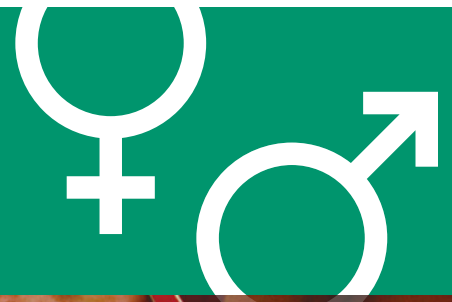




Knowledge Briefs on **Gender** and **CRVS**



Brief 3, Paper 1

Making CRVS Systems Work for Women and Children: A Country Perspective

Photo: Kenneth Pornillos / World Bank

KEY MESSAGES

- **Strengthening civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems starts at the country level.** Countries should make strong CRVS systems a priority, which can be achieved by integrating legal frameworks, adopting a clear governance structure, and ensuring sustainable financing. The Philippines has successfully maintained a strong CRVS system and has implemented laws that recognize the needs of special groups, particularly women and children. Although more work is needed, the Philippines' dedication to strengthening its CRVS system has realized important gains.
- **Strong CRVS systems require champions to help put plans into action.** Individual and institutional CRVS champions are special partners with strong voices who support a country's CRVS system. The Philippines' CRVS system has gained the support of many champions, but this support may depend on the country's political environment. CRVS stakeholders must encourage individual and institutional partners to become champions, including global partners who work actively within a country.
- **Strong CRVS systems support a country's development plan, provide vital statistics, and support the integrity of national identification systems.** The Philippine Statistics Authority is responsible for planning and maintaining civil registration and national identification systems. As a result, civil registration can be seamlessly integrated with vital statistics and national identification systems. In countries where these systems are maintained by different agencies, successful integration relies on strong, dynamic partnerships and processes.

- **Strong CRVS systems rely on solid working relationships between stakeholders through interagency committees and working groups.** National statistics offices must actively build relationships and connect with stakeholders. Coordination must be strong at all levels of a country's bureaucracy. The Philippine Statistics Authority's deputies, directors, technical staff, and officials at the subnational level must also work closely together.¹
- **Strong CRVS systems use quality assurance, data privacy, and security mechanisms to ensure their integrity and reputation.** The Philippine Statistics Authority has obtained ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Systems certification for its management, statistics, and civil registration processes. Further work is being done to ensure quality assurance of administrative data and registers.



Photo: Kenneth Pornillos / World Bank

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the international community has prioritized strengthening civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems to measure and monitor the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to address gender equality concerns ([Badiie and Appel 2018](#)). However, strengthening CRVS systems must begin at the country level. It is therefore critical to understand the country perspective and the challenges a country faces in building a CRVS system that addresses the needs of its vulnerable sectors. This knowledge brief highlights the Philippines' experience in making CRVS systems work for women and children.

On the ground in the Philippines

In November 2014, countries in Asia and the Pacific declared 2015–2024 the Asian Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade. The aim was to affirm that universal and responsive CRVS systems play a critical role in achieving inclusive, equitable, and people-centered development. Strong CRVS systems

- promote gender equality;
- equip women and girls with documents that prove family relations and civil status; and
- produce statistics that are disaggregated by age, sex, and geography ([United Nations 2015](#)).

The Philippines was among the first to formalize its commitment to this initiative through Presidential Proclamation 1106 ([Philippine Statistics Authority 2015](#)), which encourages “all agencies and instrumentalities of the National Government and local government units, including government-owned or

¹ The Philippine Statistics Authority was established in 2013 when the Philippines government introduced one statistical body to replace four agencies: Bureau of Agricultural Statistics, Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics, National Statistics Office, and National Statistical Coordination Board.

-controlled corporations, in consultation with the private sector, development partners and the citizenry” to actively support all activities and programs relevant to “Get Every *Pinoy* (Filipino) and *Pinay* (Filipina) in the Picture.” Furthermore, the Philippines served as vice-chair of the Regional Steering Group and remains a member of the group (United Nations 2015).

Baseline information from 2015 indicates that 135 million children under the age of 5 in the Asia Pacific region have not had their births registered. Further, 36 out of 47 members and associate members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific possessed CRVS systems that were categorized as “dysfunctional,” “weak,” or “functional but inadequate.” These results are drawn from self-assessments conducted in 2010 and 2013. The Regional Steering Group will complete a mid-decade assessment before the end of 2019 (United Nations 2019).

