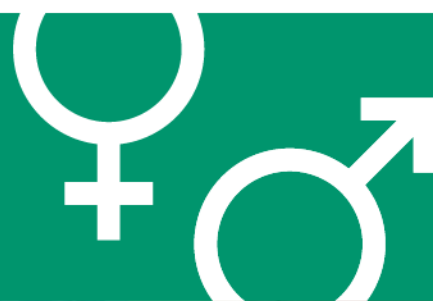




Knowledge Briefs on **Gender** and **CRVS**



Brief 2, Paper 1

The Life-Course Approach to CRVS: A Crucial Tool to Advance Gender Equality



Photo: Mohamad Al-Arief / World Bank

KEY MESSAGES

- **Excluding women and girls from civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems exacerbates gender inequality.** The three country case studies presented in this paper address the importance of CRVS and its impact on the visibility and legal rights of women in China and Morocco, as well as Syrian refugee women.
- **Sex-disaggregated monitoring of vital statistics is a necessary tool for identifying gender inequalities.** Birth registration and legal identity facilitate access to basic rights such as health care, primary and secondary education, and social support. The under-registration of women hinders gender equality and adds barriers to social and economic opportunity.
- **Marriage and divorce registration, which are too often neglected, also facilitate access to rights.** A marriage certificate provides legal proof of marriage, which women can use to secure property and collect an inheritance when their spouse dies. Similarly, divorce registration allows both individuals to remarry after a divorce, and provides a legal basis for the distribution of parental responsibilities at the end of a marriage.
- **Death registration data is a critical source of mortality statistics.** The under-registration of female deaths relative to male deaths hinders the accuracy of evidence-based health programs for women and girls.
- **Localized behavioural responses cause delays in registering female births.** The case studies illustrate how gender disparities can be clustered in geographic areas and local communities. This suggests the need for targeted subnational studies and interventions to address social gendered barriers to civil registration and legal identity.

INTRODUCTION

Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems are a crucial tool in advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls. Vital statistics, ideally derived from high-quality civil registration data, provide key insights to reproductive health outcomes such as fertility, perinatal and maternal mortality, and sex-disaggregated data on a population's

demographic profile, demographic dynamics, and overall health ([United Nations 2014](#)). As a foundational component of a legal identity system, civil registration also ensures that women and girls can prove their own identities to access crucial public services such as health, education, and social protection throughout the life-course – from birth to death, including marriage and divorce.

Table 1: Overview of core international human rights declarations and conventions that underpin the norms and standards of CRVS systems

International human rights declaration/convention	Articles related to civil registration	Year of adoption	Year came into force	Number of state parties
<i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i>	6,15	1948	N/A	N/A
<i>Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees</i>	25, 27	1951	1954	145
<i>Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons</i>	25, 27	1954	1960	83
<i>Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness</i>	1, 2, 3, 4	1961	1975	61
<i>Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages</i>	3	1962	1964	55
<i>International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination</i>	5	1965	1969	179
<i>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</i>	24	1966	1976	172
<i>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</i>	15,16	1979	1981	165
<i>Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>	7, 8	1989	1990	196
<i>International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families</i>	29	1990	2003	54
<i>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</i>	18	2006	2008	177

Source: Author's compilation unless otherwise cited.

The importance of civil registration and legal identity are well established and clearly articulated in international norms and human rights standards (see Table 1):

- The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* notes the right of all persons to have equal recognition before the law ([United Nations 1966](#)).
- The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations 1989) confirms the right to birth registration and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ([United Nations 1948](#)) sets out the right to a nationality, alluding to the importance of legal identity in ensuring equality before the law.
- The *Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages*, which entered into force in 1964, established standards for the age of consent, parental consent, and rights-based procedures for the legal registration of marriages ([United Nations 1962](#)).
- Specific international conventions explicitly recognize the fundamental rights of equal access to registration and non-discrimination on the basis of age, sex, race, refugee status, migrant status or disability status.

