

## **Key Actions to Ensure CRVS Systems Leave No One Behind**

**Based on the Outcome of ConVERGE: Connecting Vital Events Registration and Gender Equality**

*Ottawa, February 25th and 26th, 2020*

DRAFT DOCUMENT

Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems register births, marriages/divorces and deaths, issue birth and death certificates, and compile vital statistics, including cause-of-death information. The systems are an indispensable part of the data ecosystem required for individuals to prove their own identity and access education, economic opportunities, healthcare and for country good governance, as well as to measure progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They are also key for monitoring the outcome action agenda from the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD25), with particular benefits for measuring gender equality, as they can complement the census by providing real-time data to guide national plans and global investments that benefit women and girls. They are also central to a rights-based approach to development, as reflected in the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda. Yet despite the clear need for and importance of strong CRVS systems, coverage and completeness remain poor in many low- and middle-income countries.

On February 25th and 26th, 2020, the Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems housed at the International Development Research Centre, the United Nations Population Fund, and Open Data Watch convened a two-day conference to explore the intersection of gender equality and CRVS, which was attended by a community of practice of national statisticians, civil registrars, gender experts, civil society, government officials, international organizations, and youth advocates. The participants concluded with the following key action-oriented messages for this community of practice:

**As the development community works toward the 2030 Agenda during the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, the focus for the CRVS community of practice should be to support country ownership of CRVS system improvements using a human rights-based approach.**

To date, 166 million children under-five go unregistered, leaving them without their right to a legal identity and without access to healthcare, education, employment, and more as a result. Strengthening CRVS systems can also support the measuring and monitoring of the SDGs. Not only is it critical to measuring 12 out of 17 of the SDGs but it is also a target within the Goals themselves, in the form of target 16.9.

**Vital statistics produced from CRVS systems should be disaggregated by sex, geography, ethnic group, education status and other levels as appropriate given local legal frameworks to help countries focus plans on who is being left uncounated, while ensuring this information remains safe and does no harm.**

Averages mask people's realities. Sex-disaggregated data can reveal gender inequalities in access to crucial civil documents and explain the resulting lack of access to services, which global and national averages can hide. Further disaggregated data by income, region, or education level can provide insights to help design inclusive policies for those individuals, especially women and girls, left farthest behind.

**CRVS and ID systems should not forget the needs of the most vulnerable populations such as those in conflict and emergencies or in countries at high risk for natural disasters, as well as of systemically vulnerable populations, such as women and children, people with disabilities, low literacy populations, and ethnic minorities, among others.**

250 million people are on the move and many of them are trapped in conflict situations as migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. At the same time, the world faces increased challenges due to climate change, such as more frequent and extreme weather patterns and disasters. Increased attention should be given to building and maintaining rights-based resilient CRVS systems in fragile contexts and vulnerable countries to find solutions for registering vital events for displaced, stateless refugees and migrants. Existing collaborative initiatives such as the Global Compact on Refugees can provide the necessary framework to support the development of CRVS and ID systems of host countries, most of whom are developing countries. In addition, many vulnerable groups, even in comparatively rich countries, need to be included in data collection and disaggregation efforts as well as protected by governance frameworks that enshrine individual's right to their own data.

**Efforts to improve CRVS systems should consider the political, cultural, and legal environments in which they exist.**

Eliminating all forms of discrimination, including gender discrimination, against individuals in the act of registering vital events must be realized and enshrined in laws governing CRVS systems through a joint effort between civil society advocacy and participation, government stakeholder involvement beyond civil registrars, and actions by the international community to ensure gender-equal access to civil documents. However, in addition to legal discrimination, social norms can also act as barriers to individuals fully reaping the benefit of CRVS systems. More research in key areas around how social norms, such as birthing and naming practices or funeral and burial ceremonies, interact with registration is critical to achieving universal birth registration and improved death registrations. In addition, programs must keep the long-time horizon of social change in mind, as attitudes change slowly, but more sustainably than with sudden interventions.

**Data derived from CRVS systems should be for people whose data is being collected and used for policy-making aimed at improving the lives of all individuals under the country's responsibility.**

The benefits of CRVS systems to improve development policy-making, service provision, and individual empowerment will not be realized if the vital statistics generated from the systems are not analyzed and used to draw insights or used to protect individuals' right to identity in strong partnership with ID systems. This will depend on effective statistical systems that make data accessible and available and strengthen the capacity of data producers and users inside and outside of government, while putting in place strong data governance that ensures data privacy and guards against misuse of data.

**The community of practice, with an emphasis on building partnerships, especially with youth, should come together and collaborate to fill knowledge gaps for decision-makers, citizens, researchers, and the global community through sharing of know-how, and advocacy to raise the profile of the gender dimensions of CRVS and legal identification.**

Strong CRVS and ID systems require participation from all parts of government, civil society, and the private sector. The complexity of improving these systems worldwide requires empowering a range of stakeholders, including individuals, statisticians, gender experts, civil registrars, and youth advocates, in order to increase demand and impact policymaking. Since the first meeting of its kind - *Making the Invisible Visible: CRVS as a Basis to Meeting the 2030 Gender Agenda* in February 2018, the Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems has served as a facilitator of partnerships to fill research gaps and inspire change in the field.

**A continued focus should be placed on case studies that showcase why adequate financing should be mobilized at the international and national levels to improve CRVS systems and sustain the progress already made.**

CRVS systems remain underfunded, resulting in weak statistical capacity, which highlights the need for making the case for CRVS to national government and international organizations, particularly with regard to the returns from investment for CRVS. Funding for the systems through a gender lens should be accounted for by the national budget processes, specifically the national strategy for the development of statistics (NSDS). International financing should mobilize and complement domestic financing while exploring new and innovative instruments to ensure CRVS systems are fully funded and leave no one behind.

**Moving Forward:** The conversation on improving CRVS systems for gender equality will continue at upcoming fora such as the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSD-STATCOM), Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64/Beijing+25), UN Women’s Generation Equality Forums and the United Nations World Data Forum 2020 with the aim of encouraging commitments to outline specific action plans and identify stakeholders to take them forward. The time is now to commit to improving CRVS systems worldwide to ensure no one is left behind.

We invite additional comments and inputs on the drafted action items. Please share all feedback to [crvs-gender@opendatawatch.com](mailto:crvs-gender@opendatawatch.com)