It’s important to note that the Philippines had committed to strengthening civil registration before the declaration of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade. In 1991, President Corazón Aquino implemented Proclamation 682 declaring the month of February Civil Registration Month (Philippine Statistics Authority 1991). Each year, this month-long celebration adopts a theme and features events throughout the country. In February 2019, the theme was “Inclusive and Responsive: Working Smarter Through Innovation.”

As countries play a critical role in building strong CRVS systems, the global community must find ways to support work at the country level.

BUILDING ON A SOLID FOUNDATION

To effectively address the needs of women and girls, CRVS systems require a strong legal framework and development plans, a clear governance structure, and access to sustainable financing. This means introducing laws and processes that specifically address the concerns of women and girls.

Legal framework

A strong CRVS system relies on clear legal frameworks and development plans. In the Philippines, the *Civil Registry Law of 1930* and the *Philippine Statistical Act of 2013* govern the CRVS system. Other laws include:

- Provisions for respecting the traditions and religious beliefs of Muslim Filipinos and Indigenous peoples;
- Guidelines for the use of a father’s surname by children of unmarried parents, granting benefits usually accorded only to legitimate children; and
- Correction of errors in civil registration documents to ensure the integrity of civil registration records.

The Office of the Civil Registrar General provides additional legal frameworks, such as Memorandum Circulars, to provide special services for pregnant women, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and overseas Filipino workers.

A CRVS system that provides for women and children cannot exist in isolation. For that reason, CRVS laws and circulars were crafted in conjunction with legal protection for women and children, including the Philippines’ *Magna Carta of Women*.

Clear governance

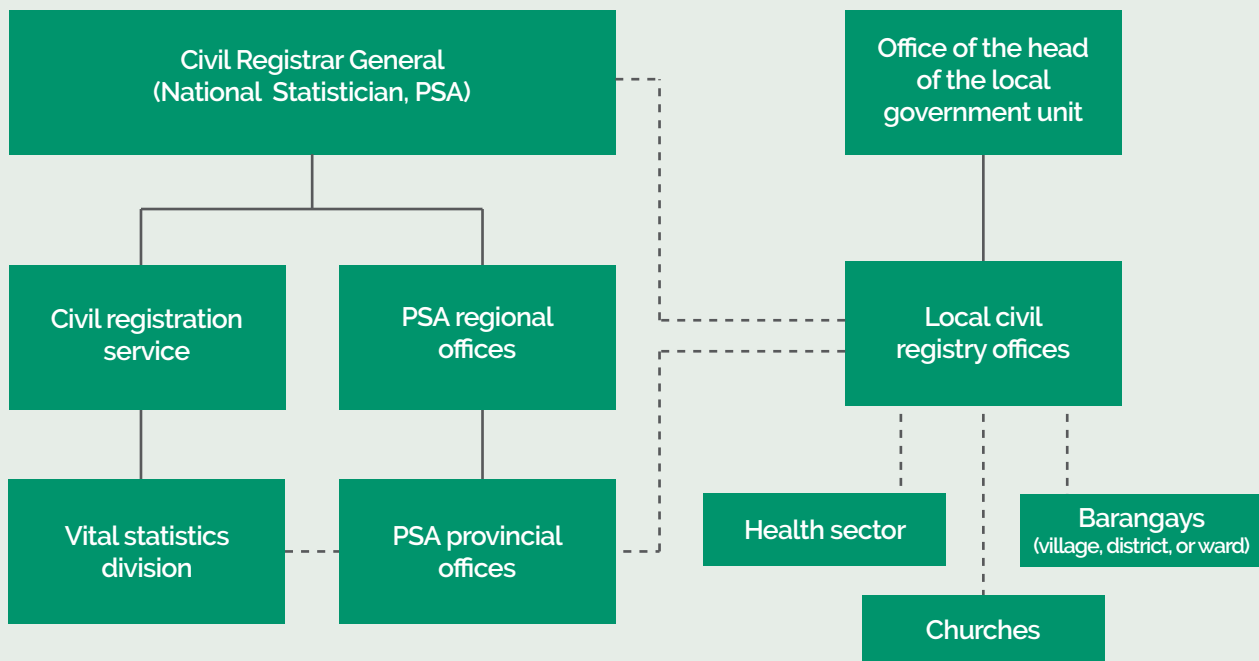
The Philippines' National Statistician is also the Civil Registrar General. The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) is responsible for managing civil registration processes and maintaining the central civil registration database. Civil registration begins at the local level with 1,637 local civil registrars who operate under a mayor. Local civil registrars submit all civil registry documents to the PSA. However, the Civil Registrar General is responsible for laws, policies, and technical guidelines related to CRVS.

