

FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT / RAPPORT TECHNIQUE FINAL CONVERGE: INTEGRATING GENDER, LEVERAGING CENSUSES AND BUILDING A CULTURE OF VITAL STATISTICS

United Nations Population Fund;

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IDRC Grant / Subvention du CRDI: 109005-001-Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems: Integrating Gender, Leveraging Population Censuses and Building a Culture of VS Production

Technical Report

ConVERGE: Connecting Vital Events Registration and Gender Equality

March, 2019 - April, 2021

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1. Executive Summary

This technical report summarizes the activities, results and lessons learned from Phase 1 of the ConVERGE (“Connecting Vital Events Registration and Gender Equality”) Initiative. Phase 1 of this initiative, which was conducted from March 2019 until April 2021, was supported by IDRC’s Centre of Excellence on CRVS Systems via a grant (Integrating Gender, Leveraging Population Censuses and Building a Culture of Vital Statistics Production, Centre File: 109005-001).

The work of the ConVERGE Initiative progressed well throughout the duration of the IDRC-CoE grant. Substantial adjustments were required, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, UNFPA had to cancel many in-person workshops and technical meetings that were scheduled by UNFPA headquarters, regional offices and country offices, and replace them with online meetings.

Our ConVERGE Phase 1 priority countries include [* denotes GFF country]:

- West and Central Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso*, Republic of Congo, Senegal*
- Arab States: Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia,

- Latin America: Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala*
- Asia Pacific: Lao PDR

Despite the disruptions and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, UNFPA has advanced major advances and lessons learned from Phase 1 of the ConVERGE Initiative including:

- **The UNFPA Population Data Fellows Program** has proven to be an effective and scalable means to bolster UNFPA country office capacity in CRVS and support national authorities via periodic in-country engagements
 - 12 fellows deployed to-date spanning Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Benin, Panama, Lao PDR, NY HQ
- **Completeness and quality assessment of vital event registration data:**
 - Big analytical insights into sex differentials in death registration completeness in Latin America and Arab States
 - New insights into lower birth registration levels in West/Central Africa for births to adolescent mothers relative to older mothers
 - Preliminary insights into usage of census data on marriage registration and how the need for birth certificates of newborns can drive marriage registration demand
- **Proximate determinants social norms research**
 - This work stream is starting to yield complementary insights (into drivers of under-registration) that can be utilized in concert with our completeness/quality assessment analyses.
 - However, the field work design and implementation has been more time-consuming and labor intensive than initially predicted.
 - Nevertheless, this work is starting to help shift attention away from a singular focus on “supply side” issues of civil registration services (e.g. proximity to registration centers) to social and behavioral factors (e.g. alignment of CR processes with social norms around birth/marriage/death, etc.) . The results from focus group discussions have opened up new country-level discussions with CRVS national authorities on how social norms and behavioral factors that lead to under-registration of vital events might be addressed as part of CRVS system strengthening efforts.
- **Vital Statistics Production, Capacity and Usage:**
 - Huge demand and interest for more guided technical support to NSOs on vital statistics production, dissemination and usage
 - Many NSOs need replenishment of technical skills in this area and stronger engagement with CRVS inter-ministerial coordination structures
 - Valuable leadership role played in several COs in the area of vital statistics - particularly, Benin, Congo, Lao PDR, Morocco, Tunisia (often at the UN Country Team level)
 - Through ConVERGE UNFPA has now produced updated technical guidance notes on [birth registration completeness assessment](#), [marriage registration completeness assessment](#), [death registration completeness assessment](#),

[demographic data quality assessment](#). The team is currently finalizing new technical guidance notes on (1) statistical adjustment for incomplete/deficient civil registration data, (2) vital statistics production in line with UN international standards and in support of gender equality, (3) legal ID coverage assessment through census data.

- Shift from workshop-based capacity development to e-learning portal has required a substantial investment in time and effort by UNFPA, but is likely to have much broader reach and uptake than episodic face-to-face workshops. UNFPA vital statistics e-learning offering is designed to complement and extend beyond the World Bank's introductory and intermediate online courses.
- Much potential in advancing vital statistics usage is not being utilized in many countries - so important to support the shift to more sustainable, continuous population data systems (CRVS, census, admin-based data systems, etc)
- **Alignment to core areas of UNFPA mandate and strategic plan:**
 - Strong **alignment with UNFPA census work**, especially in advancing completeness/quality assessment of vital event registration data
 - **Birth registration by mother's age has been a neglected** area where there are notable inequalities (in high adolescent fertility countries), which have notable consequences for life-time opportunities of children born to younger mothers
 - Advancement of marriage registration bolsters our life-course approach to CRVS and provides synergy with UNFPA's mandate on **gender equality and women's empowerment** - but marriage is not a biological process, so the social norms field research has proven invaluable to better unpack marriage and its registration in different country contexts.
 - Population Data Fellows program strongly positions UNFPA to provide agile support to national authorities while also grooming the "**next generation**" of **population data scientists and vital statistics analysts**
 - COVID-19 has highlighted the further urgency around addressing **sex-differentials in death registration** completeness --- **equitable health responses** require equal documentation on population health and mortality for women/girls (as for males)
 - Opportunity for linkage between maternal death surveillance systems and CRVS systems can improve routine and continuous data on **preventable maternal healths** -- insights from recent practice in Arab States

2. Background and Motivation

There has been a growing recognition of the importance of gender considerations in initiatives to strengthen CRVS systems. For example, in 2016 the Data 2x project published a series of working papers highlighting selected gender dimensions of under-registration of vital events.