CRVS AND THE 2030 AGENDA

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its accompanying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly reference civil registration, vital statistics, and legal identity in two instrumental and complementary ways ([United Nations 2015](#)):

- Civil registration and legal identity are recognized as a means of implementation in advancing health, economic, and social opportunities in target 16.9.

- CRVS data are identified as fundamental to the monitoring and review of progress towards the SDGs in target 17.

The 2030 Agenda also affirms the principle of non-discrimination and gender equality, as reflected in target 10.3, which aims to “ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including through eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices,” and to “end all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere.” These principles are critical in ensuring that civil registration laws, administrative processes, public services, and resulting vital statistics are gender-sensitive and customized to meet the needs of women and girls in particular. Further, gender equality and women's empowerment are integral to achieving the SDGs and are explicitly recognized in SDG Goal 5. We cannot make everyone count unless women and girls are also counted. It is impossible to ensure equal opportunities and access to health, education, land, jobs, social services, and technology if specific segments of the population are invisible.



Photo: Scott Wallace / World Bank

A LIFE-COURSE APPROACH: THREE CASE STUDIES

This paper highlights the importance of integrating a gender lens into the assessment, improvement, and scale-up of CRVS systems. We emphasize the need for a life-course approach that ranges from birth to death, but also includes the often-neglected areas of marriage and divorce registration, by showcasing three country case studies.

China—The first case study revisits the recent debate about missing females in China and highlights new insights resulting from integrated gender analysis of ethnographic evidence on the birth registration process and data from three successive population censuses between 1990 and 2010.

Syrian refugees—The second case study focuses on the challenges and intergenerational consequences of barriers to vital event registration for Syrian refugees displaced in neighbouring countries between 2011 and 2017. It describes how under-registration of one type of vital event – for example, a marriage – can result in the under-registration of other vital events later in the life-course, such as a birth for a married couple. Such barriers to registration are likely to have disproportionately larger consequences on women when displaced Syrians return post-war. This is because assets and property are mostly registered in men's names. What's more, many vital events that prove family relationships before and during the conflict were not registered.

Morocco—The third case study documents the sex differential in death registration completeness in Morocco. We note that this phenomenon is concentrated in Morocco's rural areas and is strongly associated with reduced incentives to register female deaths. It is the

result of customary norms around property and patrilineal asset inheritance, the passive nature of civil registration, and non-negligible travel distances required for rural communities to access a civil registration centre.

Ensuring legal identity for all is a crucial layer of protection against societal exclusion. This paper explains how the goal can be achieved through access to birth, marriage, and death registration across the life-course.

LITERATURE ON THE GENDER DIMENSIONS OF CIVIL REGISTRATION

In recent years, emerging research has identified several barriers for women to access civil registration across the life-course, despite strong international human rights norms and consensus on the centrality of legal identity to sustainable development.

■ **National laws vs. tradition.** In their review of challenges faced by women in registering the births of their children, Plan International found that even with adequate national laws, women lacked functional opportunities to register a birth due to lack of implementation of those laws, prejudice, and traditional customs (Plan International 2012). For example, in some rural Kenyan communities, the traditional period of post-birth 'confinement' exceeds the legal period for timely birth registration. In at least 19 countries across Africa, the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and Latin America, women in some communities face substantial stigma and prejudice when giving birth outside of marriage, resulting in social impediments to registering a new birth.

■ **Gendered barriers to registration.** In 2014–2016, Data 2X published a series of working papers highlighting selected gender dimensions of under-registration of vital events. This series revealed that women bear a large part of the burden for registering a birth, yet face access challenges and complex administrative requirements in many parts of the world (Koolwal 2017). In the Asia-Pacific region, there are notable data gaps and limitations when investigating the gender dimensions of birth, marriage, and death registration. However, the limited available data indicated that rural women were at much higher risk of under-registration of vital events than their urban counterparts – specifically citing recent evidence from Pakistan (Knowles 2016). Evidence from Asia-Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa highlighted the need to move beyond aggregate national and urban/rural statistics given that gender disparities are sometimes clustered within specific geographic areas and local communities. These findings indicate a need for targeted subnational studies and programmatic interventions to address gendered barriers to civil registration and legal identity (Knowles 2016; Koolwal 2016).

