted action at national and international levels. Considering that many stakeholders are responsible for and benefit from CRVS systems, leadership from ministries of planning or offices of the head of government that can effectively oversee national strategies involving numerous ministries, should be encouraged and reflected in the Regional Steering Group as the governance mechanism for the regional initiative.

19. Although the regional initiative encompasses more than just statistics development, the Committee should maintain an integral role in guiding national and regional activities to ensure that efforts result in the development of CRVS systems that take full advantage of the statistical potential of the continuous recording of vital events, and to facilitate regional cooperation and knowledge exchange to build statistical capacities in CRVS systems. The Committee should contribute to relevant global efforts, such as initiatives to improve information and accountability for women’s and children’s health, and address the monitoring demands of the development agenda beyond 2015, which are expected to require substantial efforts in order to improve the quality of vital statistics, including as per capita measurements and mortality statistics. In addition, it is crucial that the regional CRVS initiative remains aligned and complimentary to other regional programmes of the Committee, particularly those pertaining to population and social statistics and gender statistics.

V. Issues for consideration

20. The Committee may wish to provide guidance on the implementation of the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference, including:

(a) How national statistical offices can maintain a central role in national CRVS improvement activities;

(b) How national statistical offices can integrate the implementation of the Regional Action Framework, including achievement of its statistics targets, in national statistical development plans, such as national strategies for the development of statistics;

(c) How the Committee can continue to promote a holistic approach to improving CRVS systems at national and regional levels and facilitate regional cooperation to build statistical capacities in national CRVS systems.

21. The Committee is invited to consider and recommend that the draft revised terms of reference of the Regional Steering Group for CRVS (as contained in E/ESCAP/CST(4)/5) be submitted for endorsement by the Commission at its seventy-first session.

Annex

Members of the Regional Steering Group for CRVS in Asia and the Pacific

Name and title	Country/Organization
<i>Elected as Chair:</i> Dr. Neil Sharma, Minister, Ministry of Health	Fiji
<i>Elected as Vice Chair:</i> Mr. Chandramouli Chandrasekaran, Registrar-General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs	India
<i>Elected as Vice Chair:</i> Mr. Peter Harper, Deputy Australian Statistician, Australian Bureau of Statistics	Australia
<i>Elected as Vice Chair:</i> Dr. Enrique Tayag, Assistant Secretary, Department of Health	Philippines
Mr. Bakhyt Abishev, Chairman, Registration Service and Legal Assistance Committee, Ministry of Justice	Kazakhstan
Ms. Diana Andreasyan, Head, Health System Performance and Human Resource Assessment Department, National Health Information Analytical Centre, National Institute of Health, Ministry of Health	Armenia
Mr. Abul Kalam Azad, Additional Director-General (Planning and Development), Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare	Bangladesh
Mr. Mohd. Yazid bin Ramli, Deputy Director-General (Operations), National Registration Department, Ministry of Home Affairs	Malaysia
Mr. Douglas Brooks, Assistant Chief Economist	Asian Development Bank
Ms. Karen Carter, Vital Statistics/Civil Registration Specialist, Statistics for Development Division, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (Co-Chair of the Brisbane Accord Group)	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
Ms. Thirakha Chanthalanouvong, Deputy Director-General, Department of Social Statistics, Lao Statistics Bureau	Lao People's Democratic Republic
Ms. Jyotsna Chikersal, Regional Advisor, Health Situation and Trend Assessment	World Health Organization South-East Asia Regional Office
Ms. Carmelita Ericta, Administrator and Civil Registrar General, National Statistics Office	Philippines
Subsequently replaced by: Ms. Lisa Grace Bersales, National Statistician and Civil Registrar General, Philippine Statistics Authority, Philippines (Chair of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics)	

Name and title	Country/Organization
Ms. Claudine Henry-Anguna, Registrar of the High Court, Ministry of Justice	Cook Islands
Ms. Ying Hu, Deputy Counsel, Department of Population and Employment Statistics, National Bureau of Statistics	China
Mr. Simil Johnson Youse, Government Statistician, National Statistics Office	Vanuatu
Mr. Khalid Khan, Director-General, National Database and Registration Authority	Pakistan
Mr. Mark Landry, Team Leader, Health Information, Evidence and Research	World Health Organization Western Pacific Regional Office
Mr. Jeff Montgomery, Registrar-General, Births, Deaths and Marriages, Department of Internal Affairs	New Zealand
Ms. Svetlana Nikitina, Director, Division for Population and Healthcare Statistics, Federal State Statistics Service	Russian Federation
Mr. Sam Notzon, Director, International Statistics Program, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	United States
Mr. Seung-II Shin, Director, Statistics Division, Ministry of Health and Welfare	Republic of Korea
Ms. Diane Swales, Regional Advisor for Child Protection Replaced by: Mr. Stephen Blight, Regional Advisor for Child Protection	UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office
Mr. Battsai Tseden-Ochiz, Head, Civil Registration and Statistics Division, General Authority for State Registration	Mongolia
Mr. Kuenga Tshering, Director General, National Statistics Bureau	Bhutan
Ms. Ming Viado, Regional Universal Birth Registration Focal Point	Plan International Asia Regional Office