

# Getting Children and Youth in the Picture 2021



A Report on the Consultations With  
Children and Young People on the Civil  
Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia  
and the Pacific





**Everyone deserves  
to be counted**





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# Acknowledgments

An original publication of Child Rights Coalition Asia and World Vision International  
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Produced thanks to the financial support of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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# Executive Summary

- **This report presents the views, experiences, and recommendations of 561 children and youth from 11 countries across Asia and the Pacific on civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS), gathered through a series of discussions and consultations from March to April 2021.**

The 11 participating countries were Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Over 63% of the participating children and youth were under the age of 18, while the rest were between the ages of 18 and 24, with females making up the majority of those who took the survey.

Following the consultations, a regional forum was held via Zoom on May 29, 2021, during which the representative children and youth started drafting a joint video statement on CRVS, which will be shown at the Second Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific in November 2021. 61 children and youth attended the event, representing the 11 nations that held in-country discussions. Children made up 54% of the participants, and females made up 60% of the total.

## The Views and Experiences of Children

Registration is the key to accessing government services for in-country and regional consultation participants. The CRVS verifies their identity, citizenship, and allows them to exercise their rights.

Participants from eight (8) countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Samoa, and Thailand) reported favorable registration experiences. Good government registration systems and parents' support for civil registration were important factors in their opinion. Most participants with positive registration experiences come from stable urban homes, are citizens of their home countries, and have been born in hospitals. Children, teens, and their families struggle to register without these variables. Others do not register at all.

Many of the in-country consultations' participants said that lack of registration was an intergenerational concern. Without a marriage certificate, many unregistered parents do not see the point in registering their children. Many people struggle to obtain death certificates without birth certificates.

The in-country consultations revealed institutional flaws as barriers to registration such as a lack of coordination between government offices, and a lack of capacity and infrastructure in CRVS-related organizations. Social hurdles also prevent them from CRVS. People, especially in impoverished, rural, and isolated locations, are unaware of the necessity to register. Poverty prevents them from reporting births and deaths as their logistical and financial costs are too high. Some bonded labor households lack access to CRVS. The forum's delegates echoed these views, stating that poverty, illiteracy, and lack of information prevent registration, and that the government is failing to assist them. Some forum participants even criticized hospitals and governments for not prioritizing or taking registration seriously.

**Children and young people are denied access to entitlements and services including health, education, and finance because they are not registered.**



Photo credit: UNICEF

## **The Impact of Lack of Registration**

The challenges that children and youth have in registering stem not only from the processes, but also from the consequences of not registering, affecting their engagement in society. Without birth registration, many can't go to school, play sports, or travel freely. Registration ownership impacts their educational attainment, activities, future employment opportunities, and travel options.

No registration equals no protection. Without birth documents, children and youth are exposed to abuse and trafficking. Many marry without legal protection and have children who cannot be recognized since marriage documents are required for birth registration. Also, governments rarely recognize same-sex unions, leaving many members of the LGBTQI vulnerable. Death certificates are also required for children and youth. Many said they lost prospects and property rights simply because they couldn't establish their age, identification, residency, or relatives' deaths.

No registration means no essential services. They are denied access to entitlements and services including health, education, and finance because they are not registered. Because many of those who do not register are already poor, which reinforces the poverty cycle. Denying people the ability to register means that poverty and lack of legal identification are carried down through generations.

1 Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and Pacific, "Ministerial Declaration to 'Get Every One in the Picture' in Asia and the Pacific" (2014), [https://getinthepicture.org/sites/default/files/resources/Ministerial.Declaration.Englishfinal\\_\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://getinthepicture.org/sites/default/files/resources/Ministerial.Declaration.Englishfinal__0_0.pdf): p. 2.





Photo credit: UNICEF

## Recommendations

Participants made various recommendations on how to improve birth, marriage, and death registration. To guarantee that all births, marriages, and deaths are recorded, and to reduce the consequences of non-registration, stakeholders might consider the following recommendations.

Governments can start by educating communities, especially the impoverished, refugees, uneducated, and migrants, about registration and the repercussions of not reporting births, marriages, and deaths.

Governments can also streamline registration processes while strengthening their personnel's capabilities, reaching rural locations, and digital infrastructure. More importantly, governments must recognize that poverty limits access to registration, and can decrease or remove costs for birth, marriage, and death registration, or provide financial assistance to individuals in need.

Participants to the in-country consultations and forum stressed parents' responsibility in registration as well. They advise parents to swiftly register their marriages and children's births. NGOs can also help communities by raising awareness about the necessity of CRVS or acting as intermediates in birth registration.

## Making Registration Accessible to All

Based on the children's responses and recommendations, ensuring that everyone is registered requires a collective effort, stressing the important role that governments and parents play in the process. Both units must act swiftly since non-registration negatively damages children's lives.

Birth, marriage, and death certificates aren't just documents, but rather show how much the government and parents care about the children and their future. By allowing everyone to register, we can ensure that every child is protected, can access services, and can assert their rights.



# Definition of Terms

Adult Mentor	An adult who provides support, guidance, and encouragement to child participants
Birth Certificate	Paper issued by a government proving an individual's birth is registered
Birth registration	Official record of a birth with government authority
Child	Below 18 years old
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
In-country consultations	A series of consultations among children and youth in Asia and the Pacific
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex
Life events	This report focuses on three life events: birth, death, and marriage Non-Government Organizations
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
Youth	18 to 24 years old



Photo credit: UNICEF

# Introduction



## ■ There is still much to be done in ensuring a universal and responsive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific (CRVS).

The CRVS is integral to state planning and decision-making, as it is a “continuous, permanent, compulsory, and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events in people’s lives in accordance with the national law, including births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, divorces, adoptions, legitimations and recognitions.”<sup>1</sup> Because it influences nationality, education, health, and child marriage, among other things, children and youth’s voices and views must be heard and considered in political and policy-making.

In line with this, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), World Vision Asia Pacific, and Child Rights Coalition (CRC) Asia conducted a series of in-country consultations and a regional virtual forum to harness political pledges and advocate for the opinions and perspectives of children and youth. This document summarizes the important comments raised by children and youth delegates during the regional meeting on CRVS. It ran from February 11 to 27, 2021, with majority of the consultations taking place online. 561 children and youth shared their knowledge of birth, marriage, and death registration. They also offered suggestions to improve registration.

However, due to the pandemic and limited resources, the organizers were unable to engage with partners in Fiji, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Singapore, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. Myanmar partners were among the first to prepare but were unable to carry them out due to the country’s political situation.

The in-country meetings were organized and facilitated by 15 groups from 11 countries. The organizations include:

<b>Afghanistan</b>	UNICEF-Afghanistan Vital Statistics Department, Ministry of Public Health (Afghanistan)
<b>Bangladesh</b>	World Vision Bangladesh
<b>Cambodia</b>	Child Rights Coalition Cambodia (CRC Cambodia)
<b>Indonesia</b>	Indonesia Joining Forces to End Violence Against Children Wahana Visi Indonesia
<b>India</b>	World Vision India
<b>Nepal</b>	Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) World Vision International Nepal
<b>Pakistan</b>	Group Development (GD) Pakistan
<b>Philippines</b>	GITIB, Inc. Mindanao Migrants Center for Empowering Actions, Inc. (MMCEAI) Mindanao Action Group for Children’s Rights and Protection (MAGCRP) Tambayan Center for Children’s Rights, Inc.
<b>Thailand</b>	The Life Skills Development Foundation (TLSDF) World Vision Foundation of Thailand
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	SoS Children’s Village Sri Lanka Generation Never Give-up Care Leavers Organization (GNG) World Vision Sri Lanka
<b>Samoa</b>	Samoa Victim Support Group

An online regional forum on 29 May 2021 followed the consultations. Initial plans were for three sub-regional forums: one for South Asia, one for Southeast Asia, and one for the Pacific. Due to the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the organizers chose to host only one regional forum to ensure delegates' safety. At the forum were 61 children and youth delegates from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The regional forum expanded on earlier consultation results and began the process of creating a video statement for Asia and the Pacific's children and youth. It also selected children and youth representatives to join the Statement Core Group to finalize a video statement on CRVS (Annex 6, Information for Members of the Statement Core Group). Organizers were CRC Asia, World Vision, and UNICEF.