■ **Birth registration, harmful practices, and adverse health outcomes.** Recent evidence on gender dimensions of the CRVS system in Indonesia is substantial and has shown clear linkages between under-registration of vital events, harmful practices, and adverse health and social outcomes, particularly for women and girls. A landmark study that included a household survey of 320,000 persons, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews across 17 of Indonesia's 34 provinces found overwhelming evidence that child marriage is linked to the lack of a birth certificate in Indonesia. It noted that 90% of girls in child

marriages do not have a birth certificate. Thus, girls whose births are not registered are at greater risk of child marriage. The study also revealed substantial under-registration of divorces which, in turn, has a disproportionate effect on women. Only an estimated 24% of divorced women have a divorce certificate. This prevents them from obtaining a family card, which ensures their recognition as the head of the family and household, and means they cannot access social assistance for their family. These findings from Indonesia illustrate how under-registration of birth, marriage, and divorce events can shape the rights and opportunities for women and girls across the life-course (Sumner and Kusumaningrum 2014).

■ **Making the Invisible Visible.** In 2018, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) convened a major conference titled, "Making the Invisible Visible: CRVS as a basis to meeting the 2030 Gender Agenda." This was the first international meeting to focus solely on the gender dimensions of CRVS systems and the barriers women and girls face when registering vital life events (Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems 2018). The meeting's discussions and report highlighted that, "CRVS systems are deeply rooted in politics, governance, and institutions; and are not just about technical know-how."

Understanding the gender dimensions of CRVS systems and their broader sociopolitical and economic context are fundamental to ensuring that the benefits of CRVS systems are fully accessible to women and girls everywhere.

Case Study #1: Delayed Birth Registration in China



Photo: Steve Harris / World Bank

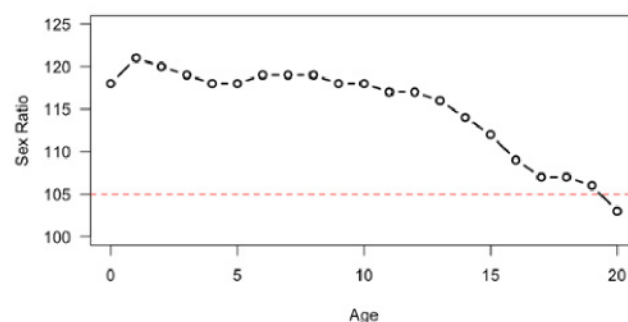
Demographers and economists have written extensively about the phenomenon of missing women in China, India, and neighbouring countries in South and East Asia (Sen 1990; Coale and Banister 1994). Estimates of missing women and girls in China range from 20 to 50 million. These estimates are most commonly presented as evidence of large-scale practices of sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, and substandard healthcare and nutrition for female infants compared with male infants (Sen 1992; Sen 2003; Coale 1991; Klasen and Wink 2002).

Researchers have studied the phenomenon by assessing the sex ratio – or the number of males per 100 females – in a given population. In most stable human populations, a sex ratio at birth of between 102 and 108 is commonly observed – reflecting a slightly higher fetal mortality rate for females than males in humans. In contrast, the Chinese sex ratio at birth in 2010 was estimated to be 118, using that year's population and housing census.

Recent research highlights insights the Chinese civil registration system provides into the question of “missing women” when assessed alongside the available census data and ethnographic research. When available census and birth registration data is re-analyzed to account for mortality, migration, and adoption, the estimated number of missing girls in China is closer to 13.7 million. This analysis applied backward projection to the latest 2010 census data, and identified a notable

decline in the sex ratio between the timing of birth and the teenage years (Shi and Kennedy 2016). Figure 1 shows a notable age effect in the enumerated census data across successive birth cohorts – starting with the 2010 birth cohort, which was aged 0 in 2010, and to the 1990 birth cohort, which was aged 20 at the time of the 2010 census. This assessment revealed that the observed skewed sex ratio is all but eliminated during the later teenage years.