More recently, the International Development Research Center (IDRC) hosted a high-level consultation and technical panels on CRVS and gender. However, there is an emerging need for more mixed-methods research to better understand gender differentials in vital registration completeness, the gender-related consequences of CRVS systems that exclude women, and new opportunities to improve gender inclusiveness in evolving CRVS systems. Further, there is a need to generate new evidence that helps to center gender considerations at the forefront of CRVS systems assessment, systems strengthening and ongoing systems maintenance.

Despite substantial investment in the strengthening of CRVS systems, many countries are still unable to produce regular and routine vital statistics outputs consistent with the UN Principles and Recommendations on Vital Statistics (PRVS), revision 3. Hence there is a need to advance a culture of routine and high-quality vital statistics production by building the capacity of National Statistics Offices in the area of demographic data quality assessment and civil registration completeness assessment, despite many civil registration systems being incomplete and deficient. While the completeness and quality of registration of vital and civil events may vary by country, this information is useful to monitor progress towards universal registration, and to better understand disparities between population subgroups, and use as much as possible these data to inform local decision making and planning in subnational zones with sufficiently good coverage and reporting.

Systematic and transparent assessment of completeness and quality of vital event registration is not widely available. UNSD's cross-country database on completeness of birth, marriage, and death registration relies heavily on self-reported completeness by NSOs. Sometimes these are based on formal direct or indirect assessments, but often it is not clear what the empirical basis for these completeness estimates is. The 2020 round of census provides an opportunity to fill this gap in systematic completeness assessments of vital events, by collecting recent vital events and their registration status. It also provides an opportunity to strengthen the methodology and technical guidance on measuring completeness of births, marriages, and deaths via add-on questions to the population census.

3. Objectives of ConVERGE Initiative, Phase 1

The purpose of this project was five-fold:

1. To advance civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems strengthening initiatives that are explicitly and purposefully gender-sensitive;
2. To promote and stimulate a stronger culture of vital statistics via technical assistance to and capacity-building work with National Statistics Offices;
3. To build on recent work as part of the 2000 and 2010 round of censuses and enhance birth, marriage and death registration completeness assessment opportunities as part of the 2020 round of Population and Housing Censuses;

4. To evaluate and expand innovative approaches to mobile birth registration initiatives in Burkina Faso and Colombia; and
5. To create new opportunities for young data scientists to contribute data driven evidence in support of CRVS system improvement initiatives around the world.

4. Advancement of Gender-sensitive CRVS systems

The ConVERGE Initiative has promoted gender sensitive approaches to civil registration and vital statistics strengthening through a range of global, regional and country-level engagements. These include:

- Global engagement:
 - In close partnership with the IDRC Centre of Excellence on CRVS Systems, UNFPA co-organized the **2020 ConVERGE Global Conference**. This conference is the only major global gathering dedicated to promoting gender sensitive approaches to CRVS strengthening and promoting the use of vital statistics in support of the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda.

The 2020 ConVERGE global conference brought together 200 participants from around the world to discuss how gender sensitive CRVS systems complement other population data systems; strategize on how to increase support for the CRVS gender agenda, explore how social norms and behavioral factors effect CRVS systems, identify knowledge and research gaps in the CRVS+Gender space and mobilize further action in this area.

The 2020 ConVERGE Global Conference formulated 7 key action messages:

1. Support country ownership of CRVS system improvements using human rights based approaches;
2. Disaggregated vital statistics by all relevant disaggregation to reduce inequalities and leave no one behind;
3. Increase attention on the most vulnerable populations;
4. Consider political, cultural and legal environments to improve CRVS systems;
5. Use vital statistics as a tool for advancing gender equality;
6. Collaborate to fill knowledge gaps and inspire change; and
7. Showcase why financing should be mobilized to improve CRVS systems.

The Conference produced a [major conference report](#) and [multimedia knowledge products](#).

- On the sidelines of the **53rd United Nations Commission on Population and Development**, UNFPA and the IDRC Centre of Excellence on CRVS Systems hosted a [high-level side event](#) as means to bring the CRVS and agenda closer with the ongoing working around the Generation Equality Forum (GEF) Action Coalitions to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. The side event, titled “Harnessing Data for Women’s Rights and Empowerment across the Life Course,” brought together high level speakers as well as field advocates and practitioners to showcase efforts and progress towards ensuring inclusiveness of women and girls in civil registration and vital statistics systems.

The side event was opened by Dr. Diene Keita (Deputy Executive Director, UNFPA) and Dr. Jean Lebel (President, IDRC). It featured presentations that showcased efforts through the ConVERGE Initiative (from WESt/Central Africa and rural Colombia), the Global Financing Facility and the GEF Action Coalition on bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Discussant reflections were provided by Tarik Khan (Director General, West and Central Africa, Global Affairs Canada).

This high level side event reviewed recent progress in gender sensitive CRVS strengthening and reconfirmed the commitment by UNFPA, IDRC and their key partners to the gender and CRVS agenda as part of large-scale efforts for gender equality everywhere. The full [video recording of the event](#) has been distributed through the UNFPA Youtube channel and the IDRC Centre of Excellence of CRVS Systems knowledge portal.