The Philippines' CRVS system was created in the 1930s with the ratification of the *Law on Registry of Civil Status*, which made civil registration a mandatory public service. The *Philippine Statistical Act of 2013* made the PSA responsible for civil registry law and appointed the National Statistician as Civil Registrar General.

The *Local Government Code of 1991* provided fiscal autonomy to local governments. It devolved the delivery of most services, including embedded civil registration functions with local civil registrars. The code requires that local civil registrar offices compile and submit all registered civil registry documents in their municipalities within the first 10 days of the month following registration to the PSA. The Civil Registrar General provides technical oversight for all local civil registrar offices (Figure 1).

This decentralized structure reduces barriers and increases registration of vital events. This greatly benefits women and girls, who will have all stages of their lifecycle captured by the CRVS system.

Figure 1: The Philippines' CRVS system governance structure.



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)

Sustainable financing

Through the *General Appropriations Act*, the Philippines government provides the PSA funding for personnel, overhead expenses for the PSA's civil registration office, and physical and IT facilities. Frontline services, digitizing civil registry documents, and innovations to information technology in civil registration are done through a public-private partnership (PPP), referred to as the Civil Registry System Information Technology Public-Private Partnership Project Phase II (CRS-ITP2). The PSA successfully secured a private partner with the assistance of the Public Private Partnership Center of the Philippines in 2016.

The public-private partnership has enabled the PSA to innovate the CRVS system by

- digitizing civil registry documents;
- maintaining a central civil registration database that can be accessed by the PSA and its partners from anywhere in the country;
- adding channels to access documents online, by telephone, and at stand-alone kiosks; and
- delivering frontline services to citizens.

Working women can request civil registration documents online and by telephone, so they do not need to leave work and lose income. PSA monitoring in 2019 indicates that these innovations have allowed the nationwide CRVS system to process 60,000 to 80,000 civil registration transactions each day.

Gender-focused CRVS systems

Through the PPP, the Philippines has created special priority lanes, increased space in waiting areas for women and children, and introduced breastfeeding rooms. In disaster situations where citizens lose their birth certificates at the village or municipal level, these documents can be reconstructed using information from the PSA's digitized central database, providing women and children documents needed to access basic services. This was the case when Typhoon Haiyan hit the city of Tacloban in Central Philippines and local civil registrars lost all civil registration documents due to the floods.

SUSTAINING GROWTH THROUGH PARTNERS AND CHAMPIONS

Strong partnerships between individuals and institutions are essential to moving from legal frameworks and development plans to an active CRVS system. Some partners become champions by using their influence to gain support for CRVS, offering consistent support to CRVS system authorities, and amending existing CRVS laws or crafting new ones.

Ministers as champions

The Philippine Statistics Authority's (PSA) first champions were the ministers of socioeconomic planning and budget under the Benigno Aquino administration. They substantially increased the PSA's budget and provided for the construction of new central office and some subnational office buildings ([Republic of the Philippines 2015–2019](#)). These champions change as the political landscape changes. For the PSA, the ministers of socioeconomic planning and budget under the Rodrigo Duterte administration continued to act as CRVS champions.



Photo: Dave Llorito / World Bank

Champions for women and children

To meet the needs of women and children, CRVS systems need champions that focus on their concerns. In the Philippines, these champions are institutional partners such as the Philippine Commission on Women and the Philippines' Department of Social Welfare and Development. The PSA and these government institutions regularly discuss CRVS issues as they relate to women and children. Other champions include non-government organizations such as Plan International and World Vision. These organizations work with women and children on the ground and promote issues, such as the need for birth certificates to access government services and the importance of obtaining death certificates for husbands and fathers so women can receive death benefits.

