



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**Eightieth session**

Bangkok, 22–26 April 2024

Item 4 (j) of the provisional agenda*

Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific and issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission: statistics**Towards the realization of the regional vision for inclusive civil registration and vital statistics systems****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024) is aimed at creating a region where all people benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems. Since the beginning of the Decade, the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific has guided the implementation of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific with the aim of achieving the shared vision.

To facilitate preparations for the Third Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, to be held in June 2025, the Regional Steering Group, at its ninth meeting, held from 10 to 12 May 2023, made specific recommendations to member States, development partners and the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

The Regional Steering Group recommends that the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024) be extended to 2030, thereby aligning it with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also highlights the importance of the 2024 review of progress made, encouraging members and associate members of the Commission to provide inputs to the review. The review will be guided by the recommendations of the Regional Steering Group to further highlight the role of resilience, inclusivity and digitalization, as well as to place an increased focus on recording causes of death.

The Commission may wish to take note of the recommendations and provide further guidance to the secretariat and the Regional Steering Group for the achievement of the shared vision.

* ESCAP/80/1.

I. Background

1. At the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific held in Bangkok from 24 to 28 November 2014, members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) proclaimed the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024) and adopted both the Ministerial Declaration to “Get Every One in the Picture” in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific. Members and associate members proclaimed their shared vision that, by 2024, all people in Asia and the Pacific would benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitated the realization of their rights and supported good governance, health and development.

2. Since 2014, members and associate members have made significant progress towards achieving the goals and targets of the Regional Action Framework, as described in the midterm report on the Decade released by ESCAP in 2021.¹ The remaining challenges facing members and associate members in their efforts to achieve the vision of the Decade by 2024 were also identified in the midterm report.

3. At the Second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok and online from 16 to 19 November 2021, the ministers and representatives of members and associate members of ESCAP adopted the Ministerial Declaration on Building a More Resilient Future with Inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, in which they recognized the significant progress made by countries as reflected in the midterm report, recognized that additional actions still needed to be taken, proclaimed their continued commitment to their shared vision and recognized the need to accelerate efforts for improvements to achieve their shared goals.

4. In its resolution 78/4 on the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration, adopted on 27 May 2022, ESCAP requested the Executive Secretary to support the convening of a third ministerial conference on civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific to mark the conclusion of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024), as appropriate.

II. Summary of the discussions held during the ninth meeting of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific

5. The ninth meeting of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was held in Bangkok from 10 to 12 May 2023. The objectives of the meeting were to discuss progress made since the eighth meeting, prepare for the final review of the Decade, including deciding on themes and topics for country questionnaires, discuss the possibility of extending the Decade and decide on focus areas for future work.

6. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following members of ESCAP: Bangladesh, Fiji, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic

¹ *Getting Every One in the Picture: A Snapshot of Progress Midway through the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade* (United Nations publication, 2021).

of), Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation, Samoa, Sri Lanka and United States of America. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the following development partners: Pacific Community (on behalf of the Brisbane Accord Group), Plan International, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Vital Strategies and World Health Organization. Representatives of the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund participated as observers. The meeting was partially funded by the Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative.

A. Accelerating the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on Building a More Resilient Future with Inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

7. Members of the Regional Steering Group shared information on progress made in the implementation of the Regional Action Framework and then held a panel discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024). The panel was composed of representatives from the Pacific Community, the Philippine Statistics Authority, UNHCR, UNICEF and Vital Strategies.

8. Regional Steering Group members agreed that the Decade had boosted political commitments, brought relevant stakeholders together and helped relevant agencies and development partners to exercise their mandates. Members also noted that the Decade would have benefited from a stronger emphasis on aligning civil registration and vital statistics initiatives with efforts to leave no one behind, as millions of people in the region were still unregistered.

9. Members also discussed ways forward for the Decade, highlighting the need to maintain momentum, build upon achievements to address remaining challenges and ensure stronger monitoring and evaluation of civil registration and vital statistics systems.

10. Regional Steering Group members gave presentations and shared experiences on inequality assessment, digitalization and resilience, among other topics. Members also discussed the 2024 review of the Decade and options for extending the Decade beyond 2024.

