

# Abstract: The way forward

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## Summary

Good public-health decision making is dependent on reliable and timely statistics on births and deaths (including the medical causes of death). All high-income countries, without exception, have national civil registration systems that record these events and generate regular, frequent, and timely vital statistics. By contrast, these statistics are not available in many low-income and lower-middle-income countries, even though it is in such settings that premature mortality is most severe and the need for robust evidence to back decision making most critical. Civil registration also has a range of benefits for individuals in terms of legal status, and the protection of economic, social, and human rights. However, over the past 30 years, the global health and development community has failed to provide the needed technical and financial support to countries to develop civil registration systems. There is no single blueprint for establishing and maintaining such systems and ensuring the availability of sound vital statistics. Each country faces a different set of challenges, and strategies must be tailored accordingly. There are steps that can be taken, however, and we propose an approach that couples the application of methods to generate better vital statistics in the short term with capacity-building for comprehensive civil registration systems in the long run.