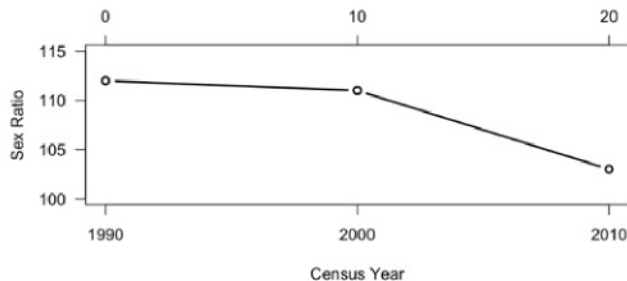
Figure 1: Estimated sex ratio by age based on 2010 Chinese Population and Housing Census data



Source: Author's own data visualization, based on tabulations presented in Shi and Kennedy (2016)

Further analysis used the last three rounds of Chinese census data to track the 1990 birth cohort over time and estimate the sex ratio documented at birth, at age 10 years, and age 20 years for this cohort (Shi and Kennedy 2016). Figure 2 shows that the documented sex ratio for the 1990 birth cohort is skewed at the time of the 1990 and 2000 censuses, when the cohort is aged 0 and 10 respectively. By the time of the 2010 census, when members of the 1990 birth cohort are 20 years of age, the sex ratio of the enumerated population is no longer skewed. This recent evidence suggests that delays in reporting and registering female births are an important factor. Delayed registration needs to be studied in the context of the national population policy and laws, individual and localized behavioral responses to the policy and legal framework, and limitations of the available population data systems

Figure 2: Sex ratio for 1990 Chinese birth cohort, documented by 1990, 2000, and 2010 Population and Housing censuses



Source: Author's own data visualization, based on tabulations presented in Shi and Kennedy (2016)

Qualitative ethnographic fieldwork also helped identify five key reasons for delayed female birth registration. These likely explanations are associated with the behavioural response by Chinese couples to China's 1979 family planning policy and its enforcement by provincial authorities. The distortions in sex ratio data observed across successive Chinese censuses in 1990, 2000, and 2010 should be understood in light of the following household and provincial level factors that affect birth registration (Shi and Kennedy 2016):

- Rural couples waited for a son before registering the birth of a daughter.
- Violating the family planning policy attracted large fines, so couples delayed registration until they can pay.
- Birth registration for a family only becomes critical in rural areas once parents enroll children in junior high in a neighbouring district, which requires a birth certificate as proof of age.
- In order to apply for a marriage certificate, couples must provide a birth certificate. This occurs during the mid to late teens years, as individuals prepare for adulthood and possible marriage. This coincides with the most dramatic increase in the sex ratio at birth when analyzed by age.
- Local officials conceal family planning policy infringements to demonstrate effective administration of government policy to provincial officials and to advance their careers.

There is also a related phenomenon of under-reporting of female first births in Chinese household surveys (Merli and Raftery 2000). There is strong evidence of implausibly long female birth intervals and second births being replaced with first births in full birth history reports in Chinese demographic surveys. Data from successive censuses reporting patterns in household surveys and ethnographic research into how couples and provincial authorities navigate official family planning policy show the importance of considering delayed birth registration alongside the data from successive censuses when investigating skewed sex ratios.

Delayed registration of female births may account for as much as 73% of the observed skewed sex ratio in China, while sex-selective abortion and infant mortality accounts for around 27% (Shi and Kennedy 2016). Complementary research on the Chinese *hukou* household registration system found that children born in violation of China's one-child policy have lower rates of registration in the *hukou* system (Vorthems 2018).

Birth registration and legal identity facilitate access to life-saving child health care including immunizations, primary and secondary education, and social support. Sex selective delays in birth registration pose social protection risks for women and girls and hinder their empowerment in critical early years of childhood and adolescence. Civil registration and survey data are important factors in understanding the effect of delays in birth registration and assessing the consistency of census data.

