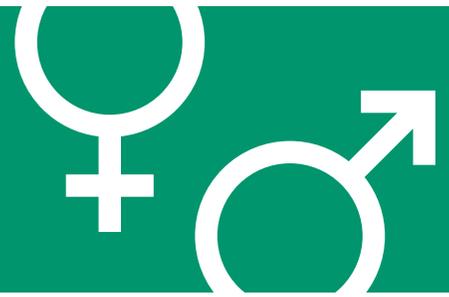




# Knowledge Briefs on **Gender** and **CRVS**



## Introduction

The **Centre of Excellence** for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Systems at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) advocates for strong CRVS systems to monitor progress towards gender equality, support social protection, and empower women and girls. It has set out to inspire a global commitment to integrating gender analysis across activities to strengthen CRVS systems by discussing the status of the field, evaluating opportunities and challenges, as well as identifying priority areas of research and action to improve vital event registration for women and girls.

On February 26<sup>th</sup>, the Centre of Excellence and its partners hosted a high-level panel and technical consultation sessions on gender and CRVS – ***Making the Invisible Visible: CRVS as a Basis to Meeting the 2030 Gender Agenda***. The meeting was the first of its kind to focus solely on the gender dimensions of CRVS systems and the barriers women and girls face when registering vital life events.

During the meeting, participants discussed challenges, opportunities, examples, and initiatives in addressing gender gaps and barriers to vital event registration for women



Mohamad Al-Arief/The World Bank

and girls. Building on the outcomes of that meeting, the Centre for Excellence is assembling knowledge resources on gender and CRVS systems. A series of knowledge briefs, created in partnership with **Open Data Watch** (ODW), will synthesize and disseminate key messages, innovative case studies, and emerging findings. By doing so, it will also articulate the importance of CRVS systems for achieving better living standards for all, protecting the rights of women and girls, and monitoring progress towards global gender equality commitments.

Participants at the conference recognized the critical role that CRVS systems play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS).

Not only is improving CRVS systems a target under Goal 16: Peace Justice, and Strong Institutions, CRVS data also serve as a crucial data source for many gender-related SDG indicators. But there are many data gaps due to a range of issues. The CRVS-Gender knowledge briefs are in development to further inform and galvanize efforts to close data gaps and ensure that no one is left behind. The briefs will serve as a tool to stimulate conversation and promote the adoption of good practices. By keeping the dialogue on the importance of CRVS systems for the global gender agenda ongoing, they will help build momentum and ensure that emerging insights are shared and used.

A total of three knowledge briefs will be published, each including four papers by key experts in the field of CRVS systems and gender data. Potential themes and topics to be covered in the briefs include gender data gaps, social protection, legal frameworks, and protection of the rights of women and girls. A set of thematic infographics highlighting key messages will accompany each one. The knowledge briefs will be disseminated to the community of practice around key events at a global level.

### **Main Outcomes of the *Making the Invisible Visible Meeting***

Participants at the “Making the Invisible Visible” meeting came together to inspire a global commitment to addressing inequalities and making CRVS systems work for all women and girls. The meeting was divided into two components: an opening plenary with a high-level panel, followed by technical sessions on the topics of research and strategy as well as planning and implementation. Through the discussions at this meeting, participants were able to identify the most urgent of needs:

- **Prioritization:** CRVS systems need to be prioritized under national development plans, statistical plans, and global agendas.

- **Balance:** All components of CRVS systems need to be equally strengthened with balanced investment in identity management (ID) systems and CRVS systems.
- **Funding:** The economic, political, and social value of CRVS data need to be better communicated to increase funding for current initiatives and ongoing efforts that will yield low-hanging fruit.
- **Partnership:** Strong CRVS systems need collaboration between all sections of government and the private sector.
- **Research:** More knowledge is needed to understand the barriers women face and how to better incentivize and promote registration to thereby close gaps.

The momentum built at the meeting must be maintained. The briefs will help stimulate further conversation and serve as a resource for those working to promote and achieve the global gender agenda.

### **Objectives**

The impetus behind the knowledge briefs series is to create a compendium that identifies current problems and challenges, offers opportunities and solutions, and proposes a call to action among relevant stakeholders. Through the publication of this compendium, gender- and CRVS-related research will be disseminated to make a case for further investments to improve CRVS systems and promote gender equality. This research will provide crucial support to stakeholders including funding agencies, the UN Statistical commission and standard setting bodies, academics, government agencies, and gender data advocates. Among these stakeholders, the knowledge briefs will increase awareness of emerging issues and promote the adoption of good practices.

