



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**Seventy-fifth session**

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Item 4 (j) of the provisional agenda*

**Review of the implementation of
the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
in Asia and the Pacific: statistics****Report on the work of the Regional Steering Group for
Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the
Pacific****Note by the secretariat*****Summary*

The present report on the work of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific pertains to the preparations for the second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which will be held in 2020. The Ministerial Conference will celebrate the midpoint of the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024), review progress and consider the direction and focus of efforts towards 2024.

To facilitate the preparations for the Ministerial Conference, the Regional Steering Group made specific recommendations to member States, development partners and the secretariat during its 4th meeting, held from 13 to 15 November 2018. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific is invited to take note of the recommendations.

As per its terms of reference, the current composition of the Regional Steering Group is valid until the end of 2019. The Regional Steering Group recommended additional criteria to guide the selection process of its members for the second half of the Decade. Based on those criteria and the criteria outlined in the terms of reference, the secretariat prepared a proposal for the future membership of the Regional Steering Group. The Commission is invited to review and approve the proposal.

* ESCAP/75/L.1.

** The document was submitted late owing to the need for further consultation with member States on the issues raised during the meeting of the Regional Steering Group.

I. Background

1. The Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, 2015–2024, was proclaimed at the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which was held in Bangkok in November 2014. In declaring the Decade, Governments committed to ensuring all people in Asia and the Pacific benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems by 2024, to facilitate the realization of their rights and support good governance, health and development. This commitment was detailed in the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which was endorsed at the Ministerial Conference in 2014.

2. Since then, many countries made significant progress towards the goals and targets of the Regional Action Framework. At its seventy-fourth session, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) adopted resolution 74/8, in which it decided to convene a second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific in 2020 to review the midterm progress in the implementation of the Regional Action Framework. The Ministerial Conference will also consider the future direction of efforts, including aligning the Decade with the current global development context, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. The Regional Action Framework outlines the general reporting structure for the midterm review. The Regional Action Framework states members and associate members should submit a midterm progress report to the secretariat by the end of 2019. The secretariat and development partners, in collaboration with the Regional Steering Group, will synthesize the country reports into a report on regional progress towards achieving the targets set by members and associate members. The synthesis report will form the basis for the midterm review of progress by the Ministerial Conference in 2020.

4. Since the proclamation of the Decade and the endorsement of the Regional Action Framework at the 2014 Ministerial Conference, developments in the area of civil registration and vital statistics, such as identity management and digitization, have emerged and need to be addressed. Other issues, such as causes of death, are already captured in the Regional Action Framework and require accelerated efforts. The Ministerial Conference in 2020 provides an ideal opportunity to discuss these issues and consider the alignment of the Decade with the current global development context.

II. Report on the 4th meeting of the Regional Steering Group

5. The 4th meeting of the Regional Steering Group, which was held from 13 to 15 November 2018, aimed to initiate preparations for the midterm review of the implementation of the Regional Action Framework. The meeting discussed and finalized the midterm reporting questionnaire and guidelines, began the preparatory work for the Ministerial Conference and discussed the working arrangements of the Regional Steering Group to support the midterm review.

6. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following government members: Armenia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; Cook Islands; Fiji; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Kazakhstan; Malaysia; Mongolia; New Zealand; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Thailand; United States of America; Uzbekistan; and Vanuatu. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the following development partner

members: Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Pacific Community (on behalf of the Brisbane Accord Group); Plan International; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); World Bank Group; World Health Organization and World Vision. Representatives of Timor-Leste attended as observers.

A. Comprehensive national midterm progress assessment

1. Discussion

7. The Regional Steering Group was briefed on the modalities for the midterm review of the implementation of the Regional Action Framework.

8. Presentations by the Islamic Republic of Iran and the secretariat highlighted lessons learned from the conduct of the baseline review in 2015. It was noted that national civil registration and vital statistics committees comprising representatives of relevant agencies with the required multisector expertise were the most effective modality for comprehensive and accurate completion of the questionnaire used for the baseline report. The support of development partners in the completion and validation of the baseline questionnaire was noted as having a positive impact on the quality of the responses.

9. The secretariat presented the draft guidelines and questionnaire for members and associate members to use for the midterm report and the proposed time frame for the submission of midterm reports. Given the difficulties countries had faced in the completion of the baseline report, the secretariat had shortened the questionnaire and had included in the guidelines further elaboration of the role of the national focal points designated by countries to complete the midterm reporting questionnaire. Considering the important role of the national focal points, the secretariat requested all countries to confirm or identify their national focal point through formal communication before it circulated the midterm reporting questionnaire.

10. Following the presentations, the Regional Steering Group members reviewed the draft guidelines and questionnaire as well as the proposed process.

2. Recommendations

11. The Regional Steering Group recommended member States take the opportunity of the midterm review to conduct a comprehensive national progress assessment and suggested that information related to it should be included in the communication from the secretariat when it circulated the midterm reporting questionnaire.