Case Study #2: Interdependence of Marriage and Birth Registration for Syrian Refugees



Photo: Dominic Chavez / World Bank

Marriage and divorce registration are critical tools for empowering women and protecting their basic human rights. However, marriage registration and its importance for gender equality and women's empowerment have been neglected and are under-studied, as compared to birth and death registration (Courey Pryor 2016).

Along with a birth certificate, a marriage certificate can facilitate transparency around a marriage, provide proof of age, and therefore help to counter child marriage (Hanmer and Elefante 2016). Marriage registration provides a married couple with legal rights, protections, and responsibilities, which are critical tools in ensuring women's empowerment. It also provides authentication of the spousal and parental relationships to local, provincial, national, and international authorities. Further, a marriage certificate provides legal proof of a marriage, which women can use to secure property and inheritance entitlements if their spouse dies, or in the event of a divorce and dissolution of the marriage. Divorce registration is also crucial in facilitating the right for both individuals to remarry after a divorce, and provides a legal basis for the distribution of parental responsibilities after the end of a marriage.

Despite the critical importance of birth and marriage registration, it can be challenging to secure and provide these types of legal identity in times of conflict. This is the plight of more than 5 million Syrian refugees displaced due to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria since 2011. The Norwegian Refugee Council has estimated that 43% of the 700,000 Syrian refugee children under the age of four in neighbouring countries

such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq have been born in exile (Norwegian Refugee Council 2017). Over half of married Syrian couples do not have marriage certificates, and 70% of Syrian refugees do not have national identity documentation. These sobering statistics point to chronic protection risks and barriers to sustainable livelihoods for Syrian refugees throughout the region in the context of protracted conflict and displacement.

The civil registration system in Syria was one of the most comprehensive and robust systems in the Mashreq sub-region prior to 2011. As with other critical infrastructure during times of conflict, it has been heavily damaged and its operations in many parts of the country severely impeded. Further, many Syrians who cross international borders do so without their original civil registration and identity documents, and enter neighbouring countries in which the laws, norms, and procedures around civil registration of vital events are markedly different. Syrian law requires births, marriages, and deaths to be registered in the country where Syrian nationals currently reside. However, Syrian refugees are unable to register vital events during periods of asylum in neighbouring countries for several reasons, such as an unfamiliarity with vital event registration procedures in the host country. They may also face prohibitive costs to navigating the registration process, language, and cultural barriers, and difficulties in adhering to the time limits stipulated by national civil registration laws of the host country (Norwegian Refugee Council 2015). Hence, those who are born, marry, and/or die during times of conflict or during periods of displacement face challenges that may prevent the timely registration of vital events.

THE RISKS OF UNDER-REGISTRATION

The largest impediment for Syrian refugees to registering vital events that occur while they are internationally displaced is the inability to produce the supporting documentation required by national civil registration authorities in the host country (Norwegian Refugee Council 2015). During times of conflict and displacement, the civil registration and legal identity documents of refugees are often lost, destroyed, or confiscated. This creates a series of short- and long-term risks.



In the short to medium term, registering vital events can be particularly difficult for displaced Syrians given the interdependence between the registration process for each event. For example, in Lebanon, birth registration requires legal entry and stay documentation, a valid passport, a marriage certificate of those registering the birth, and sometimes a family booklet (Norwegian Refugee Council 2014). In Jordan, the supporting documents required for birth registration include a hospital birth notification, passport of the person registering the birth, and proof of the parents' marriage. The Jordanian Sharia courts require five supporting documents to obtain a marriage certificate (Norwegian Refugee Council 2015):

1. Proof of identity for the bride and groom from a recognized national authority;
2. Proof of identity for the bride's guardian and the two witnesses from a recognized national authority;
3. Health certificate issued by the Jordanian Ministry of Health verifying that the bride and groom are not carriers of the genetic disease thalassemia;
4. Petition for a marriage contract addressed to the court; and,
5. Approval letter obtained from the Jordanian Ministry of Interior, required when one or both individuals are foreigners.