1. Leveraging digitalization to improve civil registration and vital statistics

11. Members of the Regional Steering Group spoke about their experiences with digitalizing their civil registration and vital statistics. The representative of UNDP presented its initiative to support countries in digitalizing civil registration processes. While there were great benefits to digitalizing systems, members emphasized the importance of establishing a comprehensive civil registration system as a first and fundamental step towards providing a legal identity for all.

12. Aspects of digitalization that commonly presented challenges included digitalization at source (digitalizing or computerizing data entry), interoperability (digital exchange and use of data) and privacy and confidentiality of records.

13. Members noted the importance of digitalization in ensuring inclusive access to civil registration and a legal identity for all.

14. Data privacy was an issue of particular importance to members of the Regional Steering Group. Members highlighted that digitalization required increased efforts to protect personal data and uphold the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality and informed consent.

15. Members emphasized that key principles such as fit for purpose, geographical relevance, national and subnational governance arrangements, privacy and digital literacy must be central to digitalization efforts.

Recommendations

16. The Regional Steering Group called on members of the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership, a group of development partners engaged in improving civil registration and vital statistics systems across the region, to offer support for integrating digitalization into civil registration and vital statistics system improvement strategies and for strengthening the capacities of government officials to ensure such strategies were effectively implemented.

2. Spotlight on inequality assessments

17. Findings from the midterm review indicated that conducting an inequality assessment was the implementation step that the fewest members and associate members had completed. The secretariat updated the Regional Steering Group on the ongoing support provided to members and associate members for strengthening capacity for inequality assessments and demographic analysis. Experiences about support received from the secretariat for conducting inequality assessments were shared by representatives of Bangladesh, Fiji, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Samoa.

18. Members of the Regional Steering Group discussed the availability of data for inequality assessments, the relevance of inequality assessments for policy and practice, ways and means to improve demographic data skills, stakeholder engagement, incentives for birth and death registrations and qualitative inequality assessments.

19. Members emphasized the importance of inequality assessments in identifying population groups that may be left behind and in developing inclusive and resilient policies and initiatives in response. It was reiterated that because conducting an inequality assessment was an implementation step of the Regional Action Framework, members and associate members were committed to carrying one out.

Recommendations

20. Members of the Regional Steering Group urged members and associate members of ESCAP to leverage existing resources, such as national civil registration and vital statistics coordination mechanisms, to establish data-sharing arrangements and address challenges regarding data availability and data accessibility.

21. Members of the Regional Steering Group also encouraged members and associate members of ESCAP to strive for inclusion in statistical systems and account for social, cultural and geographic differences within and between population groups to ensure policies can reflect the needs of everyone.

22. Members of the Regional Steering Group urged members of the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership to offer support for improving the capacity of government officials to implement inequality assessments. Members of the Regional Steering Group urged members and associate members of ESCAP to utilize existing guidance and toolkits to implement quantitative² and qualitative³ inequality assessments. They also called on development partners to facilitate experience-sharing at the regional and subregional levels and to further refine and improve guidance and toolkits.

B. Reviewing progress on the implementation of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific

23. In its resolution 78/4, ESCAP decided to convene a third ministerial conference on civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific, in 2025, to conduct a final regional review of progress made in the implementation of the Regional Action Framework. The secretariat presented the process and timeline for the review to the Regional Steering Group.

24. The secretariat outlined the main elements of the review and reflected on lessons learned from the midterm review completed in 2019, which included providing a review of progress made by members and associate members towards achieving the goals, targets and implementation steps of the Regional Action Framework. The secretariat proposed including further information on Regional Action Framework action area activities carried out by members and associate members in the 2024 review.

25. Members of the Regional Steering Group discussed introducing new themes for the review, namely national identification, digitalization, marriage registration, resilience and universality. Members noted that, based on experience from the midterm review, questions on causes of death should be refined to be more process-centric in order to better capture progress on cause-of-death recording. Better differentiation between deaths occurring in health facilities and those occurring in communities and between deaths occurring in public health facilities and those occurring in private health facilities could improve the design of the section on causes of death in the review questionnaire.

26. Members highlighted the crucial role of national civil registration and vital statistics focal points in cooperating with the secretariat and coordinating responses from government agencies for the 2024 review questionnaire.

27. Members noted that the secretariat should underscore the responsibilities of national civil registration and vital statistics coordination mechanisms, at both technical and policy levels, in contributing to country responses to the questionnaire.