12. The Regional Steering Group noted the important role of the civil registration and vital statistics national focal points in coordinating country responses to the midterm reporting questionnaire. Regarding the communication from the secretariat to countries, the Regional Steering Group recommended that the secretariat should underline the role of national civil registration and vital statistics committees at the policy and technical levels in responding to the midterm reporting questionnaire, and it should mention the link between the midterm review and the Ministerial Conference in 2020.

13. The Regional Steering Group decided the midterm reporting questionnaire should include the 15 headline indicators and eight implementation steps of the Regional Action Framework and recommended the baseline questionnaire should be circulated together with the midterm

reporting questionnaire to facilitate the establishment of a baseline by countries that had not submitted a baseline report. The Regional Steering Group welcomed the offer by New Zealand to pre-test the midterm reporting questionnaire.

14. The Regional Steering Group called on members of the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership, a group of development partners engaged in improving civil registration and vital statistics systems across the region, to support national midterm reviews through training and workshops, for example. Such support should ideally go beyond responding to the midterm reporting questionnaire and include guidance on the comprehensive national progress assessment and the establishment and functionality of national civil registration and vital statistics committees at the policy and technical levels.

15. The Regional Steering Group suggested the Partnership prepare an overview of support provided by development partners during the first half of the Decade for the Ministerial Conference.

B. Aligning the Decade with the current global development context

1. Discussion

16. The Regional Steering Group was briefed on current issues pertaining to the development of civil registration and vital statistics. The Regional Steering Group examined the relevance of current issues for the implementation of the Regional Action Framework, including its goals and targets, implementation steps and action areas, and for collaboration at the regional level, with a view to defining key items for deliberation and decision by the Ministerial Conference in 2020.

17. A presentation by Bangladesh illustrated the importance of civil registration and vital statistics to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Presentations by India, Thailand, UNICEF and the World Bank Group reflected on recent developments in legal identity and digital identity systems, while presentations by the Republic of Korea and the Pacific Community highlighted ways in which digitization can contribute to improving civil registration and vital statistics systems. The task force on mortality created by the Regional Steering Group at its 3rd meeting reported on its progress in identifying gaps in death registration systems in the Asia-Pacific region.

18. Following the presentations, group discussions were conducted to review and identify the most important and urgent issues, and outline recommendations for future regional collaboration on civil registration and vital statistics, including possible adjustments to the Regional Action Framework.

19. The issues presented pertained primarily to the shared vision and goal 2 of the Regional Action Framework which could more explicitly encompass legal identity and sustainable development. Without concluding on the matter, suggestions of alternative wordings included “Legal identity and sustainable development for all through universal civil registration and vital statistics systems” for the shared vision and “Every individual is able to prove his or her legal identity based on civil registration” for goal 2.

2. Recommendations

20. The Regional Steering Group identified the following issues: (a) the integration of civil registration and vital statistics into international and national sustainable development agendas; and (b) the promotion of civil registration and vital statistics as a foundation for legal identity for all, as essential to align the Decade with the current global development context and, therefore, further consideration should be given to them in the preparatory process for the Ministerial Conference.

C. Organizing the Ministerial Conference

1. Discussion

21. The Regional Steering Group discussed the preparatory process for the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific. Considering the Ministerial Conference will take place in 2020, and its purpose is to review the progress made and build momentum for sustained political support for the second half of the Decade, the discussions focused on the timeline leading to the Ministerial Conference, the elements of the preparatory process and the role of the Regional Steering Group and the Partnership in the process. The Regional Steering Group also discussed issues related to advocacy, visibility and communications.

2. Recommendations

22. The Regional Steering Group noted the following issues for early determination to guide the preparations for the Ministerial Conference: formulating the purpose of the Ministerial Conference in clear and catchy language; listing expected outcomes of the Ministerial Conference (to relate to progress review, alignment with the 2030 Agenda and legal identity); and agreeing on the format of the Ministerial Conference.

23. The Regional Steering Group highlighted advocacy as crucial throughout the preparatory process and suggested the following early actions: development of standardized messages to be used by all countries and partners; identification of appropriate events for advocacy efforts with a focus on events with Asia-Pacific representation; and documentation of country examples to be developed into case studies for advocacy on key issues to be discussed at the Ministerial Conference.

24. The Regional Steering Group stressed the importance of forming country delegations and using the whole-of-government approach to improve civil registration and vital statistics and noted the joint responsibility of the Regional Steering Group and the secretariat to facilitate this, including through targeted outreach and follow-up on invitations.

25. The Regional Steering Group sought the support of the Partnership in outreach efforts to boost government participation in the Conference, including liaising with the country offices of the members of the Partnership.

D. Working arrangements of the Regional Steering Group

1. Discussion

26. The Regional Steering Group discussed its working arrangements to support the midterm review process, the analytical work on the identified

current civil registration and vital statistics issues and the preparations for the Ministerial Conference.

27. The Regional Steering Group was briefed by the secretariat on the rules governing its composition. According to the terms of reference of the Regional Steering Group, the tenure of its members is five years, with the possibility of extension for a second period. The Commission would consider the membership of the Regional Steering Group for the second period (2020–2024) of the Decade at its seventy-fifth session in 2019. In preparation, the secretariat would circulate a call for expressions of interest in membership to all members and associate members of ESCAP. Based on expressions of interest, the secretariat would apply criteria listed in the terms of reference to develop a list of proposed members of the Regional Steering Group for review and approval by the Commission.