Long-term, valuable partnerships

Over time, institutional partners and champions can become sustainable partners. Coordination at various levels of the bureaucracy helps cement relationships and create partnerships that lead to institutional champions. The PSA has developed strong institutional partnerships with many of the agencies on the PSA Board, the Philippines' highest policymaking body on statistics, and the agencies that make up its Inter-Agency Committee on CRVS. At the local level, PSA subnational offices have forged strong partnerships with local civil registry offices. As a result, local civil registrars support the PSA by conducting household advocacy campaigns in their cities and municipalities to encourage people to participate in censuses.

Activities to promote CRVS

Partnerships can include both formal and informal activities. Formal activities include:

- Annual Civil Registration Month every February;
- Biennial National Workshop on Civil Registration;
- Biennial National Convention of Solemnizing Officers;
- Regular programs to discuss CRVS on radio and television;
- Regular special training and seminars to discuss special issues; and
- Updated Memorandum Circulars from the Civil Registrar General.

Informal activities include fellowships with local civil registrars and users of civil registration. For instance, the PSA participates in the annual National Women's Month every March by releasing the Women and Men FactSheet, which is sourced from censuses, surveys, administrative records, and the PSA's central civil

registration database. Many CRVS champions for women and children are female heads of institutions, including the Philippine Commission on Women and the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

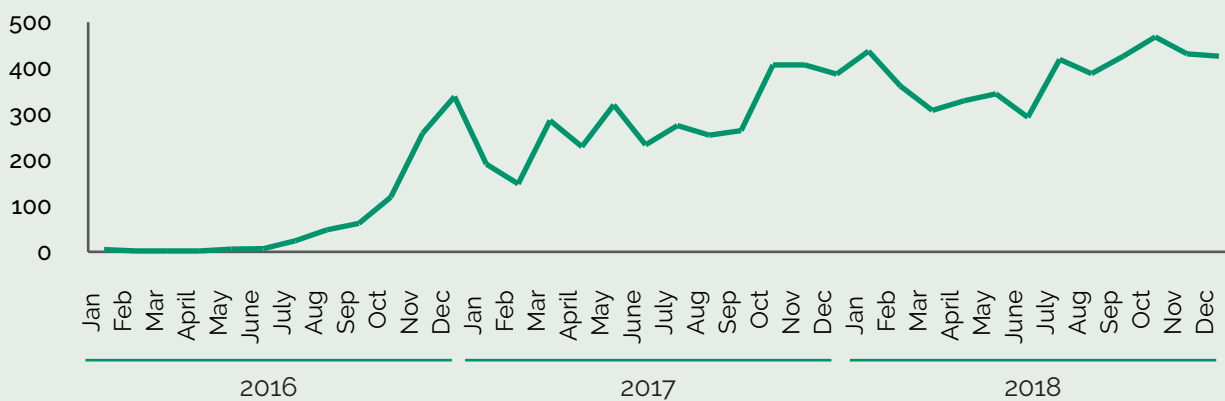
Value of partnerships

Presented as part of an overview of current CRVS issues during the fourth meeting of the United Nations' Regional Steering Group, Figure 2 illustrates the dramatic improvement that occurs when different CRVS stakeholders in a country coordinate their work and adopt a whole-of-government approach (Chowdhury 2018).

It is also essential for global partners to collaborate on the ground, as together they can drive action in countries. Global partners also provide venues for major CRVS stakeholders to share experiences and develop a support system that may not be available in their respective countries. The Philippines has benefitted greatly from its global partners, including UN agencies, PARIS21, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, Open Data Watch, and Bloomberg Philanthropies' Data for Health Initiative.

Figure 2: How a whole-of-government approach to CRVS coordination can create dramatic improvement.

Number of births registered per month in 45 districts of Kaliganj, Bangladesh



Year	Births registered	Target registration*	(%)
2016	873	5,465	16
2018	4,630	5,616	82

*The target is taken from immunization programs and the number of registrations from the Birth Registration Information System of the Office of the Registrar General.

Source: United Nations 2019

BUILDING TRUST

Fundamentally, a CRVS system must gain the trust of its stakeholders to encourage them to value and use the documents that it generates. In the Philippines, the following agencies and organizations recognize the birth certificates, marriage certificates, and death certificates issued from the PSA as correct and authentic:

- Schools;
- Employers;
- Embassies that issue visas;
- Insurance companies; and
- Government agencies that provide passports, driver's licences, and professional licences.