The consultations and forum are part of the preparations for the Second Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific, November 16–19, 2021. For the region's First Ministerial Conference on CRVS in 2014, the Asia-Pacific countries adopted the Ministerial Declaration to "get everyone in the picture" and envisioned that "by 2024, all people in Asia and the Pacific will benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitate the realization of their rights, and support good governance, health, and development."<sup>2</sup> The First Ministerial Conference also declared 2015–2024 as the "Asian and Pacific CRVS Decade" and endorsed the Regional Action Framework on CRVS for the region.<sup>3</sup>

## The Regional Action Framework outlines **three goals and seven action areas** to achieve the vision for 2024.

### Goals



1

**Universal civil registration of births, deaths, and other vital events**



2

**To provide all individuals with legal documentation of civil registration, deaths, and other vital events, as necessary, to claim identity, civil status, and ensuing rights**



3

**To produce and disseminate accurate, complete, and timely vital statistics (including on causes of death) based on registration records**

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.: p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Also in Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and Pacific, "Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific" (2014), [https://getinthepicture.org/sites/default/files/resources/Regional%20Action%20Framework%20on%20Civil%20Registration%20and%20Vital%20Statistics%20in%20Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://getinthepicture.org/sites/default/files/resources/Regional%20Action%20Framework%20on%20Civil%20Registration%20and%20Vital%20Statistics%20in%20Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific_0_0.pdf): paras. 7–8.



Photo credit: UNICEF

## The seven action areas are:

- 1 **Political commitment**
- 2 **Public engagement, participation, and generation of demand,**
- 3 **Coordination**
- 4 **Policies, legislation, and implementation of regulations**
- 5 **Infrastructure and resources**
- 6 **Operational procedures, practices, and innovations**
- 7 **Production, dissemination, and use of vital statistics.<sup>4</sup>**

Asia-Pacific country representatives will review the progress on the goals and action areas set in the Ministerial Declaration on CRVS in 2014 and the Regional Action Framework on CRVS for Asia-Pacific in November 2021.<sup>5</sup> To prepare for this, the UN ESCAP, the Ministerial Conference's development partner, World Vision, CRC Asia, and their respective partners held regional consultations that culminated in a regional forum.

<sup>5</sup> Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and Pacific, "Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific" (2014), [https://getinthepicture.org/sites/default/files/resources/Regional%20Action%20Framework%20on%20Civil%20Registration%20and%20Vital%20Statistics%20in%20Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://getinthepicture.org/sites/default/files/resources/Regional%20Action%20Framework%20on%20Civil%20Registration%20and%20Vital%20Statistics%20in%20Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific_0_0.pdf); para. 62(b). See also "Second Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific Brochure," accessed January 3, 2021, <https://getinthepicture.org/sites/default/files/resources/FINAL%202020%20MC%20Pamphlet.pdf>.





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# The Participants

**The in-country consultations included 355 children and 206 youth from 11 Asian and Pacific countries.**

The in-country partners reached out to these kids and teens because they had opinions on CRVS, wanted to be heard, and could represent groups with CRVS issues (see Table 2). In-country partners did not randomly select participants, so their views do not represent the views of children and youth in their represented country.

Half of the child participants were younger than 15, two of whom were only six years old, while the other half was not older than 17. The youth participants ranged in age from 18 to 24. More than half (53%) of the child participants were female, and 61% of the youth participants were female.

**Table 1. Children and Youth Consultation Participants by Country and Gender (Count)**

Countries	Children			Youth				Overall Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Others	Total	
Afghanistan	15	21	36	10	10		20	56
Bangladesh	0	0	0	15	15		30	30
Cambodia	31		31	7			7	38
India	91		91	35			35	126
Indonesia	5	15	20	4	7		11	31
Nepal	12	15	27	7	14	2	23	50
Pakistan	21	9	30	7	12	1	20	50
Philippines	9	14	23	1	6		7	30
Samoa	17	16	33	6	10		16	49
Sri Lanka	20	14	34	4	12		16	50
Thailand	10	20	30	7	14		21	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>109*</b>	<b>124*</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>61*</b>	<b>100*</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>561</b>

Note: +LGBTQ/Prefer not to say; \*Excluding Cambodia and India

## 355 and 206 youth from 11 countries

in Asia and the Pacific participated in the in-country consultations.

Over a quarter (26%) of the participants, from 9 of the 11 countries that submitted complete data, belong to organizations working with children. Almost a quarter (24.18%) were from child-led organizations. About 17% come from communities that are considered isolated or remote in their respective countries, 11% belong to ethnic minorities, and 10% are working children. Children and youth from indigenous and migrant communities, children in alternative care, young couples, and children/youth from other groups were also represented in the consultations. Table 2 provides the details.

**Table 2. Groups of the Children and Youth Participants (% to total/country; sorted)**

Group <sup>5</sup>	AFGH	BANG	IDSA	NEP	PKST	PHL	SAM	SRL	THAI	ASIA-PACIFIC
Child agency/ organization	37.5	3.33	6.45	18	30	66.67	8.16		60.78	25.94
Child-led organization	16.07	66.67	6.45	64	26		10.2		29.48	24.18
Isolated or remote community		13.33	74.19	10	8		10.2	28	23.53	16.88
Ethnic minority		3.33			4		4.08	48	11.76	11.34
Working children			16.13	6	14	33.33	2.04			10.33
Indigenous community	30.36		16.13	20	2	26.67	10.2			7.81
Migrant community	32.14			12	4	33.33			3.92	7.81
Children in alternative care			6.45	12	2	10	10.2	32		7.81
Children/youth born out of wedlock						3.33	2.04	40		5.29
Young couple		6.67	35.48				2.04			4.28
Out of school youth/children			3.23	8	4	20	2.04			3.53
Teenage mothers/fathers				8	4	6.67	12.24		1.96	3.27
Children/youth in conflict with the law				6			8.16			1.76
Children/youth in conflict with the law				4			4.08		5.58	1.76
Persons with disability				6	6					1.51
Adopted children/youth							4.08	4		1.01
Others (Orphans, Urban Poor)		6.67	19.35	18	4	3		14	3.92	7.05

<sup>5</sup> AFGH-Afghanistan, BANG-Bangladesh, IDSA-Indonesia, NEP-Nepal, PKST-Pakistan, PHL-Philippines, SAM-SAMOA, SRL-Sri Lanka, THAI-Thailand



For the regional forum, there were 61 participants from eleven countries.

**Table 3. Children and Youth Regional Participants by Country (Count)**

Countries	Children			Youth			Overall Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Afghanistan	1	1	2	2		2	4
Bangladesh	2	2	2	2	1	3	5
Cambodia	2	2	4			0	4
India	3	3	6		2	2	8
Indonesia		5	5	2		2	7
Nepal	1	3	4	2	2	4	8
Pakistan	1	1	2	2	2	4	6
Philippines	2	1	3		3	3	6
Samoa		2	2	1	2	3	5
Sri Lanka			0	1	1	2	2
Thailand	1	2	3	2	1	3	6



Photo credit: UNICEF

# The Consultations

■ The consultations followed a focus group consultation or an interview format. At least one country, Cambodia, did a survey. Almost all were conducted online. Table 4 details the different consultation modes used by the organizers in 11 participating countries.