As a result, if one vital event goes unregistered, this can lead to non-registration of other vital events and a lack of legal identity for newborn children. For example, marriage registration is particularly important, as marriage certificates are required for birth registrations in the host country. Yet, Syrian refugees who married in Syria may not have their marriage certificates on hand. They may be unwilling to seek a copy of the marriage certificate from an embassy or consulate due to fear of repercussions, or they may have difficulty having their marriage certificate recognized by local authorities in the host community. And those who have newly married in a host country may simply not have been able to successfully register their marriage.

The gender dimensions associated with Syrian national law, the Syrian conflict, and birth registration are particularly important. Syrian national law makes provisions for Syrian fathers to pass Syrian nationality to children born in another country. However, there is no such provision for Syrian mothers. This raises additional challenges for Syrian women who are heads

of households, or Syrian women who are displaced across an international border without their husbands. In particular, it raises the risk of statelessness for children born to Syrian women outside of the country during recent years of conflict (Albarazi and van Waas 2015).

In the long-term, the lack of birth registration of Syrian refugees may impede the eventual post-conflict return to Syria of Syrians born in Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan through official border crossings (Norwegian Refugee Council 2013). Further, many births, marriages, and deaths have not been officially registered since 2011, which poses a number of challenges for post-war reconstruction and post-conflict community relations. In particular, it creates an increasing disconnect between an individual's identity documents and property records in Syria, which could make reclaiming of property and land upon return to Syria difficult for refugees (Clutterbuck 2018). Further, Syrian women whose spouse has died during the conflict and whose family property is registered in their deceased spouse's name will face particular challenges without a marriage or death registration certificate. The inability to authenticate recent vital events and produce proof of identity will likely shape the future rights and livelihood prospects of Syrian women.

There have been promising recent initiatives to improve the accessibility of civil registration and legal identity both by local authorities in countries hosting Syrian refugees and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (Clutterbuck et al. 2018). For example, some countries have introduced more flexible arrangements to allow Syrian children born in Syria and who lack a birth certificate to use their UNHCR-issued documentation to obtain a residency permit. Similarly, authorities in Turkey have relaxed the need for a marriage certificate to obtain a birth certificate for Syrian children born in Turkey.

More coordinated and system-wide approaches are needed. The newly-launched West Africa Unique Identification for Regional Integration and Inclusion (WURI) Program is an example of enhanced coordination in fragile and high-mobility regional settings. This initiative seeks to facilitate interoperability of foundational identity systems across borders in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sub-region, an area characterized by seven times as much as migration than other regions of sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank 2018).

Case Study #3: Under-Registration of Female Deaths in Rural Morocco



Photo: Curt Carnemark / World Bank

Death registration is important for multiple reasons, both at the individual and broader societal levels. For individuals, death registration ensures that their identity is securely closed out from the CRVS and legal identity system. This protects against identity theft and fraudulent accessing or misappropriation of health or pension benefits (Schwartz 2009). At the societal level, death registration is the preferred source of data for constructing accurate mortality statistics (United Nations 2014). Death registration helps guide the improvement of public health interventions to empower women and improve their health. It also ensures that any benefits and entitlements accrued to a deceased woman throughout her life-course are not misappropriated.

Analysis undertaken in consultation with the Moroccan Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP) identified a notable sex differential in death registration completeness in Morocco (Silva 2016). Indirect methods of estimating death registration completeness between the 1994 and 2004 censuses revealed that nationally, approximately 65% of male deaths are registered compared with approximately 35% of female deaths. These indirect estimates – commonly referred to as death distribution methods in the demography literature (Moultrie et al. 2013) – estimate death registration completeness by comparing the age distribution of intercensal registered deaths with the age distribution of the population in which the deaths occurred (usually using the two census enumerations that envelop the available death registration data).