- In partnership with the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP), we hosted an Expert Group Meeting on **Innovations in Structured Demographic/Population Data Collection**, New York, USA (4-6 December, 2019). This technical meeting brought together leading social scientists to share recent innovations in data collection through census, CRVS systems, and surveys. A special emphasis of the meeting was hard-to-reach populations and sensitive topics/stigmatized behavior. Within this meeting, we organized two sessions on CRVS innovations that directly build on the 2018 IDRC CRVS Innovations Conference and the ConVERGE priority areas. The meeting also facilitated cross-learning between experts engaged in CRVS, census and surveys on sensitive topics and hard-to-reach populations. The meeting was webcast live and the proceedings have also been archived on video-sharing platforms (See [here](#)).
- Regional engagement: Over the last two years the ConVERGE Initiative has organized and contributed to a number of regional events to ensure that gender and CRVS systems are centrally positioned in accelerating progress towards the 2030 sustainable development goals. These include:

- Arab States: UNFPA Arab States Regional Office carried out a regional consultation on CRVS and Gender in November, 2019. This consultation set the stage for UNFPA, IDRC and ESCWA leadership in developing the 2020-2030 regional strategy on CRVS for Arab States and for implementation of ConVERGE Phase 1 activities in the Arab States region.
- Sub Saharan Africa: The ConVERGE Initiative supported three sessions at the 5th Council of African Ministers responsible for CRVS Meeting (COM5 Meeting) held in Lusaka, Zambia in October, 2019. These included the session highlighting the [need for increased attention on the importance of marriage and divorce registration](#), the [importance of vital statistics derived from civil registration data in monitoring progress towards the 2030 development agenda](#), and [lessons learned from civil registration digitization efforts using iCivil in Burkina Faso](#). The ConVERGE Initiative has also developed two background papers for the upcoming COM6 ministerial conference in October 2021 on vital statistics production, dissemination and usage across Africa and gender dimensions of CRVS systems in Africa.
- **African Population Conference, Entebbe, Uganda (17-19, November):** We sponsored technical session on civil registration and vital statistics across the life course at premier African demography and population studies conference - featuring technical presentations by UNFPA (on the life-course approach to gender-sensitive CRVS Strengthening), Benin (determinants of birth under-registration), Republic of Congo (on marriage registration completeness and quality assessment), Jordan (on sex differentials in death registration).
- Latin America: UNFPA organized a major roundtable session at the Population Association for Latin American (ALAP). **Deliverables:** [Summary report](#) (ENG, final); [Infographics](#) (ESP, ENG, last); [Promotional videos](#) (ESP, ENG, in progress).
- The IX Congress of the Population Association of Latin American (Asociación Latinoamericana de Población-ALAP) was held from 9th to 11th December 2020. It was organized as an entirely virtual congress, with several oral and poster sessions, round tables and conferences, and virtual booths. Courses, network meetings, and workshops were also organized on the previous days. UNFPA facilitated congress's financial support through ConVERGE funds. UNFPA's engagement included the participation of the Regional Director and Advisors on the welcoming and plenary sessions and the collaborative organization with ALAP and IDRC of two ConVERGE Round Tables. The first round table, *Conectando el Registro de Eventos Vitales y la Equidad de Género en América Latina y el Caribe [Connecting Vital Event Registration and Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean]*, chaired by Vanessa Carrera from UNFPA Ecuador, aimed at presenting and discussing the results of the ConVERGE initiative in Latin America and the Caribbean. Mathias Nathan from UNFPA LACRO introduced the project and laid out its primary objectives: to assess sex-differentials in completeness and quality of birth and death registration data at the sub-national level, and to contribute to improving national civil registration

and vital statistics systems in Colombia, Ecuador, and Guatemala. The second round table, *El Registro de Defunciones y la Medición de la Mortalidad en América Latina y el Caribe en tiempos de COVID-19* [Death Registration and Mortality Measurement in Latin America and the Caribbean in times of COVID-19], was chaired by Mathias Nathan from LACRO. This round table aimed to discuss data issues and approaches to examining the mortality in the region. The four papers presented were selected from a call for papers from a research grant by ALAP and UNFPA entitled "Leave no one behind: challenges for the advancement of Agenda 2030 in the framework of COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean". See [Summary report](#) ; [Infographics](#) ; [Promotional videos](#).

- Asia Pacific: preparations for the 2021 regional ministerial-level meeting on civil registration and vital statistics in the Asia Pacific - by preparing the technical session on vital statistics production, dissemination and usage and contributing to the technical session on gender and CRVS and the associated technical background documents.
- Country engagement: UNFPA Country Offices have convened engagements with key line ministries (Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, and National Statistics Offices) in ConVERGE focus countries. These engagements have ensured integration of a gender sensitive approach to CRVS strengthening as part of UNFPA's broader support to the strengthening of country-owned and country-led population data systems. For example, in Lao PDR, through the ConVERGE Initiative UNFPA convened [a review of the Laotian government's CRVS strategic plan](#) with key line ministries and core members of the UN Country Team. This review highlighted opportunities and challenges in strengthening the country's vital statistics culture and priority areas for focus in the next few years.

5. Vital Statistics Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

A major limitation of existing rapid and comprehensive assessments of CRVS systems is their relatively cursory review of vital statistics production, dissemination and usage capacity and practices. In short, existing assessments have focused almost exclusively on the legal framework, administrative procedures and institutional coordination supporting the registration of vital events. To address this knowledge gap, UNFPA commissioned a series of regional assessments focused on vital statistics production, dissemination and usage capacity and practices. Each regional assessment comprised two core components:

1. a snapshot of the vital statistics production capacity over the last 10 years relative to the standards outlined in the UN Principles and Recommendations on Vital Statistics Systems (Revision 3, 2014), and

2. A series of in-depth country case studies documenting vital statistics production, dissemination and usage practices in 3-4 countries per region.