28. Members highlighted the importance of piloting the questionnaire with a sample group of ESCAP members and associate members before administering the questionnaire to all members and associate members in Asia and the Pacific. Members also noted the importance of engaging national civil

² ESCAP, “Guidelines for estimating completeness of civil registration of vital events” (Bangkok, 2022).

³ Jonathan Marskell and Renee Sorchik, *Bali Process Civil Registration Assessment Toolkit* (Bangkok, Bali Process, 2018); and Jonathan Marskell and Renee Sorchik, *Bali Process Toolkit for Inclusive Civil Registration* (Bangkok, Bali Process, 2023).

registration and vital statistics focal points and involving all relevant stakeholders.

Recommendations

29. Regional Steering Group members recommended that, for the 2024 review of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024), the secretariat should retain the majority of the review elements from the midterm review, namely the targets and implementation steps of the Regional Action Framework. Members also recommended including the seven action areas of the Regional Action Framework in the 2024 review, as well as adding two new themes: resilience and inclusivity.

30. Regional Steering Group members further recommended that members and associate members of ESCAP should be given an opportunity to review the data that they had submitted during the midterm review and provide an update to the secretariat when they submitted their responses to the 2024 review questionnaire.

31. Regional Steering Group members called on members of the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership to support the 2024 review at the national level, for example through training and workshops. Such support should ideally go beyond the 2024 reporting exercise and include guidance on conducting comprehensive national progress assessments and on establishing national civil registration and vital statistics coordination mechanisms.

32. Regional Steering Group members suggested that the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership prepare an overview of the support provided by development partners during the Decade for the Ministerial Conference to be held in 2025.

C. Options for a regional civil registration and vital statistics improvement framework beyond 2024

33. The members of the Regional Steering Group acknowledged the significant progress made by members and associate members of ESCAP towards achieving the goals and targets of the Regional Action Framework and recognized the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on efforts by members and associate members to implement their civil registration and vital statistics system improvement plans. Regional Steering Group members also highlighted the need to accelerate progress and maximize resource mobilization and utilization. Members noted the significant effort that had been required to obtain high-level commitments and resources to establish the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024) and emphasized the benefits of maintaining the strong momentum generated by the Regional Action Framework.

34. Members discussed the options for extending regional commitments on civil registration and vital statistics beyond the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024). Members were in favour of extending the Decade, including the related goals, targets and frameworks.

35. Extending the Decade would allow members and associate members of ESCAP to maintain momentum and incorporate lessons learned during the pandemic into their civil registration and vital statistics improvement efforts. Moreover, it would offer an opportunity to include efforts towards achieving the vision of inclusive civil registration and vital statistics systems in

preparations for a post-2030 agenda for sustainable development. The extension would also allow members and associate members of ESCAP to leverage resources dedicated to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and draw on relevant insights from preparations for a post-2030 agenda in order to guide potential future civil registration and vital statistics system improvement initiatives.

36. Members further emphasized the importance of the 2024 review in terms of providing necessary information for deciding on the future of the Decade. The 2024 review would provide updates on progress made, challenges faced and partnership opportunities at the national and regional levels.

Recommendations

37. Considering countries' rates of progress and the effects of the pandemic, the members of the Regional Steering Group recommended that the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024) be extended to 2030, thereby aligning it with the 2030 Agenda.

38. Members also recommended introducing resilience and inclusivity as two new themes for the extended Decade. Ensuring resilient and inclusive systems would support the achievement of the existing goals and targets of the Regional Action Framework.

39. Members noted the importance of accounting for context-specific factors, such as national and subnational governance arrangements, geographical challenges and sociocultural practices, in developing initiatives for inclusive and resilient civil registration and vital statistics systems, in alignment with the key principles of the Regional Action Framework. This would be particularly important for enabling access to civil registration and essential services for hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations, including people living in rural, remote, isolated or border areas, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, migrants, non-citizens, asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless persons, internally displaced persons, domestic workers, women, children, persons with disabilities, foundlings and persons without documentation.

III. Issues for consideration by the Commission

40. The Commission may wish to reaffirm its commitment to the vision that all people in Asia and the Pacific would benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems, facilitating the realization of their rights, supporting good governance, health and development and accelerating action to achieve the shared vision.

41. The Commission may also wish to take note of the recommendations of the Regional Steering Group and give further guidance to the secretariat and the Regional Steering Group for the achievement of the shared vision.