Other administrative data, relevant scholarly literature, and consultations with the staff of the HCP's Vital Statistics Unit confirmed the sex differential in death registration implied by indirect estimates and highlighted that this was mostly a rural phenomenon. In the 1994–2004 period, just over half of Morocco's population resided in rural areas. In the early 1990s, based on raw civil registration data, more than twice as many male deaths were registered in rural areas as female deaths (Figure 3) (Al Youbi and Warit 1995). This is despite an approximately similar numbers of births being registered for females as males by the civil registration system at the time. This is consistent with indirect estimates that, on average, rural male deaths were twice as likely to be registered as rural female deaths in this time period (Silva 2016).

The Moroccan *Civil Status Act* states clearly that the registration of births and deaths is mandatory for all citizens. Further, the law clearly states that the, "son, spouse, parents, brother, grandfather, and family" are responsible for registering birth and death events (Law 37.99 of Civil Status 2002). Yet, officials from the HCP Vital Statistics Unit confirmed that under-registration of deaths in rural areas of the country and under-registration of deaths of people lacking national ID cards are substantial – particularly disadvantaging women in rural parts of the country (Al Youbi and Warit 1995).

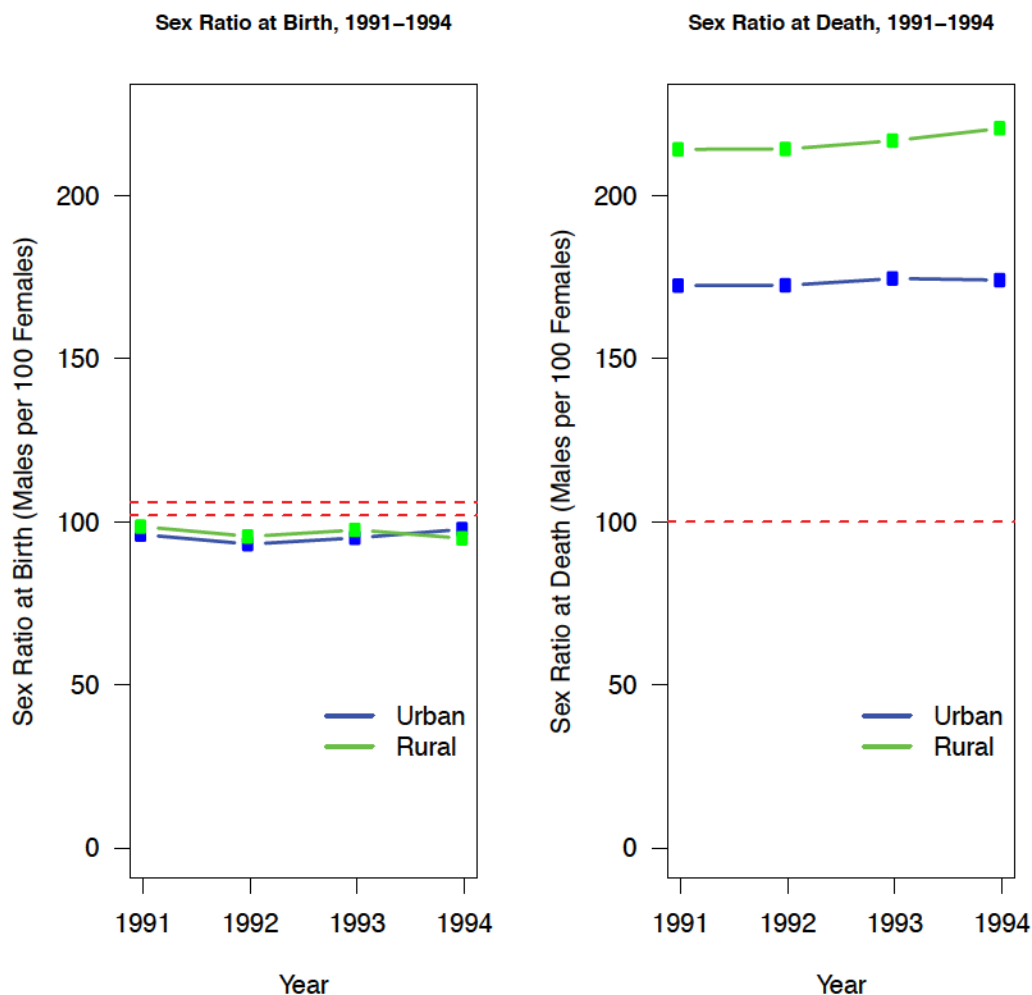
According to academic literature, the Moudawana (or family code) dating back to Moroccan independence treated women as minors via marital tutorship, which imposed male supervision and authority over all aspects of their lives, including participating in the labour force, accessing civil registration and legal identity documentation, and leaving the house (Maddy-Weitzman 2005). Further, traditional customs alongside the 1958 Moudawana essentially ensured that asset and property inheritance had to strictly followed patrilineal lines in Morocco – making the registration of female deaths a de-facto lower priority than male deaths. This is especially the case in rural areas, given the passive nature of death registration, the process of notification, registration and certification of a death being a multi-step nature, and the geographic distance