Table 4. Consultation Modes

Countries	Mode
Afghanistan	Face-to-face consultation
Bangladesh	Online interviews
Cambodia	Online survey
India	Face-to-face consultation
Indonesia	Online consultations
Nepal	Face-to-face consultation
Pakistan	Face-to-face consultation
Philippines	Online consultation
Samoa	Face-to-face consultation
Sri Lanka	Face-to-face consultation
Thailand	Combination of online and face-to-face consultation

The consultations used qualitative methods to capture the range and significance of expressed views in response to open-ended and pointed questions.

### The questions focused on five main inquiries:

- 1 General CRVS experience
- 2 Challenges in the registration process
- 3 Registration experience and perceived utility
- 4 Accuracy, validity, and quality of registration documents, and encountered challenges in correcting these
- 5 Recommendations to improve CRVS



**Table 5. Consultation Questions**

- **What are your experiences regarding birth/marriage/death certificate registration?**
- **Based on your experience or the experience of people you know, how does the government process the birth/marriage/death of a person?**
- **What do you think are the challenges in recording the birth/marriage/death of a person?**
- **In your opinion, is it important to have birth/marriage/death certificates?**
- **Is it difficult to get the certificates?**
- **When do you use these certificates?**
- **Do you know of anyone who experienced difficulty in getting their certificates? How did the lack of certificates affect you or the person you know?**
- **Are the details in your certificates correct? What happens if there are incorrect details?**
- **How have these incorrect details impacted you or someone you know? Have these been resolved? If yes, how? If no, what should be done about it?**
- **What are your recommendations to improve birth/marriage/death registration?**
- **What are your recommendations to address challenges in recording/registering the birth/marriage/death of a person?**
- **What are your recommendations to address the challenges in getting certificates?**
- **What are your recommendations to address the challenges in ensuring that the details in the certificates are correct?**

The questions and consultation guidelines were created with the participants' specific contexts in mind. With input from in-country partners, UN ESCAP, World Vision, and CRC Asia refined the questions and consultation guidelines to reflect the diverse contexts of the different countries in Asia and the Pacific. Birth, marriage, and death certification/registration are likely the most relevant for children and youth. They also advised in-country partners on how to include children and youth, implement child protection policies, and provide adult and professional support.

The consultation guidelines included tools for in-country partners, such as the Consultation Reporting Template, Registration/Attendance Template, and Evaluation Template. It also provided options for safe and inclusive consultations during the pandemic (offline, online, mix of platforms). It allowed for child-friendly consultations and for children to participate in the consultation process.

The guidelines were developed using the nine basic requirements<sup>6</sup> for effective, ethical, and meaningful child participation. During the consultations, the safety of everyone was prioritized, especially of children and youth. The consultations and forum required a Child Safeguarding Protocol. CRC Asia prepared a set of activity-specific Child Participation and Child Safeguarding documents, even though the in-country partners' policies do not conflict with CRC Asia's. In-country partners funded by CRC Asia/UN ESCAP were required to use it, while others were encouraged.

<sup>6</sup> Updated version of the nine basic requirements can be found at <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/applying-9-basic-requirements-meaningful-and-ethical-child-participation-during-covid-19>



# Results of the Consultations with Children and Youth

## Children and Youth's Experience and Knowledge of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

Over 80% of the children and youth surveyed had direct or indirect experience of registration, and shared the impact it had on their lives or the lives of others. In the consultations, less than 20% of participants had opinions on CRVS, but did not have direct or indirect experience with it. In most cases, people shared their registration issues or heard about others' issues. Many shared that they or a family member have not yet registered their birth, marriage, or death. While some reported registering, others reported having trouble correcting errors on their certificates. Some had positive registration experiences.

### ■ Positive Registration Experience

Participants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Samoa, and Thailand said the registration process was easy and went well. There are two (2) common factors from their experiences: a good government registration system that is easy, affordable, and accessible, and parental involvement showing support and value for the process.



**I easily got my birth certificate because the government made it mandatory, and my father went to our village to process it."**

a child participant from Nepal

The children and youth who had positive registration experiences had common backgrounds. Most of their families have a stable urban residence, are citizens of the countries they live in, were born in clinics and hospitals (for birth registration), and their relatives died in hospitals (for death registration). The registration process was difficult for the children, youth, and their families without these factors. Some chose not to register at all.



## Reasons for Non-Registration

Unregistered participants from Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka shared personal reasons for not registering births, marriages, and deaths of relatives. Many of them were unaware of the value of registration, had no concept of it all, or did not take it seriously, while some felt they had no choice.

Two reasons stand out as alarming. One involves bonded labor families' children and youth, with participants from Pakistan citing they have no right to be registered because they belong to bonded labor families.

**"I belong to a bonded family and I think we have no right to the certificate. Our parents spend their life without registration, so we will spend our life like this."**

a 14-year-old boy from Pakistan

The other reason is from Sri Lankan SOS villages' children and youth who have probable birth certificates that are not officially acknowledged as a substitute for birth registration. There appears to be no easy way to convert them to actual birth certificates.

Others cited poverty as an issue with factors including inaccessibility to registration centers due to them living in rural areas, lack of awareness, unclear information, and births and deaths taking place at home.

## Registration Woes

The registration issues stated by most of the children and youth from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are unfortunately intergenerational. Unregistered parents, both for marriage and birth, either do not value registering or simply cannot register their children's births, finding the registration process difficult. Death of an unregistered parent also hinders passport application for their child.

The registration issues are also linked. Couples whose births are unregistered struggle to register their marriage. Consequently, unregistered marriages make birth registration of children born from that marriage difficult.

Another contributing factor to registration problems is the rigidity of registration requirements, especially late registration and correction of details. Children, youth, and families who relocated must re-register, while migrants, refugees, and stateless persons have no recognized registration processes.

**"I missed out on various opportunities, as well as basic rights guaranteed by birth certificates."**

a young person from Nepal

## Children's Perspectives on the Importance of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

The children and youth knew the value of registering births, marriages, and deaths. Over 80% based this on their own experience or on the experience of someone they know.

### ■ Importance of Birth Registration

Birth registration is important for the government and the people it serves, according to the children and youth, citing three (3) primary reasons:

1. It confirms one's national identity.
2. It is required to access services and support, such as school enrollment, employment, travel, healthcare, financial services, licenses, and other certifications such as driving, national ID card, marriage, and death.
3. It is required for voting.

For the government, birth registration is essential in keeping track of the population it serves, especially in planning and implementing services.

### ■ Importance of Marriage Registration

Marriage registration is important for the children and youth for the following reasons:

1. It proves a marriage is legal and prevents fake marriages.
2. It prevents marriages without consent and decreases violence against women and girls.
3. It is a requirement in processes and services, including spousal benefits, banking, insurance, inheritance, division of assets in case of divorce or separation, establishing guardianship in times of emergency, and birth registration of children.
4. It is required in filing for adultery, annulment, or divorce.

### ■ Importance of Death Registration

Death registration is important for the children and youth for the following reasons:

1. It proves the death of a person and shows the cause of death.
2. It is required in processes and services, such as accessing financial assistance from the government, inheritance, pension, settlement of assets, passport application of children, and processing burials in some cases.
3. It is used by the government to know the condition of its population, especially on health-related issues.