The CRVS system can provide women and children with the legal documents they need to independently complete transactions without needing authorization from someone else, such as their husbands or their fathers. As a result,

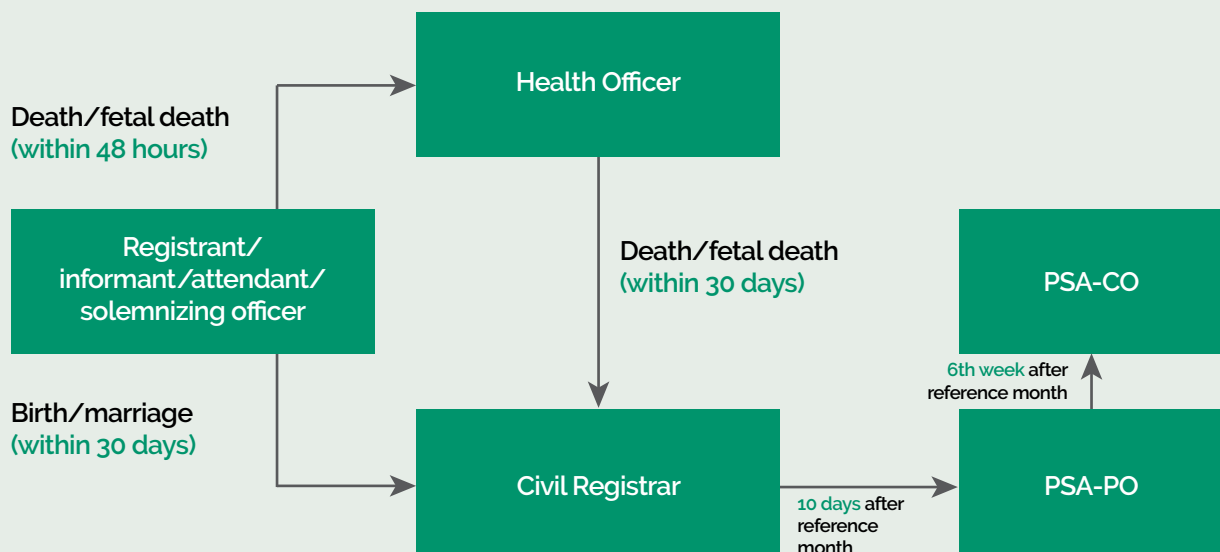
they can obtain passports or an inheritance, provide proof of marriage to their husbands, and prove guardianship of their children.

The Philippines' CRVS system has earned the trust of its stakeholders through transparency, clear process flows, data privacy and security, and a quality assurance framework. The PSA website contains the following public information about the country's CRVS system:

- Laws;
- Governance structure;
- Memorandum Circulars;
- Access to documents; and
- Processes.

Since 2017, the Philippines has obtained and maintained ISO 9001:2015 certification for all processes in the central office and in selected regional and provincial offices ([Philippine Statistics Authority 2019](#)).

Figure 3: CRVS process flow and major stakeholders, including the Philippine Statistics Authority Central Office (PSA-CO) and PSA provincial offices (PSA-PO).



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)

Currently, the PSA is leading the development of a quality assurance framework for administrative data called Mechanism for Harmonization of Administrative Records, Registers, and Information Systems (M-HARRIS). The project's main objective is to improve the design of administrative forms and registers, including the CRVS system, and to produce quality data and information for use in official statistics. The PSA Board is scheduled to adopt this quality assurance framework in the last quarter of 2019 (PSA 2019).

The PSA has been recognized for its compliance with the *Data Privacy Act* and the Freedom of Information Executive Order. These certifications and awards have contributed to increased trust in the CRVS system.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

CRVS systems should be linked to official statistics and identification systems. The *Philippine Statistical Act of 2013* created the PSA to “carry out, enforce and administer civil registration functions” (Republic of the Philippines 2013). Further, the *Philippine Identification System Act* identified the PSA as the implementing agency for the Philippine identification system (Republic of the Philippines 2018).

The Philippines' case has been unique because the civil registration system, the vital statistics system, and the national identification system are housed in one government agency, the Philippine Statistics Authority. This agency is also in charge of official statistics and coordinates the National Statistical System. This setup provides a more seamless delivery of services and processing of data and statistics to support government programs and policies. Utilization of resources – budgets, personnel, infrastructure – is optimized. It must be underscored that legal frameworks are not enough. Additionally, data

privacy and security are much easier to protect since all the various databases are owned by one agency. Strong leadership and political support through the chief statistician and his/her top management team makes the laws come to life. Thus, other countries should consider this model but with the recognition of the different factors that make it successful.