to the local civil registrar's office. In contrast, the burial of human remains in urban areas is highly regulated and requires that a death certificate be presented to cemetery officials to obtain a burial permit.

The under-registration of female deaths relative to male deaths in Morocco has largely been a rural phenomenon. Despite civil registration law requiring that all vital events, including the deaths of rural women, be registered, there are several barriers and deterrents to

registration. These include legislative barriers that limit woman's autonomy in public and private life, cultural norms around patrilineal inheritance, and accessibility challenges to civil registration services in rural areas. Given that death registration data serve as the preferred source for mortality statistics, the under-registration of female deaths relative to male deaths hinders accurate and timely evidence-based policy and program development in the service of women and girls.

Figure 3: Sex ratios for registered births and deaths by rural/urban region, 1991–1994



Source: Tabulated data presented in Al Youbi & Warit (1995)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Delays in registration and under-registration of births, marriages, and deaths are important, yet under-studied, factors that affect gender equality and women's rights, social status, and economic opportunity throughout their life-course. International human rights norms and the 2030 Agenda recognize the transformative power of civil registration and legal identity. However, a deeper understanding of gender dimensions of civil registration is required to improve access to proof of legal identity for women and girls. There are a number of areas that can disproportionately affect the ability of women and girls to access civil registration systems:

- Inadequate national legal frameworks;
- Insufficient access to civil registration centres;
- Outdated civil registration procedures, cultural norms, and stigma associated with the post-pregnancy period and non-marital childbearing; and,
- Contextualized disincentives to register or delay registration of a vital event.

More research and better data are needed. In particular, sex-disaggregated assessment of vital event registration for births, deaths, and marriages is crucial to understanding where current CRVS systems are weak and inadequate. The current 2020 census round, which began in 2015 and runs through to 2024, provides a key opportunity to undertake comprehensive and systematic assessments of civil registration completeness. This must be coupled with improved understanding of the incentives and disincentives to registering births, and particularly marriages and deaths, across diverse contexts and settings. Integrated analyses that

also draw on mixed methods research and analysis of vital statistics can be particularly informative. These data and evidence need to be channeled into ongoing efforts to improve CRVS systems, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

Civil registration is a fundamental vehicle to increasing the visibility, legal rights, and human agency of women. Under-registration of vital events throughout the life-course prevents women and girls from reaching their full capabilities and prevents societies from fully benefiting from their potential. Reducing barriers and differential access to civil registration is crucial to ensuring that women and girls are not left behind.



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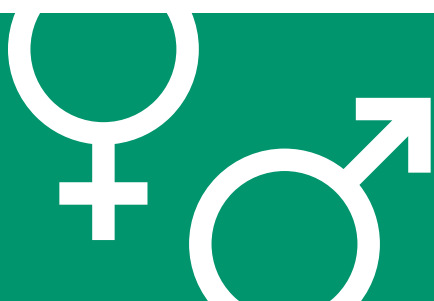
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