## Children and Youth's Knowledge of the Challenges of Registration

### ■ Birth Registration

Challenges are:

1. Lack of awareness and education on its process and importance
2. Lack of access to and coverage of birth registration

- a. This is evident in the lack of proper home birth registration procedures and access to registration centers due to distance or lack of government facilities.
  - b. This can also be seen in some groups' inability to process birth registration. Those who cannot read or write, have disabilities, are migrants, or live in remote areas have difficulty accessing birth registration.
3. Problems in the registration process also impede birth registration:
- a. Actual process
    - Complicated and time-consuming
    - Insufficient time to comply with the requirements
    - Long lines in the registration centers
  - b. Registration staff
    - Not accommodating and helpful

## ■ **Marriage Registration**

Challenges are:

1. Limited options for marriage registration
  - a. Some areas lack a marriage registration office or agency, making it difficult for ] those living in the provinces and rural areas. Some may need to travel to the city to register.
  - b. Online registration is not an option.
2. Lack of awareness on the importance of a marriage certificate
3. Lengthy process
4. Ineligibility to register child marriage
  - a. Since child marriage has been outlawed, married Nepali children are unable to register their marriage, multiplying their problems. They are trapped in a marriage not legally recognized, without the protection of and benefits from the government and society.
5. Ineligibility of parents lacking marriage registration to register the birth of their children

## ■ **Death Registration**

Challenges are:

1. Lack of accountability from the registering agencies
  - a. Hospitals and the government do not take death certification seriously.
  - b. Private hospitals issue fake death certificates.
  - c. Inaccurate details in the death certificate.



2. Lack of education and awareness on its importance and process
3. Lack of interest to secure death certificate
4. Complicated and lengthy process
5. Non-issuance of death certificate when death occurs at home even if the family goes to the hospital
6. Deprivation of monetary assistance or inheritance and settlement for the children of the unregistered dead

## Children and Youth's Recommendations to Improve Birth, Marriage, and Death Registration

### ■ Birth Registration

Recommendations are:

1. Ensure the registration of all children wherever they are born.
2. Ensure fast registration within 30 days after birth.
3. Ensure accurate registration.

To achieve these goals, the children and youth listed specific actions that governments and other stakeholders can take:

1. Government can ensure registration of all children by:
  - a. Increasing the number registration sites, especially in remote areas
  - b. Facilitating birth registry for home births
  - c. Establishing alternative information centers and birth registration offices in hospitals or otherwise for special populations
  - d. Implementing alternative birth registration procedures for special populations
  - e. Having a separate procedure for unregistered orphans, migrants, and refugees, such as allowing birth registration within the year of birth, and the provision of birth certificates based on date and place of birth, without the need for parents' presence, especially in the case of orphans.
  - f. Making a registration system for refugees
  - g. Setting up a system ensuring all relevant documents of the child are handed over when they are endorsed to an orphanage
  - h. Extending assistance to children and youth from special groups like indigenous communities
  - i. Integrating health programs for newborns with birth registration campaigns, such as providing birth cards during children's vaccination
  - j. Recruiting one person per village or district to register children born at home, issue birth cards, and report births to relevant organizations (This can be done by assigning teams to do house-to-house registration.)
  - k. Making birth registration mandatory; mothers giving birth at home should take their children to hospitals for birth registration
  - l. Raising awareness and conducting education campaigns on registration, its

- importance, and how and where to do it in the communities
- m. Improving collaboration between local non-government organizations (NGOs) and the government
- 2. Government can ensure fast registration by:
  - a. Increasing the number of registration personnel
  - b. Mobilizing health personnel or hospital staff to provide birth registration cards to mothers
  - c. Strengthening institutional cooperation and training hospital staff to coordinate with the civil register on birth registration
- 3. Government can ensure accurate registration by:
  - a. Training staff involved in the registration
  - b. Improving processes and the computer system
  - c. Improving cooperation between national and local governments for the proper monitoring and follow-up on the needed system and infrastructure improvements for CRVS

## ■ **Marriage Registration**

Recommendations are:

1. Make marriage registration mandatory.
2. Improve services and processes.
  - a. Expand options for couples to make their marriage legal in the nearest possible place like their own village.
  - b. Make the process free.
3. Clarify and raise awareness on the process.
4. Ensure a fast marriage registration process (within 30 days).

## ■ **Death Registration**

1. Make it easier by:
  - a. Establishing an office in every district
  - b. Allowing religious leaders (imams/priests/pastors) presiding over funeral services to check death registrations and do the registrations
  - c. Making it free
2. Improve death registration services and processing by:
  - a. Clarifying who should do the registration and where it could be done
  - b. Ensuring that details of death, such as the cause of death, are accurately recorded and verified
3. Increase awareness on the death registration process, especially on how and where to do the registration



Photo credit: Group Development Pakistan

# The Regional Forum



## Child-friendly Venue to Hear Children's Voices

The organizers initially planned to hold three sub-regional forums (Greater Mekong/Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Asia and the Pacific) to allow participants to share their CRVS experiences and recommendations. When the participants in the in-country consultations finalized their chosen delegates for the forum, the organizers decided to reduce the number of sub-regional virtual forums from three to two in March 2021. Lockdowns in May 2021 forced organizers to hold only one regional forum for children and youth who can safely participate from home.

The forum allowed the in-country consultations' children and youth representatives to start drafting their joint video statement and select members of a Statement Core Group who would finalize it. Before the regional forum, a child-friendly information packet was distributed to participants to prepare and guide them for the forum in drafting their joint video statement (Annex 5: Information Pack about the Regional Forum for Children and Youth, p. 91). Adult support (i.e., Adult Mentors, Interpreters, other representatives of in-country partner organizations) received a separate information pack to ensure they were well-informed to support the regional forum's children and youth delegates.

Tanja Sejersen, of the UN ESCAP, gave a welcome address, emphasizing the importance of civil registration and vital statistics, and the government's responsibility to ensure everyone's access. Following her, Kathrine Yee, Regional Advocacy Director for World Vision International, explained the forum's purpose and objectives.

The delegates discussed how to present the findings and how to support them in their joint video statement during the workshop session, which covered three major topics:

1. **Importance** – Why is it important to have birth, marriage, and death certificates?
2. **Challenges** – What are the challenges we face in getting birth, marriage, and death certificates?
3. **Recommendations** – How can the government and other people help us in getting birth, marriage, and death certificates?

### ■ Children's Views

During the forum, the children expressed their views, echoing those expressed during the in-country consultations. For them, registration is more than a piece of paper, and that they are not legally recognized without birth registration. They see it as a gateway to services. This piece of paper, according to a Sri Lankan delegate, can destroy a child's or anyone's future.

Certificates are human rights, and without it, children do not legally exist in the system.

**“Certificates are human rights, and without it, children do not legally exist in the system.”**

child and youth delegates of the regional forum

## ■ The Video Statement Core Group

Participants chose their Statement Core Group representatives after the discussion. They chose 13 from 9 countries (i.e., Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand). To ensure that all 11 countries are represented in the final video statement, the organizers asked the delegates from Cambodia and Samoa to nominate their representatives. To finalize the joint video statement to be presented to the Second Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and Pacific from November 16–19, 2021, the Statement Core Group had 15 members by June 2021.

### **Joint Statement of Children and Youth on Birth, Marriage and Death Registration/Certification**

#### **Birth, marriage, and death certificates are human rights.**

A birth certificate is important in the different stages of our lives because it reflects our identity and our relationship with the people around us, including our parents.

It is the first document that gives us recognition as citizens. We need it now, to go to school. And we will need it for future employment and in realizing our dreams. We need it to secure important papers such as our national identification card, driver's license and even our marriage certificate when we decide to have our own family.