To ensure a standardized approach across regions and country case studies, UNFPA developed a [technical assessment guide](#) that structured the vital statistics assessment country case studies around the following core components:

1. Legal underpinnings and Institutional Context of the CRVS system: a brief overview of the legal and institutional arrangements associated with the CRVS system;
2. Quality Assurance of Civil Registration Data: an overview of standard quality assurance procedures and mechanisms to monitor quality of CRVS data;
3. Vital Statistics Production: an overview of the current status, strengths and limitations of vital statistics production;
4. Content of Vital Statistics: a summary of vital statistics outputs that are routinely produced in-country;
5. Vital Statistics Dissemination practices: an overview of dissemination modes, practices and strategies used for vital statistics;
6. Vital Statistics Usage situation: a review of the expectations and experience of end-users of vital statistics;
7. Gender Equality and Women's/Girl's Empowerment: the potential and actual usage of vital statistics to support gender equality and women's empowerment efforts;
8. CRVS During the COVID-19 pandemic: the evolving civil registration practices and vital statistics efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Draft Vital Statistics Assessment Reports have been prepared for [Eastern Europe and Central Asia](#), [Asia and the Pacific](#), [West and Central Africa](#), [Latin American and the Caribbean](#), and Arab States. These reports are being edited, a global summary report is currently being finalized and dissemination activities scheduled for summer, 2021. The respective regional assessments and global synthesis provide an overview of the state of play and opportunities/challenges for creating a “culture of vital statistics”.

The main findings from these vital statistics assessments are:

- Vital statistics production capacity and dissemination is much stronger in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and Latin America (in terms of regions) and much weaker for marriages/divorces than births/deaths (in terms of thematic areas)
- Vital statistics culture was strongest in countries where vital statistics are either (a) actively used to update annual population estimates, or (b) integrated into a broader gender statistics program in which end-users are consulted and their statistics usage needs are addressed.
- In West/Central Africa and the Asia Pacific, National Statistics Offices do not prioritize vital statistics production (given the known completeness/quality problems with civil registration data); they tend to think that vital statistics should only be produced when the civil registration data are complete and high quality (instead of identifying that vital

statistics production/dissemination/usage is critical to improving the quality of civil registration data and usability of vital statistics).

- Via country case studies in each region, we have mapped out if/how vital statistics are used by national actors to engage key questions on
 - Femicides
 - Under-age marriage
 - Maternal mortality
 - Infant mortality
 - Gender-based sex selection
 - Fertility
 - Spousal differences (in age, education level, etc)
- For example in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, there is a wide range of vital statistics to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment. See table below.

Table 5. Observing gender related issues via vital statistics

	Kyrgyzstan	Kosovo	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan
Femicides	No. It is hard to observe the causes of femicides or suicides in the statistics, as the relatives tend to hide the real causes of death. People do not allow autopsy for religious reasons. There is no sufficient data on the living conditions of women and types of violence	Yes. However, there are some delays and misdeclaration on violent deaths consistence with femicides. This may be due to the lack of a unified reporting system between the Ministry of Interior Affairs and Justice, and KAS.	No. Data on causes of death comes from Ministry of Health and there is no inter-connectivity between MoH and Ministry of Justice. Only few causes of death are published broken down by gender	No. There is no publication on causes of death statistics.
Underage marriage	Yes. It is possible to indirectly study underage marriage using the birth statistics by mother’s age.	Yes. It is possible to indirectly study underage marriage using the birth statistics by mother’s age. The problem is that the subpopulations with higher underage marriage (or early unions) are also the ones that less registers the vital events, such as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian.	No. It would be possible to indirectly study underage marriage using the birth statistics by mother’s age. However, Births are published as the total number/rate in the country and five urban territories.	No, there is no official publication on underage marriage. Birth statistics are published on the Statistical Yearbook in only printed on paper and there is information on birth by mother’s age.
Maternal mortality	Yes. However, the statistics is not always transparent, as medical institutions tend to hide the real statistics to keep more positive records on their work.	Yes.	Yes. However, only cases occurred in the public health system.	No. There is no official publication on causes of death statistics.
Infant mortality	Yes. However, there a big difference with MICS statistics and no data on the living conditions of children.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes. There are published on the Statistical Yearbook in printed version only
Gender preference for babies	Partially. It is hard to get the complete abortion statistics. There are a number of private clinics where women do abortions, and these clinics do not provide statistics, as they guarantee confidentiality to their clients.	Partially. It is hard to get reliable and complete abortion statistics. The only way to partially trace it is through birth statistics.	No. there is no information on born children by gender. Abortions statistics only cases occurred in the public health system.	No. It is no information on born children by gender or abortions.
Children per women	Yes.	Yes.	No. It is only possible using the indirect estimations on surveys.	No. It is only possible using the indirect estimations on surveys.
Differences in educational attainment between spouses	Yes.	Yes.	No. Marriage statistics are	No. even when some marriage statistics are occasionally published; there is no information on school attendance or educational level.
Migration	Yes. However, very little information available (no age, gender disaggregation)	Yes.	Yes. However, only a global number, without disaggregation	Yes. There are published on the Statistical Yearbook in printed version only and without disaggregation