## The State of CRVS Systems and Data for Gender Equality

The importance of CRVS systems and data for achieving gender equality cannot be overstated. Because of recent tireless advocacy by many organizations, the understanding of the importance of gender data for achieving gender equality has grown. SDG 5 focuses entirely on improving the status of women and girls and achieving gender equality, and many other SDG indicators require crucial sex disaggregated data. And with SDG target 16.9 set to provide legal identity for all, the importance of a special focus to improve CRVS systems is clearly stated. Further, while gender and CRVS systems have strong independent importance, they

also are inextricably linked. To achieve the full potential benefits that CRVS systems and data have to offer for achieving gender equality, it is necessary to understand their connection and increase focus on both simultaneously.

### Benefits of CRVS Systems for Women and Girls

Women and girls experience disproportionately positive benefits from a quality CRVS system. Although children are registered almost equally across countries,<sup>1</sup> these systems are particularly important to women and girls as CRVS data provide sex-disaggregated demographic data on key issues such as population distribution and maternal mortality. Strong CRVS systems

### Birth Certificates Help Prevent Child Marriage

Plan International's *Girls Not Brides* initiative documents the story of Rubi, a young girl from Bangladesh who used her birth certificate to avoid an arranged marriage when she was 15 years old. She received her birth certificate at age six when the lack of it denied her admission to primary school. Through her involvement with the *Because I am a Girl* campaign, she knew the legal age of marriage in Bangladesh was 18 and the role a birth certificate could play in preventing her marriage. Rubi explained her situation to the chairman of the Union Council Office, who Rubi knew due to her involvement with the local child forum group. The chairman was able to speak to her parents, who initially discreetly change the age on Rubi's birth certificate. However, the chairman explained legal implications of child marriage and ultimately convinced them to abandon the arranged marriage.



Pictured at 19 in 2014, Rubi continues her studies with aspirations of being a teacher.

Source: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/birth-certificates-help-tackle-child-marriage/>

1 [https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/UNICEF\\_Birth\\_Registration\\_Handbook.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/UNICEF_Birth_Registration_Handbook.pdf)

also provide proof of legal identity and social relationships. This makes it easier for women to access crucial services such as health, education, banking, political representation, and to lay claim to inheritance and/or property rights. Registering girls at birth and recording their marriages can also reveal and make it possible to prevent early and forced marriages. Unfortunately, few CRVS systems around the world record marriages and divorces,<sup>2</sup> but having proof of legal identity and marriage allows women to exercise fundamental rights and responsibilities.

### **Gender Barriers to CRVS Registration**

Women often experience unique disadvantages in the ability to register their children. According to a 2013 UNICEF publication, legal barriers exist in countries such as Nepal, Nicaragua, and Bhutan, where children cannot be registered permanently without their father's or grandfather's name.<sup>3</sup> In other countries, discriminatory laws have been reformed, but behavior changes on the part of officials

enforcing laws has yet to fully change. One study found that social stigmas can affect registration because women hesitated to request a birth certificate if they could not provide the father's name.<sup>4</sup> A mother's wealth and education also impact the likelihood of whether she will register her children. A lack of knowledge of how to register, registration costs, and difficulties in reaching registration locations all pose barriers to the ability of mothers to register their children. More understanding is needed to overcome these barriers, but the lack of strong case studies exploring interventions creates a knowledge gap on factors that influence the registration of vital events for women and girls.

### **Importance of CRVS Data for the SDGs**

A well-functioning CRVS system impacts more than the well-being of individual women and girls; it also plays a crucial role in helping countries measure and achieve the SDGs, with particular importance for gender-related SDGs. According to a 2016 UN Statistics review, the monitoring and achievement of 24 SDG targets could be directly impacted by the availability of CRVS systems and data. However, with the understanding that CRVS systems provide crucial sex-disaggregated demographic data, it is possible to identify far more SDG targets and indicators that would benefit. Population data is most often available through censuses and surveys. However, population censuses usually occur once a decade, and according to a review of 137 low- and middle-income countries, 11 percent had not conducted a census in the last ten years. Not only are CRVS data important to achieving any SDG indicator requiring population statistics, their importance is even greater for gender-related indicators.