And we need it to access healthcare.

Our birth certificates allow us to practice our right to vote, to exercise our freedom of movement. And in the future, it will allow us to access financial services such as banking and insurance.

Data on birth, marriage, and death registrations are important for governments to ensure every citizen, including us children and youth, is considered in the provision of services including education, health, and disease prevention.

Marriage certificates give our parents access to social benefits and services.

It also guarantees us with parental support, in cases of separation or divorce, and with claim to properties or inheritance due to death of a parent.

Death certificates, guarantee our right to our parents' pension, compensation, and other financial support.

#### **Birth, marriage, and death registrations do not only secure us access to our rights. They also give us protection.**

Efficient birth and marriage certification will protect us from the irreversible impacts of child or early marriage. All children and youth should be allowed to enjoy their childhood, their youth.

The marriage certificate is an important document for women who experience harassment and violence at home and want to file for divorce. Marriage

registration can also protect us, children and youth, from forced or fake marriages.

**Birth, marriage, and death registration helps the government in ensuring efficient allocation of goods and services.**

It promotes fair elections and good governance. A reliable death registration system is a good reference for voter registration. It prevents election fraud.

Efficient death registration will allow governments to know the causes of preventable deaths, and provide protective measures against it. In cases of violent deaths and human rights violations, the death certificate is an important supporting document in pursuing legal action.

But many people hesitate to register births, marriages, and deaths.

They find the registration process complicated. It consumes their time, energy, and money. Many people also hesitate to register births, marriages, and deaths because of the quality of service in the registration centers. Some experience discrimination. Some experience difficulties to correct errors made by data encoders themselves.

Some get discouraged when concerned government units and private institutions provide little help and add another obstacle to the registration process.

We, the children and youth of Asia and the Pacific, have the limitless potential to contribute to society.

But we can only develop our full potential when our rights are secured and protected.

**And this starts with our basic, identifying documents.**

As we participated in consultations and online forum on civil registration of vital statistics, we saw the need to actively raise awareness about the importance of birth, marriage, and death registration and certificates.

Children and youth need all adults to understand this – all adults.

And parents and other children caregivers need to understand how birth registration affects our access to education, healthcare, and other government services.

We do not only want to share, with other children and youth, the importance of getting registered. We want to have a dialogue with our governments. We have recommendations to make registration systems responsive to the needs of its citizen, regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and abilities.

We, the participants of the children and youth regional forum on issues of civil registration and vital statistics held in May 2021, strongly recommend for governments to make and enforce laws that support timely registration of all



births, marriages, and deaths.

Governments also need to ensure that the registration systems are efficient and accurate.

We recommend:

- increasing the number of personnel and registration centers, to make them accessible to people.
- providing appropriate training for all of its personnel.
- involving community and religious leaders in the registration system.
- improving coordination between different government units and other institutions such as hospitals, churches and police departments.
- providing different accessible options such as online registration, for parents and families of children and youth in different conditions
- guaranteeing all parents and families of children and youth with assistance based on their different situations.

Governments need to make the birth, marriage, and death registration simple and cost-free for our families.

And governments need to make sure information about this process is widely distributed in different languages and in forms of communication that are accessible to people who are differently-abled.

We also ask the governments to recognize probable age certificates for children and youth who are orphans, stateless, or victims of abuse.

Please, let every individual in your country be counted.

Protect them from injustices that this lack of recognition from institutions may bring.

We, the children and youth, need governments, civil society and other concerned individuals and organizations to commit to the development of our full potential.

It all starts with an efficient and accurate registration system where everyone is registered.

**Register us to include us in public services and programs.**

**Register all of us, now!**

## ■ Children's Experiences

Many children shared negative registration experiences during the regional forum, echoing the perspectives of some of the participants of the in-country consultations. They say the government is not doing enough to help them register.

**“Poverty, illiteracy, and lack of information hinder registration.**

child and youth delegates of the regional forum

Families who live in remote areas and cannot afford to travel to registration centers are hampered by poverty. When they do register, they have trouble correcting errors on the certificates. Several participants said registration officials sometimes demand money and intentionally delay registration. Parents' lack of awareness of the importance of birth registration and the processes involved prevents registration. Delegates agreed that more information is needed to emphasize the value of registration. Assistance with birth certificates is also required, especially for minorities.

Many children said that lack of hospital and government support also hindered death registration. They said hospitals and even the government don't take death certificates seriously. There were errors in some death certificates, and a delegate from Pakistan stated that there is no system for issuing death certificates in communities.

## ■ Children's Recommendations

The forum's delegates emphasized one major recommendation: make birth, marriage, and death registration easily accessible, free, and without erroneous information.

**“ Make registration accurate, easily accessible, and free of charge.**

child and youth delegates of the regional forum

They emphasized the importance of gathering birth, marriage, and death certificates to urge policy-makers to register everyone. They said the lack of certificates not only causes problems when registering, but also impacts their daily lives. They can't enroll in school, travel freely, claim inheritance or property without these certificates. Participants can be motivated to “get everyone in the picture” if the government is made aware of their situation, suggesting specific actions that governments can take:

- Increase the number of registration center managers
- Increase infrastructure and create mechanisms so people can get important documents
- more easily
- Review registration procedures
- Improve capacity of registration staff
- Ensure accountability in the registration process to minimize errors
- Review benefits and salaries of registration staff
- Prioritize connectivity and digitalization
- Provide comprehensive information at the district office providing registration services, not just in the online platforms





Photo credit: Group Development Pakistan

# Conclusions and Recommendations

To be unrecognized in society is to be deprived of one's human rights. Many participants in the in-country consultations and regional forum revealed that they are among the unrecognized and expressed how they are the faces behind the numbers. To address this, participants made recommendations, which are summarized here.

## Children's Views and Experiences on Civil Registration

### ■ Two Key Actors in Universal Registration

Participants identified governments and parents as key players in successful registration. Governments made registration simple, affordable, and accessible. The parents valued registration, were registered, and registered their kids.

### ■ Registration Barriers

Participants experienced institutional and social barriers connected to the aforementioned key actors.

- Institutional barriers stem from CRVS-related agencies' policies and practices. There is a lack of coordination between government departments, human resource skills, and capacity gaps in the agencies responsible for CRVS processes. Specific ones they encountered include:
- A complicated and lengthy registration process, including late registration
- Rigid requirements such as the need for witnesses to confirm one's birth and parents, and the need for parents' birth certificates and national identity card, among others
- Lack of a registration process for people with special needs
- Technical issues in processing certificates and correcting errors
- Lack of facilities and staff for filing of registration

On the other hand, social barriers refer to demand-side challenges that may hinder timely registration. These may include lack of understanding and awareness of the importance of registration and the difference in the language and cultural practices of a person to a country's lingua franca and common practices. Poverty is also a social barrier as many poor families, especially those living in rural areas, are unable to afford the high cost of registration, lengthy processes, and travel expenses.

## The Impact of Lack of Registration on the Children

Registration is important for the children and youth participants of the consultation and forum. Birth registration establishes their legal identity and is key to accessing rights, entitlements, and services. Marriage registration establishes a person's civil status and protects them from deceit, violence, or separation. A marriage certificate is also required to register children, access financial claims and benefits, and file for adultery, annulment, or divorce. A death certificate also proves a person's death and facilitates financial assistance, inheritance, pension, and asset settlement, and is also required for burial. Needless to say, the lack of these certificates negatively impacts children and youth in many ways.