- Analysis of mortality in times of COVID-19 has been another emerging pillar of the ConVERGE in the context of the pandemic:
 - UNFPA compiled and harmonized annual/monthly [data on registered COVID-19 deaths and all-cause deaths for 2015-19 and 2020](#) in LAC, by country and critical variables (admin level, sex, age, ethnicity, cause of death). Specific indicators and estimates on [COVID mortality](#) and [excess deaths](#) were produced, and a visualization tool in a shiny app prototype ([app & documentation, slides](#)) was developed to enhance the usage of this information;

- four **research articles on the impact of COVID-19 on mortality** were selected in a competitive-based call for proposals within the Population Association of Latin America (ALAP) research community. These articles will be published in a forthcoming ALAP-UNFPA book about the impact of COVID-19 on the 2030 Agenda in the region;
- produced a policy brief with a [comprehensive analysis of excess mortality in Ecuador](#) together with UNICEF, UNFPA

6. Vital Statistics Capacity Development

In the area of **vital statistics strengthening**, ConVERGE Phase 1 has provided technical assistance directly to National Statistics Offices. In the case of Morocco, this has resulted in the first official vital statistics report in [Morocco](#) in 19 years. UNFPA has also supported **vital statistics report production** in [Benin](#), Senegal, Burkina Faso, [Republic of Congo](#), Ecuador, Guatemala, Colombia, and Tunisia. Our capacity building assistance has emphasized the technical standards outlined in the United Nations Principles and Recommendations on Vital Statistics Systems. We have also focused on the importance of sex disaggregation of vital statistics analytic outputs and a strong gender lens.

In Arab States and West/Central Africa, this capacity development is **advancing a culture of vital statistics** that complements routine usage of census and household survey data. This technical assistance has emphasized the importance of sex-disaggregated data of vital statistics and also vital statistics usage to support efforts in preventing maternal deaths, monitoring child marriage, supporting adolescent mothers, and advancing gender equality in marital unions.

In Guatemala, through the ConVERGE Initiative, UNFPA has [increased the availability and accessibility of vital statistics in Guatemala](#). This has been achieved by supporting the harmonization and publication of the databases of live births, deaths, and fetal deaths in Guatemala, for the years 2000 to 2008. The series of vital statistics microdata, tabulations, and documentation for 2000-2008 was produced and harmonized with the series 2009-2019 already published by the National Statistics Office in Guatemala (INE), allowing the institution to provide the potential users with accessible and accurate data. Also, a tool for the automated generation of official annual reports on vital statistics was developed for enhancing the opportunity and quality of reporting at INE.

In response to a technical assistance request from the National Statistics Office in Colombia (DANE), UNFPA developed a monitoring tool for improving the completeness, timeliness and quality of vital statistics in Colombia. A [Dashboard PowerBi](#) application was developed and enhanced with a user-friendly version for real-time monitoring and assessment of the vital statistics production in Colombia.

Through our UNFPA Population Data Fellows Program, we have produced a range of technical guidance notes and technical tools to assist National Statistics Offices in the completeness assessment of vital event registration data and the production of vital statistics reports from incomplete/deficient vital registration data. In response to the technical assistance requests from National Statistics Offices in West/Central Africa, Arab States and Latin America, we have produced the following set of UNFPA Technical Guidance Notes:

- [Demographic data quality assessment](#)
- [Birth registration completeness](#)
- [Death registration completeness](#)
- [Statistical adjustment of incomplete data](#)
- [Construction of vital statistics reports](#)

To support National Statistics Offices in their completeness assessment of death registration data and examination of sex differentials in death registration across subnational geographic regions, we have developed an [open-source software tool \(“SubnationalCRVS”\)](#) for National Statistics Offices to estimate and visualize sex differentials in death registration. This software tool is accompanied by technical documentation, tutorial documentation and video tutorials.

The Technical Guidance Notes, associated training materials and SubnationalCRVS software tool documentation are now being collated into an intermediate e-learning course on civil registration and vital statistics. This course, developed in partnership with UNFPA’s Learning Branch, is designed to extend beyond the introductory level courses offered by the World Bank Group and synthesize examples and lessons from ConVERGE Phase 1 technical assistance. This e-learning portal is being developed on the ArticulateRise360 platform to facilitate interactive multimedia functionalities and support self-guided learning via videos, tutorials, online forums, quizzes, and interactive slide decks.

The United Nations Population Fund, Arab States Regional Office (UNFPA ASRO) developed a series of interconnected documents on **reinforcing linkages between CRVS and MPDSR systems in both development and humanitarian settings**. The series was created in response to demand from countries in the region, and strong interest from partners in understanding how to engage with UNFPA’s work in this area in a responsible manner. The three draft documents in the series are guided by existing best practice and evidence, while noting that many key questions are not adequately addressed in the published literature. The series consists of:

- [profiles of the 20 countries](#) and territories included in UNFPA’s Arab region. The profiles provide a high-level overview of the presence and robustness of CRVS and MPDSR systems and any linkages between the two in each country.
- A **Guidance note**, which provides practical guidance for assessing if the basic requirements for effectively linking CRVS and MPDSR systems are in place in a country, including in humanitarian settings.