Dominic Chavez/World Bank

2 [http://www.who.int/healthinfo/civil\\_registration/en/](http://www.who.int/healthinfo/civil_registration/en/)

3 [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Birth\\_Registration\\_11\\_Dec\\_13.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Birth_Registration_11_Dec_13.pdf)

4 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4369829/>

## CRVS is crucial for gender-related SDGs

Excluding repeated indicators, there are 54 explicitly gender-related indicators as identified by UN Women. However, ODW tabulations find an additional 39 indicators that are not explicitly sex-disaggregated but should be. Of these indicators, 72 percent require CRVS data. Thus, it is clear that CRVS systems and data are crucial to monitoring progress and achieving gender equality.

Gender-related indicators\* that need Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS)



Source: Open Data Watch tabulations

## Gaps in CRVS Data Availability

There are huge gaps in the availability of vital statistics. Based on an ODW review of 137 low- and middle-income countries, 69 percent do not have complete vital registration system coverage. Although girls and boys are registered equally at birth, about 35 percent of all children under the age of five, which is about 230 million, have not had their births registered.<sup>5</sup> Only one third of countries keep complete civil registries that capture deaths and causes of death.<sup>6</sup> And data from China and India show that women's

deaths are less likely to be registered than men's deaths.<sup>7</sup> The population of these countries account for more than a third of the world's population. This lack of information poses a significant issue for country governments who need these CRVS systems to plan, budget, and monitor their population accurately. These data also enable them to design and measure the effectiveness of public health policies, delivery of health services, and educational programs for mothers and their children.

5 [https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/Embargoed\\_11\\_Dec\\_Birth\\_Registration\\_report\\_low\\_res.pdf](https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/Embargoed_11_Dec_Birth_Registration_report_low_res.pdf)

6 [http://www.who.int/gho/publications/world\\_health\\_statistics/2012/en/](http://www.who.int/gho/publications/world_health_statistics/2012/en/)

7 <https://www.data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CRVS-Synthesis-Paper.pdf>

## Moving the CRVS-Agenda Forward

Despite the documented individual and societal benefits of a well-functioning CRVS system, women still face many financial, cultural, and legal barriers to realizing the benefits of CRVS, such as the cost of registration; requirements of a husband's presence for a child's registration; the system's failure to capture customary marriages; burial practices; and inheritance laws. More understanding is needed to overcome these barriers, specifically how to do so within a country's unique political and cultural context. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of strong case studies which explore the successes or failures of these interventions. As such, there remains a knowledge gap on proximate constraints and underlying factors that may influence the registration of different vital events for women and girls. And while there has been a growing recognition over the last several years of the importance of strong CRVS systems, gendered barriers and inequalities are often overlooked. Gaps in understanding and unanswered questions remain:

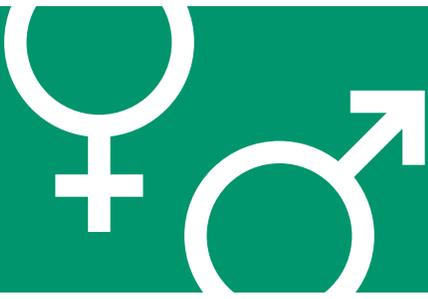
- **Examine barriers and hidden biases:** What gender biases exist in the legal systems that govern civil registration? How do the current legal frameworks discourage or prohibit women from registering vital life events such as their child's birth or their own marriage? What cultural, economic or social barriers may prevent women and girls from registering their vital events?

- **Uncover the gaps:** Where are the registration data gaps? Where are women least likely to be counted, registered or recognized? How can we increase demand for registration among these vulnerable populations? How can we better engage men to ensure that vital events pertaining to their daughters and wives are legally recorded?
- **Develop a strategy:** How should countries register different types of marriages, especially those that are least likely to be registered or recognized? How can we develop evidence based strategies or design programs that facilitate registration of vital events for women and girls?
- **Build capacity:** share knowledge and increase data use and impact: How can countries strengthen their technical and administrative capacities? On the local level, how can registration authorities more efficiently register marriage and divorces? How can we increase data use and promote evidenced-based policy making?

Striving to answer the questions above, the Centre of Excellence has set out to inspire a global commitment to making CRVS systems work for all women and girls by discussing the status of the field, evaluating opportunities and challenges, as well as identifying priority areas of research and action to strengthen CRVS systems. Through the Knowledge Brief Series, we aim to close these gaps and shed light on the potential barriers and hidden biases within systems.







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