## Limited Participation in Society

The lack of registration prevents children and youth from enrolling in school, moving up levels, participating in sports, or traveling freely. Their registration ownership determines their educational level, activities, future job opportunities, and travel options. Their lack of registration prevents them from contributing to society. Currently, the LGBTQI are not recognized in some countries.

### A story of a young person from Nepal

**Aparna (not her real name) does not have a vital registration certificate because both her parents lacked knowledge about the importance of having them. She couldn't go to school because she does not have a birth certificate or a citizenship card. She works on the streets as a ragpicker. She feels that the lack of such crucial documents has hindered her dreams.**

## Lack of Access to Basic Services

Registration is the key to accessing government services. It establishes one's legal identity as well as their citizenship rights and gives them access to entitlements and services. Access to basic services like health care and education becomes difficult for unregistered children, especially those whose parents did not register their marriages. Some participants said they couldn't access government or financial services because their parents couldn't produce their marriage and birth certificates.

### A story of a child from Sri Lanka

**Sadesh (not his real name) shared that his grandmother doesn't know her actual age because she doesn't have a birth certificate and a national identity card. Because of this, she was not able to open a bank account. She faces a lot of difficulties when she goes to health clinics and government hospitals.**

## Lack of Protection

No registration means no protection. Without birth certificates, children are vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. In fact, many children in different parts of Asia are trapped in unrecognized marriages, without the protection or benefits of the state or society. Marriage certificates are required to register children born from these types of unions. The LGBTQI community is also unprotected because many governments do not recognize their civil unions.

### A story of a young person from Nepal

**Rama (not her real name) is an 18-year-old, Grade 11 female student. She got pregnant at the age of 15 and had an informal marriage ceremony. When the baby was six months old, she went back to her parents to continue her studies. She wanted to register the birth of her son but couldn't do so because she cannot present a marriage certificate. She requested the child's father to help in obtaining the birth certificate, but he demanded custody before he would help. The father is getting married to another woman, and Rama cannot claim property rights or support for her or her child because they were never formally married or divorced. She fears that the child's legal identity may be hampered.**

## ■ The Cycle of Unregistration and Poverty

Many who are not registered belong to low-income families. Because registration is required to access basic services, many unregistered people are further pushed into poverty, perpetuating and reinforcing the cycle of poverty. In many cases, like poverty, non-registration is passed down from parent to child to grandchild.

### A story of a young person from Nepal

**A young girl shared that when her father passed away, they couldn't get a death certificate for him because his birth was unregistered. Mariam (not her real name) lives with her three sisters and their mother. Their mother is illiterate and a domestic worker who works hard for them to give them an education.**

**She and her siblings are not registered. They tried to register but couldn't because they lacked their father's death certificate, and their mother is not registered too and does not have a computerized national ID card. They asked for help, but they were told that registering entails a long process and they need to hire a lawyer. They cannot afford to get a lawyer.**

## Making Registration Accessible to All

The CRVS issue requires a societal approach. Parents/guardians must register their children, but the process must be accessible, transparent, and affordable. A basic document recognizing rights and citizenship is vital for all citizens, especially the most vulnerable. This section suggests actions that stakeholders can take to ensure that all births, marriages, and deaths are registered, remove obstacles to registration, and reduce the impact of non-registration.

### ■ For Governments

To address institutional and social barriers to registration, the government can start by educating the public. Many children and their parents, especially the poor, refugees, illiterate, and migrants, do not know how to register. The government must make sure everyone understands the consequences of not registering births, marriages, and deaths.

One major institutional barrier identified by the children is unclear birth and late registration processes. Many said the process is time-consuming, costly, and requires rigid requirements like birth certificates and income information from parents. Complying with the rules costs time and money, which the poor cannot afford. Governments can streamline the registration process and improve the skills of their registration personnel.

Governments can make birth registration mandatory to ensure every birth is registered. This can also help orphans, migrants, and refugees by providing alternative birth registration policies, such as basing registration on the child's birthdate and place of birth, rather than on the presence of parents; as well as acknowledging and including the LGBTQI in official statistics and registration processes. As the government refines registration processes to include all, it can also reduce or eliminate birth registration and late fees, or provide financial assistance to those who need it.

Better registration processes and facilities for those born at home, remote areas, marginalized and vulnerable groups can help governments expand their reach. They also emphasized the need to increase hospital staff capacity and numbers to ensure all babies are registered. These changes should be accompanied by better digital infrastructure and data systems, and improved cooperation between the national and local government.

Access to birth registration services can be combined with early childhood development or universal access to education. Many children said they can't go to school because they don't have birth certificates, so when they talked about coordination between the different government agencies, they meant linking registration with education services. Government education agencies should be able to facilitate the process of securing birth registration for students if universal access to education is the government's policy and a birth certificate is going to be a requirement.

### ■ **For Parents**

The children who took part in both activities suggested actions for parents as well. For them, parents should take registration seriously, and must quickly register their marriages and children's births. Many of the children said they didn't have birth certificates because their parents do not have a marriage certificate. It all starts at home.

### ■ **For NGOs**

Several children identified the importance of NGOs in spreading registration information and strengthening institutions by providing training. NGOs can play this role by raising community awareness on the importance of CRVS.

Despite the difficulties young people had accessing registration in various Asian and Pacific countries, children cited examples that show how registration can be made accessible to all. During the in-country consultations and the regional forum, some shared a positive birth registration experience. They said the government made registration simple, affordable, and accessible. They also said their parents helped them register because they understand the value of birth certificates, were registered themselves, and handled their children's registration.

These responses emphasize the importance of the government and parents registering all children. Birth, marriage, and death certificates are tangible proof that the government and parents value and recognize their lives and protect their future. The children revealed their concerns not only about the registration process, but also about how non-registration affects their education, freedom, and quality of life. By allowing everyone to register, we can ensure that every child is protected, can access services, and can assert their rights.





Photo credit: Group Development Pakistan

# **Young People's Voices in the Picture: Stories on CRVS**



### A Child of Street Situations

Aparna (not her real name) is a child from Kathmandu. Her father was an alcoholic who mentally and physically abused his wife and two children. He died when she was five years old. Her mother remarried, this time to a man who was a rag picker like herself and who also had two children. Aparna and her sister never received the love they deserve, causing her to run back to the streets. She was rescued numerous times and brought to shelter homes, yet she always goes back to the streets. She is now married to a former street dweller. She has a five-year-old daughter and is now four months pregnant.

Aparna is one of the many people in Nepal without a vital registration certificate. Because both her parents lacked knowledge about the importance of registration, they never got registered. According to her, she has missed out on various opportunities as well as basic rights guaranteed by such certificates. She laments not being able to receive a good education due to the lack of any identifying documents such as a birth certificate. This adversely affected her chances of having the life she dreamt off. Ever since she was a kid, she always wanted to break free to escape the life she was living. She says the lack of such crucial documents has hindered her dreams.

When her father died, they were not able to get a death certificate because he did not possess any proof of identity. This hampered her chances to claim for property rights in her father's ancestral home. Furthermore, due to lack of a birth certificate, she was also not able to get her citizenship card. Because she did not have identity documents and was deprived of education, she was forced to work in the streets as a rag picker.

She married at the early age of 14 to a boy who was also living in the streets who was a year older than her. They have a five-year-old daughter and are living in a rented room. She was also not able to file a birth certificate for her child because she and her husband do not have any supporting documents for registration, such as a citizenship certificate or marriage certificate. According to her, her biggest fear in life is her daughter having the same fate as hers due to lack of vital registration certificates. With the help of an NGO, she was able to send her daughter to school, but she worries that the absence of the birth or citizenship certificate will hamper her daughter's chances of receiving all the perks and services provided by such certificates.