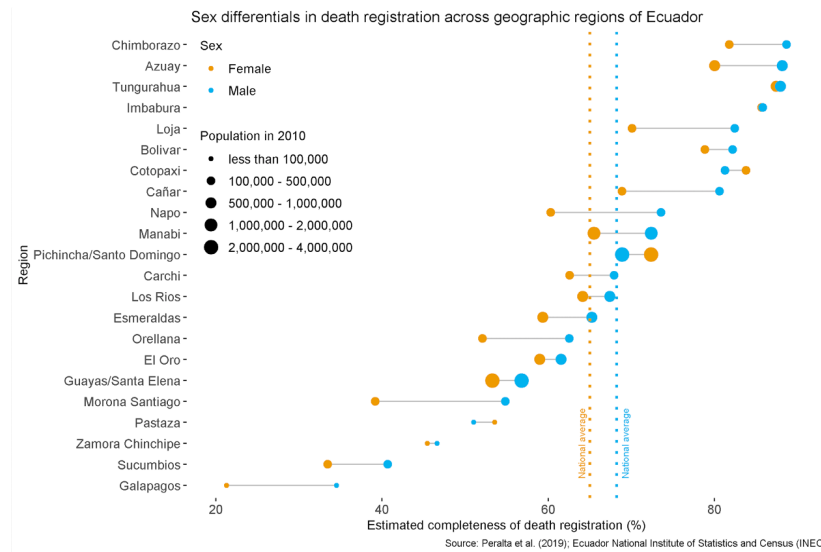
- **Challenges and recommendations for strengthening CRVS and MPDSR systems in humanitarian settings.** Discusses key challenges facing CRVS and MPDSR systems in humanitarian settings, and outlines opportunities, best practice principles and recommendations for systems-strengthening.

7. CRVS Completeness and Quality Assessments

Birth registration: In West and Central Africa, we have identified that birth registration completeness tends to be lower for children born to younger mothers (aged 15-24) compared with older mothers (aged 25-49) in countries with high adolescent birth rates. This finding has not previously been documented and has major implications for adolescent health. Out of 13 West/Central African countries with recent data, we have identified 7 countries (Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Senegal) where there is **a measurable differential in birth registration completeness for adolescent mothers relative to older mothers**. For example, in Ghana that differential is sizeable – an 11%-point difference in birth registration completeness for children born to mothers aged 15-24 versus mothers aged 25-49 years – this places adolescent mothers and their children at considerable disadvantage from birth.

Marriage registration: We assessed marriage registration completeness using recent census data from Armenia, Congo, Kyrgyzstan, and Senegal. By examining data from censuses, we identified the utility of marriage registration completeness assessment using add-on census questions. Further, in Kyrgyzstan, we identified **a clear difference in the completeness of marriage registration for women with children versus those without children**. This is consistent with a social norm in some countries of only obtaining a marriage certificate as a pre-condition for obtaining a birth certificate for a newborn child. The associated [Technical paper](#) is being revised and prepared for publication and dissemination.

Death Registration: We have completed analyses of sex differentials in death registration completeness in Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan. We identified notable sex differentials in all countries except Tunisia (where death registration is above 90% completeness). In Guatemala, Ecuador (see below) and Morocco, there is substantial variation in sex differentials in death registration by subnational region.



[Technical paper](#) is being finalized and prepared for release/dissemination in August, 2021.

Census/Survey Add-On Questions work:

UNFPA successfully convinced DHS/MICS survey programs to add a standard module on marriage registration to the next wave of DHS/MICS surveys - ensuring systematic inclusion of marriage registration assessment in the next wave of major household surveys in low- and middle-income countries. We have been providing technical assistance to the MICS team in Benin on integrating this work into the 2021 Benin MICS which will go into the field this month.

UNFPA has carried out a systematic review of the use of census add-on questions on birth and death registration in Latin America, A [Draft technical brief](#) is being finalized by UNFPA LACRO. [UNFPA technical guidance](#) note issued to all COs on add-on census equations on marriage registration - ensuring a common approach to marriage registration assessment via the 2020 census round by all 130 UNFPA Country Offices.

To improve national capacities in the cause of death registration and ICD-19 coding through technical support to national institutions, UNFPA responded to technical assistance requests from Guatemala, Ecuador and Tunisia. The technical assistance in Latin America resulted in the following accomplishments:

- 2104 health professionals from 208 health units (124 public and 84 private) were trained on death certificate completion in Ecuador. [Report](#) (ESP, final)
- The number of death certificates accurately processed using the automated coding software IRIS increased from 80% to 95% in Ecuador due to developing the new version of the IRIS Ecuador Dictionary. [Report](#) (ESP, final)

- An application for mobile devices for death certificate completion, including the registration of deaths caused by COVID - 19, was developed and is currently being tested in Ecuador. [App contents](#) (ESP, in progress)
- The team of coders at INE Guatemala was trained in the ICD-10, 2018 update [Report](#) (ESP, final)
- The IRIS Guatemala Dictionary for coding causes of death was produced together with a roadmap on implementing IRIS software at INE. [Report](#) (ESP, final)

Within the framework of the support provided to enhance Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Tunisia, UNFPA conducted, in collaboration with the national institutions in Tunisia, a quality assessment through a gender lens of the causes of death data collected in Tunisia between 2013 and 2020.