Protecting women and children

For Filipino women and children, the link between CRVS systems and identification systems ensures that information on a person's name, age, and sex from their birth certificate in the CRVS system and biometrics from the ID system are captured correctly. Accurate information helps protect women and children from trafficking and provides proof of recognition by their parents, whether they are legitimate or not. The importance of the link between these systems for women and children is discussed in greater detail in the paper, *Linking National ID and CRVS Systems: An Imperative for Inclusive Development* in the second Knowledge Brief on Gender and CRVS (Gutra 2018).

Linking development with statistics

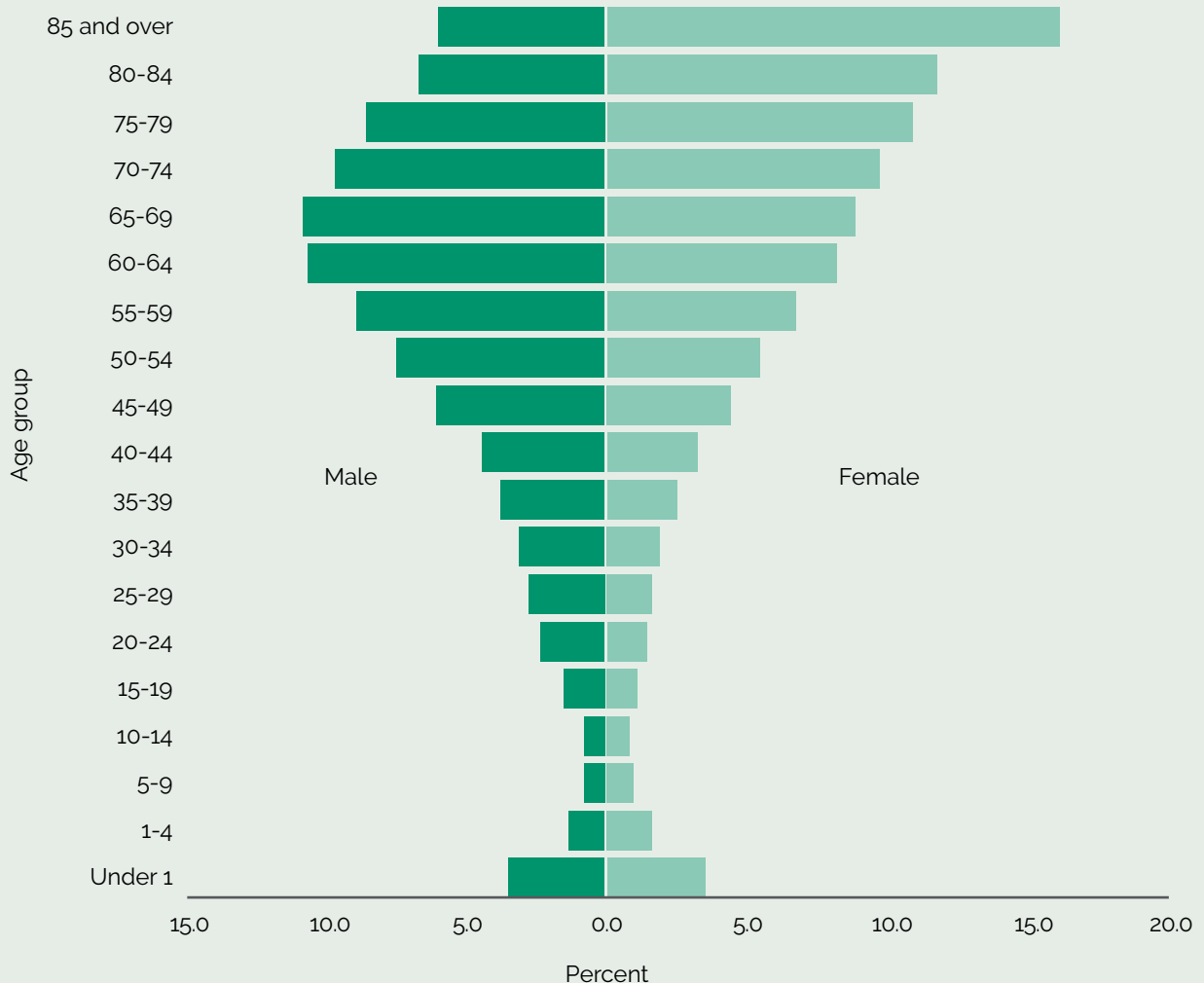
The link between a government's development plan and statistics has been recognized in the Philippine Development Plan 2017–2022, which identifies the Philippine Statistical Development Program for 2017–2023 as a parallel document for data support for planning and monitoring. For the first time, the Philippine Statistical Development Program includes a chapter on CRVS.