She also shared her experience about the numerous visits she did to concerned government offices responsible for providing these vital certificates. She said that she has visited the ward office multiple times to file her certificates. However, due to lack of other supporting documents she was unable to register and get them. When she heard that she might be able to obtain the certificates using her father's identity documents, she travelled to their ancestral place in search of a relative or anyone who can identify her deceased father in front of a concerned government officer as this might help obtain her father's certificate. However, she was unable to find anyone who knew her father in Kavre District.

She feels that government should make some special provisions and policies in favor of vulnerable children and youths so that they can also get birth, citizenship, and marriage certificates even if their parents do not possess such vital certificates. She asks, "I am a Nepali who was born and brought up in Nepal. Why am I not able to receive my certificate?"

There are many children and youth in Nepal who face the same problem she does. They ask themselves and society the same question. By coming forward and sharing her experiences, she hopes to highlight the difficulties people like her face in obtaining the certificates. She hopes that responsible authorities take the necessary actions so that other children and youth do not have to suffer like her.

## Children of Early Marriages

Rama (not her real name) is an 18-year-old, Grade 11 female student. She lives with her parents and her two-year-old son in a rented flat in Kathmandu. Her story is a case prevalent in Nepalese society—marriage before the legal age of 20 and its consequences.

Many children and youth in Nepal are married before the legal age. A UNICEF report states that 40% of Nepalese girls are married before their 18th birthday and 7% are married before the age of 15. About 10% of Nepali boys get married before the age of 18. Their young age deprives them from getting a marriage certificate as well as the birth certificate of their children.

Rama fell in love when she was fifteen-year-old with a boy who was a year older than her. She was still an elementary student when she became pregnant. When her parents found about her pregnancy, they contacted the father of the unborn child and his parents. Eight months into her pregnancy and with the consent of their parents, she was sent to the boy's home. They had an informal marriage ceremony witnessed only by their parents.

When the baby was six months old, she came back to her parents. To continue her studies, her parents decided to enroll her in Grade 10 and asked her to stay back until she completes her education. This caused the rift between her and her partner. It has been more than two years since she went back to her parents. She is not in good terms with the father of the baby.

Being an educated girl, she knows about the importance of the birth certificate. She wants to register her son's birth. However, because she does not have a marriage certificate since she was married before the legal age, she is unable to file for the birth certificate of her child. To secure the future of her child, she requested the child's father to help in obtaining the birth certificate. He demanded for the custody of the child before he would help.

She heard the father of her child is getting married to another person. She cannot do anything about this if it were true because they do not have a marriage certificate. She cannot claim for property rights since they were never formally married or divorced. She cannot even ask for child support. Her biggest concern is that the identity of her child will be hampered.

She has visited ward offices to secure her child's birth certificate using her own as basis, but she has always been denied. According to the law, details of both parents are needed to obtain a birth certificate. Rama believes that the government should amend the policies to allow a child to register and receive a birth certificate based on the mother's certificate only. There might be many children facing a similar situation. Moreover, since there are many adolescent and young adults who get married before the age of 20, there should be special provisions for children who are born of such marriages so that they can also receive their birth certificates.

## Pakistan

### The Lack of Registration Denies People their Rights

My name is Ali and my story revolves around my birth certificate and its importance.

I belong to the small village of Takkar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province-Pakistan. I grew up there and had no clear knowledge of what birth registration means. I was not registered until I reached the age of 16, when I realized how important it is.

It surprised me to know that I have been living and growing up in Pakistan but officially, I was not their citizen. I cannot claim or prove my identity, which deprives me of my "right to identity." It can also make it difficult for me to travel locally and internationally.

When I learned all these, I decided to fill out Form B and register my birth. I went to the National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA) Mega Centre with my parents who were already registered. It was a great

experience for me because I was able to do it without any hurdles, even on a Sunday. The facility was open 24/7 in my locality.

It took me less than an hour to register, but the wait for my turn was long due to the heavy workload. Verification was easier because it was carried out biometrically by my mother. The great thing was that there were no mistakes in recording the data. If there were, they can be corrected in a few minutes without any hurdles or extra fee. You just need your parents for verification/attestation. I also learned that it can also be done on your own through your Union Council officer. This is easier, but it is important to get it done on time otherwise you will need the medical board for your age determination.

Without my birth certificate, I would have been deprived of my right to identity, my right to education, my right to travel and move locally and internationally, and my right to health.

Having my birth certificate allowed me to get a passport to travel internationally in 2019. When I first went to the Immigration Office to apply for a passport, I was shocked to learn that I won't be able to get it because at the age of 16, I still did not have a birth registration. This meant that I was not a registered citizen of Pakistan and my parents were not aware of it.

Based on my experience, I would recommend the following:

- we should raise awareness. Many people like me are not aware of the importance of birth registration
- there should be a specific policy and age limit for birth registration which all parents should be bound to do for their children
- there should be interlinkage and coordination between authorities like hospitals, schools, among others, to gather data on unregistered children
- the NADRA centre or offices should be made accessible to everyone and there should be load management to make the process quicker and reduce waiting time.
- there should be yearly updates of birth records with the NADRA centre so that if any mistake is recorded, it can be corrected

### **The Lack of Registration Denies the Right to Citizenship**

My name is Saba and I have two children. My family is engaged in the labor of brick kiln. I married 5 years ago. The Nikah (wedding) ceremony was held in the local mosque of the brick kiln where we worked in 2016. We are not aware of the importance of the marriage registration at the time of Nikah and did not bother to register it and to get a certificate from the local union council.

After the birth of our first child, we felt the need for the Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) for the birth registration of our child. We learned that the CNIC is a mandatory document for birth registration or B-form. When we inquired with the National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA) for our CNIC, we were asked to present our marriage certificate, but we did not know how to get it. When we inquired about our Nikah registrar, we learned he died and no one knows about our Nikah record. Our marriage was never registered because the Molvi who married us did not process the Nikah in the Union Council Office.

Now, whenever we go to that mosque for our marriage certificate, the staff say they have submitted it to the Union Council. But the Union Council is not cooperating with us; it did not provide us a relevant certificate even with repeated visits and follow-ups.

Because we of our lack of awareness and the carelessness of concerned authorities, we cannot get our marriage certificate from the Union Council and are unable to process our CNICs. Our children's birth cannot be registered until we have our CNICs. Our lack of a marriage certificate, CNIC, and birth certificates deprives us and our children Pakistani citizenship. Without citizenship, we are unable to get social security, education, health, wages, and other government services.

## **The Lack of Birth Registration is a Barrier to the Right to Education**

My name is Anum. I work as a teacher at a non-formal basic education school. Almost 60 students enrolled in my school get education under my supervision. This school is for poor, needy, and laborer-class children. The students enrolled in our school belong to the lowest-income families of remote communities. Our school helps poor parents provide education to their children.

Many parents do not have their computerized national identity cards. The lack of this card is a key hurdle to student's birth registration at the Union Council or at the NADRA. These parents belong to the laborer class. They have very low income and face great difficulty in fulfilling their basic needs. Many of them are illiterate and are not aware of the significance of birth registration and how to proceed with it. Many of them do not have the knowledge and awareness about the basic rules and regulations in dealing with the registration process. Some parents cannot afford the costs associated with registration, including travel to registration sites or late fees. Thus, many are unable to register their children.

Birth registration is a basic document required for enrollment to any public-sector run institute. Many students do not have birth certificates. Because of this, we are unable to complete their enrollment process. The concerned government officials must pay special attention to resolve this issue so that the children can enjoy their basic right to education and continue their learning journey.