2. Recommendations

28. The Regional Steering Group decided to form four task forces to support the preparation for the Ministerial Conference in the following areas: conduct of the midterm review of the implementation of the Regional Action Framework; clarification of linkages among civil registration and vital statistics; legal identity and related issues; clarification of linkages between civil registration and vital statistics and the Sustainable Development Goals; and identification of events for advocacy at the Ministerial Conference. The Regional Steering Group decided each task force should develop their terms of reference upon formation, with concrete deliverables and a schedule.

29. The Regional Steering Group recommended the following additional criteria to guide the selection process for its membership during the second period (2020–2024) of the Decade: (a) the Regional Steering Group shall be composed of a mix of old and new members to ensure continuity; (b) the current balance between country representatives and development partner representatives in the Regional Steering Group should be maintained; (c) the Regional Steering Group will consult with the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership on the membership of development partners; and (d) the chairs of subregional groups of civil registrars formed as part of the “Get Every One in the Picture” initiative, particularly the Pacific Civil Registrars Network and the South Asian Civil Registrars Network, should be given special consideration if they express interest in membership.

III. Membership of the Regional Steering Group, 2020–2024

30. As mentioned in its terms of reference, the tenure of Regional Steering Group members is five years with the possibility of extension for a second period. The current membership is valid until the end of 2019, and a new list of members is needed.

31. Following a call for expressions of interest in membership to all members and associate members of ESCAP, the secretariat received 43 nominations from 34 countries. The secretariat has compiled a proposed list of Regional Steering Group members for the second period (2020–2024) of the Decade using the criteria outlined in the terms of reference of the Regional Steering Group and the additional criteria recommended at the 4th meeting of the Regional Steering Group (see paragraph 29). The proposed membership of the Regional Steering Group reflects the diversity of development of civil registration and vital statistics systems in the region and the multiple sectors

involved. The proposed list includes 16 new members and 7 new countries from all subregions in Asia and the Pacific.

32. The Commission is invited to review and approve the list of Regional Steering Group members for the second period (2020–2024) of the Decade. The list of proposed members is given below.

1. Afghanistan, Mr. Hasibullah Mowahed, Deputy of Director General on Professional Affairs, Central Statistics Organization;
2. Armenia, Ms. Ani Mkhitarian, Head, Civil Status Acts Registration Agency, Ministry of Justice;
3. Australia, Ms. Justine Boland, Programme Manager, Health and Disability Statistics Branch, Australian Bureau of Statistics;
4. Bangladesh, Mr. A.K. Mohiuddin Ahmad, Additional Secretary, Cabinet Division;
5. Fiji, Ms. Kamni Naidu, Acting Administrator-General, Ministry of Justice;
6. Georgia, Ms. Shorena Tisklauri, Head of Population Census and Demographic Statistics Department, National Statistics Office;
7. India, Mr. Janardan Yadav, Additional Registrar General, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner;
8. Indonesia, Mr. Maliki, Director of Population Planning and Social Protection, Ministry of National Development Planning (Bappenas);
9. Iran (Islamic Republic of), Mr. Mohammad Bagher Abbasi, Director-General, Bureau of Demographic and Migration Statistics, National Organization for Civil Registration, Ministry of Interior;
10. Kazakhstan, Mr. Nurlan Khanzhigitov, Chief Expert and Acting Head, Social and Demographic Statistics Division, Ministry of National Economy;
11. Kiribati, Ms. Tebete England, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Justice;
12. Lao People's Democratic Republic, Ms. Thirakha Chanthalanouvong, Director General, Social Statistics Department, Lao Statistics Bureau;
13. Malaysia, Ms. Nazaria Baharudin, Deputy Chief Statistician (Technical Development and Social), Department of Statistics;
14. Mongolia, Mr. Amarbal Avirmed, Director, Population and Social Statistics Department, National Statistics Office;
15. New Zealand, Mr. Jeff Montgomery, Registrar-General, Department of Internal Affairs;
16. Pakistan, Mr. Zafar Hasan, Secretary, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform;
17. Philippines, Mr. Daniel Ariaso, Sr., Assistant Secretary, Deputy National Statistician, Philippine Statistics Authority;
18. Republic of Korea, Ms. Jin Kim, Director, Vital Statistics Division, Statistics Korea;

19. Russian Federation, Mr. Dmitry Sevryuk, Deputy Head, Department of Legal Assistance and Cooperation with Judicial Systems, Ministry of Justice;
 20. Solomon Islands, Mr. Jeffrey Sade Deve, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs;
 21. Sri Lanka, Ms. M. M. Darshanie, Senior Statistician, Medical Statistics Unit, Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine;
 22. United States of America, Mr. Francis (Sam) Notzon, Director, International Statistics Program, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;
 23. United Nations Children's Fund;
 24. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;
 25. World Health Organization;
 26. World Bank Group;
 27. Brisbane Accord Group (represented by the Pacific Community);
 28. Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative;
 29. Plan International;
 30. World Vision International.
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