The link between CRVS and official statistics is illustrated by many of the PSA's information systems, such as factsheets on women and men, vital statistics, and even seemingly trivial statistics, such as common baby girl and baby boy names.

Vital statistics reports in 2017 include important concerns for women and men:

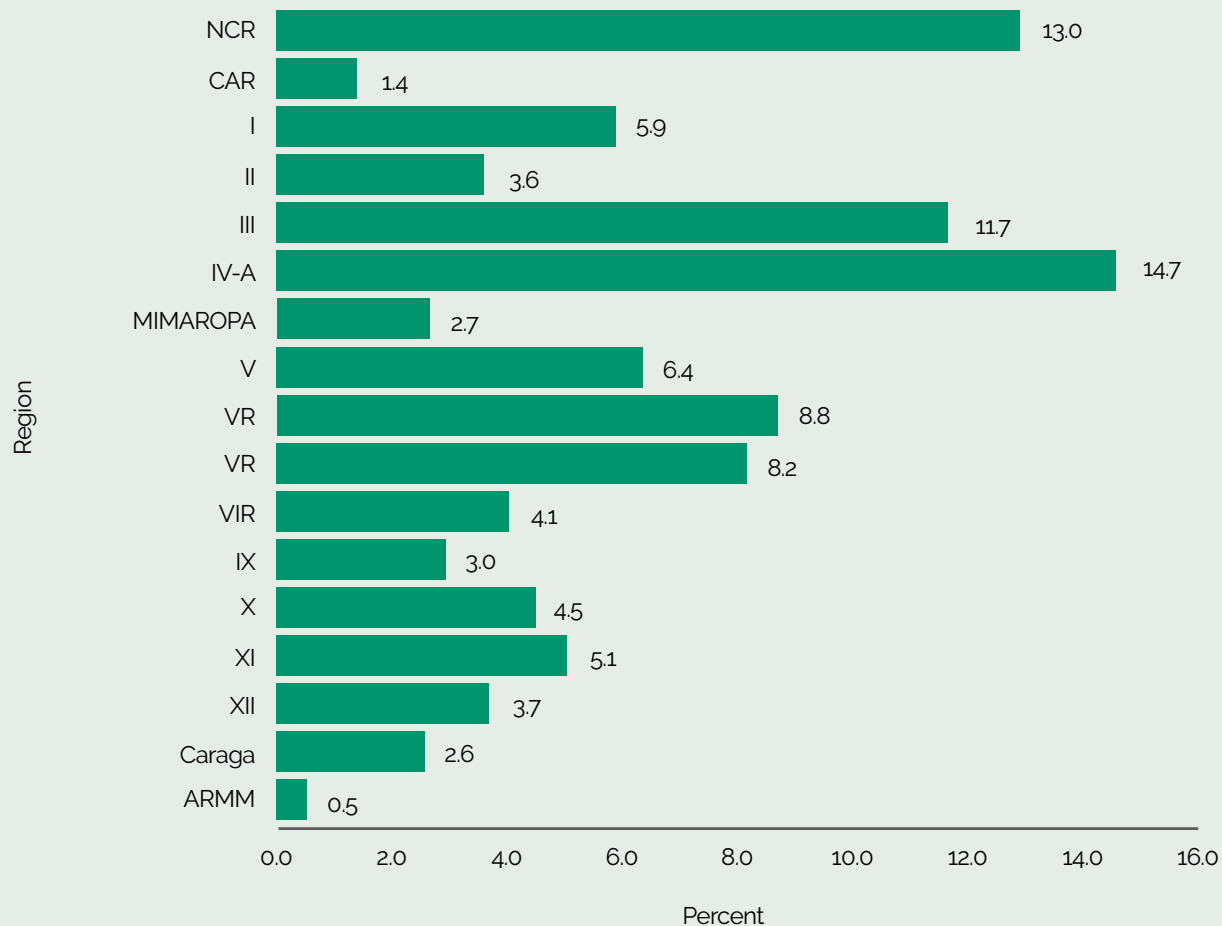
- More than half of babies were born to unwed mothers (53.3 percent);
- More babies were born to adolescent mothers (196,478) than adolescent fathers (52,342);
- Males died at a higher rate than females before reaching the age of 80, with the greatest variance at ages 60–64 years. This is illustrated in the special report on deaths (Figure 4); and
- Maternal deaths were highest in Region IV-A, followed by the National Capital Region (NCR) and Region VII, the urban regions of the country, according to the special report on deaths (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Philippine males died at a higher rate than females before age 80.