The main findings in Tunisia from this assessment are:

- Completeness of cause of death registration in Tunisia has improved from 38% in 2013 to 61.2% in 2020, but measurable differences remain across governorates as completeness ranges from 15% in Kébili to 96% in Tozeur. Moreover, variations are observed across age groups as male population aged 15-44 has the lowest levels of completeness of cause of death registration both in 2013 and in 2020.
- Maternal cause of death registration completeness is deficient in Tunisia with large discrepancies between the number of deaths recorded in the CRVS and the ones captured in Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response (MPDSR) system. In fact, only 8% of the causes of maternal deaths registered in Tunisia were captured in the CRVS in 2020.
- Although the quality of causes of death registration in Tunisia has improved in 2020; it is still deficient with 50% of causes registered using garbage codes, 13.5% recorded with unspecified age and 8.8% with unspecified sex.
- The gender differences in completeness levels of cause of death registration do not persistently show higher completeness for a certain gender compared to the other and fluctuate throughout the years. They are not due to underreporting of causes of death related to gender but rather a result of the current problems in Cause of Death Information management.
- There is a persistent gender difference in data quality throughout the 2013-2020 period as garbage codes for women were higher by 7.4% in 2015 and 4.6% in 2020. Subnationally, the most significant gender differences are registered in Zaghouan (19%), Ariana (12%) and Mahdia (10%).

8. Social Norms Research on Determinants of Under-registration

During the course of ConVERGE Phase 1, UNFPA Country Offices (Benin, Burkina Faso, Republic of Congo, Senegal, Morocco and Jordan) have undertaken important **social and behavioral research into the determinants of vital event under-registration**. UNFPA used the IDRC Conceptual framework to decompose the social determinants and behavioral factors leading to vital event under registration into individual level, household/family level and community level

components. This field research has uncovered important insights from local communities including:

- In some rural communities in West/Central Africa, such as Benin, the social perception is that the decision to register a birth should be made (solely) by the father, and then the administrative details implemented by the mother.
- In contrast, in Congo most vital events are overwhelmingly registered by a male, despite the civil registration law making provision for women to register vital events.
- For Muslim and Christian communities in West/Central, naming and religious rituals are very separate from official birth registration and the two processes and traditions lack integration and cohesion;
- In rural Burkina Faso, some men fear formal marriage registration as they perceive it as reducing the permanence of patrilineal inheritance in the event of his death prior to his wife's;
- In rural West/Central Africa, death registration is seen as a formality that unnecessarily brings painful attention and visibility to a sad event for the next of kin;
- In rural Morocco, registration of female deaths were viewed by many as less of a priority than the registration of male deaths due to patrilineal inheritance traditions;
- In Jordan, refugees expressed a need that death registration needed to be avoided if the cause of death might bring shame to the family.

These insights from ConVERGE qualitative field research studies are being integrated into national dialogues on CRVS strengthening strategies by UNFPA through our country offices and national counterparts at civil registries, ministries of health and national statistics offices. In collaboration with our technical partner, Overseer Advisory Group, UNFPA is finalizing a comparative country case study report that presents the results from our social norms research and discusses the implications of the research findings.

9. Exploration and Assessment of Innovations in Civil Registration Digitization

UNFPA country offices in Burkina Faso and Colombia supported the respective national authorities in exploring the integration of digital innovations to improve the inclusiveness of vital event registration in both countries.

In Burkina Faso, UNFPA reviewed recent efforts in digitizing civil registration processes in Burkina Faso, as part of its CRVS modernization plan, including the expansion of digitized civil registration services to rural areas, and the extension of digitization from birth registration to also incorporate marriage and death registration, and the aligning of expanded and modern civil registration services with strategies to address social and factors associated with behavioral factors associated with vital event under-registration. UNFPA also assessed the completeness and quality

of data collected via digitized platforms and the current status and future potential of vital statistics production and dissemination capacity, as per the UN Principles and Recommendations on Vital Statistics Systems (Rev. 3, 2014).

In assessing initial civil registration digitization efforts in Burkina Faso, UNFPA found that

- **The current digitization of civil registration procedures is essentially limited to birth registration only.** There is a need for the Burkinabe Department of Civil Registration Modernization (DGMEC) to revisit the procedures for aligning marriage and death registration with the digitization of these vital event registration processes. Specifically, current procedural design and software implementation requires that a marriage or death can only be registered if the individuals' birth has been registered in the iCivil software platform. This necessarily precludes the registration of marriage and deaths to persons who have had births registered through DGMEC's analog systems or have not had their births registered.
- **Approximately 37% of key attributes of birth registration records captured through the iCivil application are missing.** This represents a substantial missing data problem - especially for key information such as geographic coordinates, the declarant, and the date of birth of the child's mother, etc. This highlights the need for enhanced quality assurance processes by DGMEC for electronic birth registration through the iCivil platform - including both automated data field validation and routine supervisory checks of data at the point of registration.
- **Key fields in the birth registration record that are required for vital statistics production, consistent with the UN Principles and Recommendations on Vital Statistics Systems, are not being systematically captured through the iCivil system.** This reduces the scope of vital statistics that can be routinely compiled by the National Institute of Statistics and Demography (INSD) in Burkina Faso. DGMEC, INSD and the iCivil developers, in collaboration with UNFPA, should review the database design of iCivil with a view to increasing the number of core vital statistics tabulations that can be routinely produced from data captured through DGMEC's digital civil registration system.
- **In communes where digitized birth registration has been introduced in Burkina Faso, between 0-40% of registered births have resulted in birth certificate issuance. The overwhelming majority of registered births are declared by male relatives.** This attrition from birth notification, to birth registration to birth certification suggests notable bottle-necks in achieving universal legal identity from birth in both urban areas and rural areas. Further, the data from iCivil indicate that the vast majority of declarations of births are made by male relatives. So further research is required to better understand the role of and access to birth registration procedures for mothers and female relatives of the newborn. The data from DGMEC's digitized birth registration system need to be studied alongside field research on social norms and behavioral aspects leading to under-registration of vital events by UNFPA, DGMEC, INSD, and its technical partners.
- **Data protection standards and procedures around the capture, management, transmission, storage and accessing of digitized birth registration need enhancement.** At the time this review was carried out, DGMEC's central server in Ouagadougou was not being routinely backed-up to a governmental server on cloud-based server. Security of and access to digital equipment in civil registration centers and maternity wards need to be supported via clear protocols, procedures and ongoing training of staff.
- **Fiscal sustainability of the current digitization initiative for the civil registration system.** Although the government of Burkina Faso has already acquired a iCivil license, it does not yet