## **Samoa**

### **The Importance of Birth Registration**

When I played in our school's rugby team, our coach asked us to bring our birth certificates to confirm that we met the age requirement. We all brought our birth certificates. Those who qualified for the team were those born in 2000. There was one other boy who was born in 1998. In his desire to play and be part of the team, he crossed out the year 1998 and wrote the year 2000 on his birth certificate.

The teacher did not notice the change until the game's officials received many complaints about this overage boy playing in our school rugby team. An investigation ensued and it was discovered that the boy tampered his birth certificate. An inquiry into the Birth, Deaths, and Marriages Offices, which produced the boy's actual birth certificate, confirmed the document was tampered. He was immediately taken off the team.

This experience taught me about the seriousness of tampering with registered documents and the importance of being registered. If this boy was not registered at birth, the rugby officials will find it difficult to confirm the boy's actual date of birth.

The story illustrated a real need for registrations to be compulsory and for their processes to be accessible to all. The certificates validate the existence of and the status of a person through birth, death, or marriage.

### **Lessons from a Birth Registration**

I am young mother and my experience with the registration process is through the birth certificate changes I requested for my first-born child. I experienced a problem not at the time of my son's first registration, but when I went back to the Registration Office to change his last name.

When my son was born, I registered my child and specified my name and his biological father's name as his parents. At the time, his father and I were still in a relationship but we were not married. We separated and I married a different man. Since I married and my son's biological father does not contribute to raising my son, my husband and I agreed to replace my son's last name with my husband's last name.

When I went to the Registration Office, I was told that I can only do this if the biological father will give his consent. In the end, I did not get exactly what I wanted. Instead, my son's last name was changed from his



biological father's to my last name, which is my father's surname.

This taught me a very important lesson about registration. It is not something you can change whenever you feel like it. There are processes and procedures that we need to comply with for changes to be officially recognized.

## **A Victim of the System**

I did not have a direct experience with registration, but I am regarded as a victim of the system, my mother's irresponsibility, or my grandmother's concern that I may not have a birth record. For some reason, I used to have two birth certificates, each with a different birth date and different parents.

According to my mother, she used the card from the hospital stating my date of birth to apply for a birth certificate immediately after I was born. Because I was raised by my grandparents when my mother moved overseas, my grandmother took charge of my baptism some years later. She was issued my baptism certificate, which contains the wrong date of my actual birth. She used my baptism certificate to register my birth, and on this birth registration, my grandmother wrote both her name and my grandfather's name as my parents. The registration went through alright.

It was not until my mother's return for the holidays and my birthday did we find out about the error. During all the time my mother was overseas, we were celebrating my birthday on a wrong day, the date on the birth certificate my grandparents prepared. While that did not make a big difference in my schooling as the year of birth remain the same for both certificates, the fact that I used to have two birth certificates in the registration system meant that there could have been gaps in the system at the time of my registration that failed to pick up this double registration.

My mother had to get her birth certificate, my father's birth certificate, and the hospital card of my birth, together with my baptism certificate, to confirm my actual date of birth, and for the office to declare void my second birth certificate on the system. I blamed my mother for the different information on my birth certificates because she left for New Zealand without leaving my original and correct birth certificate with my grandparents.

## **Thailand**

### **The Lack of Registration Denies Children their National Identity**

Nong A (not his real name) has no house registration. He only has a birth certificate that has inadvertent errors on it. Because of this, he cannot get an identity card (ID). He uses a Thor Ror. 14, which is a house registration of persons—Thai nationals and aliens—entitled to permanent residence in the Kingdom of Thailand. He has to ask for this document every month because he is not a Thai national and he does not have an identity card.

He did not know, where, and what to do when he applied for an identity card. He went to many places—including the Chiang Mai Municipality at the White Pagoda, but he could not get it there. He went to the district office where he was looked down on by the officials because he was not a Thai. Nong A realized that he should find more information in advance. Finally, he went to the Mengrai District Office where the staff provided very good information, enabling him to get request no. 725/2544 so he could be issued a Thai ID card. He had to take several days off from school to get this.

He went to submit the pertinent documents, including a certificate from the Ban Mae Taman School to the district office. He was insulted there because his father's and mother's names were not in the birth certificate. His parents were foreigners and could not speak Thai clearly. They submitted his certificate late and provided the wrong information. The officials said that the parents' names were not correct.

Nong A's father is already dead and without a death certificate because he died in Burma. Since his mother's name in the form was also not correct, he cannot apply for an ID card. The officials also said they don't have his data in the civil registration system.

Because he has no ID card, it is difficult for Anong A to travel. He cannot travel pass the checkpoint. Without a driver's license and any identifying documents, if he were arrested, it would be very difficult for him.

### **The High Cost of Civil Registration**

Nong B (not his real name) was born in the San Sai District of Chiang Mai. His father's employer brought him to the district office to file for his birth certificate. Nong B knew that the process was very complicated and that he had to pay a big sum of money because the district was notified late of his birth.

His parents did not have a house registration. They hold an ID card with the number 0 which means a 10-year temporary stay for people who did not have legal status. His parents could not speak Thai clearly. His father's name is Geng, but when he applied for an ID card, the officer spelled it Deng, so his father's name on his ID card was wrong. The registrar said that he could not change the name on that ID card.

When he went to the district office to apply for his own ID card, Nong B had to pay for transportation and document costs. He also had to travel to many places, too, because he was born in San Sai. This cost not only money, but time.

Now Anong B is 16 years old, but he cannot not change the title of his name to master yet. He cannot open a bank account. All because the title on his card do not match.

### **The Difficult Process of Civil Registration**

Nong C (not her real name) is a 14-year-old girl. She was born in Maesot but now lives in the border of Thailand and Myanmar with her family. Because she had a none-Thai status, it would take 10 years to get a birth certificate. She also needed Thai witnesses in their community for which her family must pay.

The process was difficult for her. She and her mother does not look alike so they had to pay to prove their kinship. She also had to bring her deceased father's picture. They had to do these in lieu of a DNA test. From this process, she got an identity number, but it would take two more years to get a "Pink ID Card," an ID card initially issued to stateless people to restrict their movement within the Kingdom of Thailand.

Nong D (not her real name) is C's 18 years older sister. She had a different identity verification experience from C. She was born in Mae Tao Clinic, a Burmese local hospital that Thai officials do not recognize in approving birth certificates. She did not get a Pink Card (Non-Thai) like C, she only has a white card (non-register status) because she has no birth certificate, witness, or other documents. She lost them all in a big flood.

Nong D also faces another registration issue: inaccurate date of birth. This affected her official documents such as the national test, registration, statistic data, and election, among others. This most especially affects her right to access further education. She hopes that once she graduates from college, she can get finally get her birth certificate for her national identification. This will secure her rights.

### **Stateless and Without an Identity**

Annie is a 15-year-old girl from Sangklaburi, which lies on the border of Thailand and Myanmar. Her family migrated to Thailand without any document, rendering their status in the Kingdom 'stateless.'

Annie just got her nationality and ID two years ago. She dreams to be a doctor. During the span of time when she lived as 'stateless,' she felt inequality. The stateless child has no surname. She cannot access state services such as basic education, entrance to college, or a certificate of graduation.

Annie finally received her ID when she was 13 years old, simultaneously with her sister who was 8 years old then. The process took one year of waiting, a community leader proving her identity, and payment for administration costs to get the card and surname. One village would have same surname.

When she got her ID, Annie knew it was her ticket to access official services. She plans to buy a land for her family in the Kingdom of Thailand so she can finally call it her real home.



**Annex**



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