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), 2019. Registered deaths in the Philippines.

Figure 5: Rate of maternal deaths by region.



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), 2019. Registered deaths in the Philippines.

In 2015, the PSA conducted a mid-decade census of the population, known as POPCEN 2015, which included questions to determine birth registration of Filipinos. The census revealed that:

- The birth registration rate was 95 percent for both males and females; and
- The death registration rate for those who died from June 2013 to July 2015 was 91 percent, with 92 percent for deceased males and 90 percent for deceased females. It is interesting to note the gap between males and females in terms of death registration ([PSA 2015](#)).

The census also revealed the interconnection between the PSA's two services with respect to monitoring CRVS – the National Census Service, which conducts the census, and the Civil Registration Service of the PSA, which monitors registration coverage.



Photo: World Bank

NEXT STEPS

The Philippines' CRVS experiences are intended to provide useful information for implementation in other countries. We recommend that:

- **Countries work on building a strong foundation for their CRVS system, which includes legal frameworks and sustainable financing.** Countries could consider public-private partnerships (PPP) to obtain financing that would allow for sustainable and innovative delivery of civil registration services to citizens. This helps create a strong CRVS system that can provide women and children with easy, low-cost access to documentation.
- **Countries' national statistics offices encourage CRVS stakeholders to access the system for official statistics and include CRVS data in their national statistical development strategies.** Official statistics that are linked to CRVS systems provide sex-disaggregated information that governments and other stakeholders can use to introduce appropriate laws, policies, and programs for women and children.
- **The global community continues to support countries' CRVS efforts by collaborating with them on the ground and providing opportunities for countries' key CRVS players to join international discussions.** This will help women and children experience support from the global community.

- **Countries should work on quality assurance and data privacy initiatives to safeguard civil registry documents.** Ensuring data integrity equips women and children with proper identity credentials and protects the privacy and security of their individual information. This helps women and children access benefits for social protection, such as conditional cash transfers, enrollment in schools, inheritance, and access to pensions of their deceased husbands.
- **Countries should provide enabling laws or governance structures to create a clear seamless link between their national ID system and their civil registration system.** Directly linking these two systems ensure the integrity of the national ID system, promotes cost-efficiency, privacy and security of the systems. Strong leadership and strong support from other government entities should be ensured for the actualization of the laws and governance structures.
- **Countries should identify CRVS champions and enlist their support in crafting laws, obtaining required resources, and maintaining the integrity of their CRVS systems.** Champions are needed in all areas to build strong CRVS systems that address the concerns of women and children, provide additional resources to implement innovative solutions to accessibility issues, and facilitate the recovery of civil registration documents in disaster situations. Indeed, these champions make things happen for women and children!



This paper was authored by Lisa Grace S. Bersales, Professor of Statistics, School of Statistics, University of the Philippines, and formerly National Statistician and Civil Registrar General of the Philippines. It is part of the Knowledge Brief Series on Gender and CRVS developed by the Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Systems, in partnership with Open Data Watch.

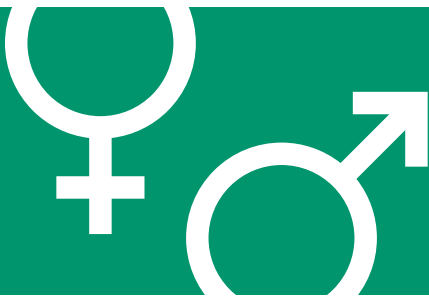
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