have the source code for the application, which remains under the control of the iCivil company. This could represent an obstacle to future development needs of the application to add new features or services. UNFPA was not able to access the details of the initial agreement between the Burkinabe government and iCivil (the software company), which defines the terms of use. However, the ultimate goal for the government should be to receive the source code from iCivil or, have it sent to a third party under well-defined legal conditions.

The specific details of the findings and recommendations to Burkinabe authorities are described in the [UNFPA technical assessment report](#).

During the covid19 pandemic, in Colombia maternal mortality appears to have increased to levels previously recorded back in 2012. This situation is particular worrying for Afro-Colombian and indigenous women, who die at twice and five times the national average in Colombia. Accurate monitoring of maternal mortality is a critical step towards ending preventable maternal deaths, especially in some of the most remote communities in Colombia. Yet, non-facility births and deaths in remote regions like Chocó are not included in the official vital statistics system in Colombia. Asorepidar Chocó - an association of more than 800 midwives in Chocó, has partnered with DANE and UNFPA to address this situation. The partnership leverages the critical role that traditional midwives play in facilitating safe birth for Africa-Colombian and indigenous women, by linking the midwives to the National Statistics Office (DANE) via handheld devices. This linkage of systems and data ensures that births are registered and pregnancy-related deaths are systematically documented and included in the vital statistics system. Hence this initiative is helping to improve the civil status of the AfroColombian and indigenous communities and ensure that their vital events are integrated into the official vital statistics of the country. Ensuring that vital statistics on maternal and newborn events are more complete are a critical tool towards achieving zero preventable maternal deaths - particularly for the people of Chocó. The detailed analytical findings from this work are presented in this [UNFPA Colombia report](#).

10. UNFPA Population Data Fellows Programme

Through the ConVERGE Initiative we launched the UNFPA Population Data Fellows program (see [brochure](#)). The program seeks to develop the next generation of civil registration and vital statistics experts. Early-career data scientists are hosted in UNFPA offices and integrated directly into CRVS technical assistance work and data analysis initiatives. We have placed 12 fellows in Country Offices, Regional Offices and headquarters of UNFPA. Recruitment has been competitive, managed through the United Nations Volunteers agency and UNFPA's Division of Human Resources. Throughout their fellowships, most lasting between 12-18 months, fellows have been mentored by UNFPA technical staff and received professional development support from the Talent Management Branch at UNFPA.

The focus of these UNFPA Population Data Fellowships has been primarily on capacity development (of government partners), field research and data analysis of civil registration data. Fellows in Country Offices have been directly engaged in country support to National Statistics

Offices, civil registration authorities and ministries of health. Their work has been aligned with UNFPA country programs and integrated within the UN Country Team's overall engagements on civil registration, vital statistics and legal identity. Throughout their assignments, fellows have been given career development opportunities including participation in the 2020 ConVERGE Global Conference, participation in technical assistance missions (prior to March, 2020), structured career development coaching support, and on-the-job mentoring.

Fellows in Benin, Burkina Faso, Jordan and Morocco have supported field research efforts on the social determinants and behavioral factors leading to under-registration of vital events. They have also provided direct bespoke technical assistance to capacity building to national counterparts in the areas of completeness and quality assessment of civil registration data and vital statistics production, as has the fellows posted to Tunisia and Lao PDR. The Population Data Fellow placed within our Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office collaborated closely with the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and supported ConVERGE country programs in Guatemala, Colombia and Ecuador. Whereas Population Data Fellows hosted at UNFPA headquarters have focused on technical support to country and regional offices, production of CRVS e-learning content and development of a R package to support National Statistics Offices in implementing indirect demographic estimation methods to quantify the completeness and quality of death registration data, particularly between subnational geographic areas.

The Population Data Fellows program, piloted through ConVERGE Initiative has been a cost effective means to bolster technical assistance support to national authorities while also mentoring a new cohort of population data scientists and CRVS experts. UNFPA has therefore begun to expand the program into other areas of its technical assistance - including the measurement of Female Genital Mutilation, humanitarian data, low fertility and aging, as well as census and geospatial data. UNFPA plans to expand the size and reach of the Population Data Fellows program as part of its efforts to strengthen its ongoing technical assistance work on CRVS.

At the conclusion of their assignments, each population data fellow has shared a reflection essay that reviews their accomplishments, lessons learned and professional aspirations in light of their fellowship experience. The [reflection essays](#) chronicle, in the words of fellows themselves, the nature of their work, contributions to the ConVERGE Initiative and their professional and personal growth while at UNFPA.