



CRVS best-practice and advocacy

Civil registration and identification

This document outlines the components of national identification systems, and discusses the importance of civil registration as the basis of any identification system.

Civil registration should be the basis of any national identification system, and must be strengthened before identification systems are put in place.

Civil registration is the recording and description of vital events in a population, such as births, deaths, and marriages. It is continuous and compulsory, as defined by decree, law, or regulation.

Civil registration systems are **foundational systems**. They create legal documentation that can be used by people to prove their identity, civil status and family relationships. Civil registration agencies can issue legal identity documents that contain certified information about vital events. Birth certificates are an example of such an identity document.

A national identification system is the system or combination of systems, rules and procedures that govern the

relationship between individuals and organisations regarding the entitlement, use and protection of personal information.

Identification systems should be based on information from the civil register, and usually include a unique personal number and/or biometric data.

Both civil registers and identification registers need to be regulated and protected by law.

In response to incomplete civil registration, some low- and middle-income countries have implemented electronic identity (eID) management systems. However, these **functional systems** are often limited to specific populations. They cannot provide input to vital statistics systems.

Civil registration cannot be replaced by identification systems.

Box 1:

A **foundational system** or registry provides identification that can be used for many purposes, such as the birth certificate provided through civil registration. This is in contrast to a **functional system**, which is setup to fulfil a particular purpose for a specific group of people (such as an electoral roll).

Components of an identification system

Effective national identification systems need a reliable universal civil register. The system must be capable of issuing trustworthy and accepted forms of identity (such as a national identification card), which gives access to services and benefits.

Interoperability, or the ability for different systems to 'talk' and 'understand' each other, is a critical component of any identification system. Without this, systems can become incomplete or duplicative. As a result, individuals may have several 'identities': one for each different system.

Civil register

A country's civil register contains information on vital events and is continuously updated. This allows for the recording of 'entry into' (births) and 'exit from' (deaths) population registers. A civil register provides the basis for individual identification from birth to death, through its issuance of legal identity documents.

The birth certificate is considered the foundational document for all other identity systems and as such, serves multiple purposes. The death certificate permits the removal of individuals from the population and other registers, such as electoral rolls, pensions and social security mechanisms.



Population register

Population registers are government data collection systems in which the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of all or part of the population are continuously recorded.

Compared with the civil register, the population register contains more data, such as address or citizenship status. The population register's main function is to maintain reliable data for functional registers and government services such as education, taxation, budgeting, voting, social insurance and welfare, and personal identification. Countries that have population registers also issue a unique personal number from birth for all citizens and residents.

National identification register

A national identification register should build on the biographic data from the civil register by adding an attribute to an individual's record in the form of a unique number, a photo, biometrics, or signature, with the objective of making this person unique. The information is stored in a database which serves as the basis for the issuance of a national ID card.

Identification credential

An identification credential is the information (electronic, token, or paper) that uniquely identifies its holder. This may be through qualifications or attributes that define the individual's identity. Cards can range from simple paper-based cards with a photo and signature, to sophisticated electronic national ID cards, with machine-readable computer chips.

A unique identification credential that is secure, recognised and accepted for access to services and benefits has the potential to save resources for the individual, government and the agencies that need to make sure the right person gets the right benefit or service.

Who are you?

Verifying identity is at the core of our everyday lives: each time someone interacts with private or public institutions, they need to have their identity verified.

Identity documents, or credentials, are those issued by an authorised official, or government agency, and contain information about the person that has been authenticated.

Civil registration establishes the identity of the person; civil identification adds attributes like a unique personal number, biometrics, a photo, or signature. This makes the individual's identity and identity credential trusted and trustworthy. Information on an identity credential includes name, place and date of birth, sex, current address, nationality, and other information needed to determine the individuals' access to services, rights and civic responsibilities.

Optimal identification systems are designed by linking civil registration with additional attributes such as a unique number or address to enable the verification of the identity of individuals.

Further reading:

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Joshi K and Yoon S (2015). Information Note D: CRVS and Identity Management. Manila, Philippines: Asian Development Bank (ADB) for 'Get everyone in the picture'.

Harbitz M and Kentala K (2015). Dictionary for Civil Registration and Identification. Washington DC: Government of Canada and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

The program partners on this initiative include: The University of Melbourne, Australia; CDC Foundation, USA; Vital Strategies, USA; Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, USA; World Health Organization, Switzerland.

Civil Registration and Vital Statistics partners:



For more information contact:

CRVS-info@unimelb.edu.au
crvsgateway.info

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