



Assessing Inequalities in Registration of Births and Deaths

Lao PDR (2023) CRVS Inequality Assessment Brief



A well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system helps ensure that every person has a legal identity, facilitating access to the benefits and protections of the State. Data collected by (CRVS) systems are critical for monitoring the health and well-being of the population, implementing policies and monitoring the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. However, disparities exist in the completeness of birth and death registration among marginalized and hard-to-reach populations. The **Regional Action Framework (RAF)** on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific recognized the need to address disparities in civil registration, calling upon countries to assess CRVS-related inequalities. In response, ESCAP initiated a **project** and developed **guidelines** for assessing inequalities in registration, which is critical to address disparities and ensure all persons have access to and full inclusion in the CRVS system.

This brief summarizes findings from the inequality assessment **report** implemented by CRVS stakeholders in Lao PDR, with technical support from ESCAP and UNFPA. Findings from this quantitative assessment can be used to inform future research and policy interventions to bridge gaps in registration between different populations in the country.

Lao PDR's CRVS system

The Family Registration Law (FRL) was enacted by the National Assembly in 1992 when the CRVS system was established. The FRL was revised in

2009 to enforce the registration of vital events and was amended again in 2018. In 2019/2020 Lao PDR launched a project (2020-2025) to strengthen and digitize the existing CRVS system, supported by the World Bank.

For births or deaths taking place at health facilities, vital event notifications are issued by the Ministry of Health (MOH). The Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) is responsible for family registration and maintaining family books, and citizen identification documents are issued by the Ministry of Public Security (MPS). These systems are currently paper-based but a new eCRVS system is being rolled out.

Methodology

To assess inequalities, the number of registered births and deaths should be compared with the total estimated number of births and deaths.

Only a small sample of civil registration data required to conduct the inequality assessment were obtained, therefore the Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) was used to estimate completeness of birth and death registration. A complete list of potential data sources identified can be found in the published **report**.

To assess inequalities in birth registration, data from the two most recent rounds of LSIS (2011-12 and 2017) were used, allowing for observation of trends over time. Birth registration completeness was self-reported by mothers or caretakers in the Questionnaire for Children under Five.

The completeness of birth registration among children under age 5 was calculated using the number of children aged 0-59 months who have had



their birth registered as the numerator, and the total number of children aged 0-59 months in the survey as the denominator. Inequalities in birth registration were examined by sex, age group, area of residence, region, province, and wealth.

To assess inequalities in death registration, the numerator for death registration was the annual registered deaths from 2015 to 2020, provided by MOHA. Due to a lack of suitable data, the denominator was calculated using demographic techniques and model life tables with LSIS 2017 child and infant mortality data. Inequalities in death registration were examined by sex.

Key Findings

Birth registration:

- **Birth registration completeness among children under age 5 has increased over time.** In 2011-12, only 37% of children were registered within one year, compared to 75% in 2017.
- **No distinct differences by sex** in the completeness of birth registration within one year, based on LSIS data in 2011-12 and in 2017.
- The completeness of **birth registration among infants is significantly higher in urban areas compared to rural areas.**
- A large **variation between provinces** in the completeness of birth registration is apparent using both 2011-12 and 2017 data. Registration completeness for children under age 5 is highest in Vientiane Capital and lowest in the mountainous Houaphanh province.
- Birth registration **completeness by age 1 year is highest in the Central region** and lowest in the Southern region for both rounds of LSIS.
- Completeness of birth registration by age 1 year is also observed to increase as the household wealth increases.

Death registration:

- Females are more likely to have their death registered compared to males in each year between 2016 and 2019.

Policy Recommendations

Improving the availability of and access to civil registration data

- Regularly publishing official reports about the number of vital events by key characteristics (e.g. sex, age and area of residence), using data collected at the time of registration:
 - Information about a vital event, such as the date of occurrence and date of registration should be collected during the registration process and included in CRVS data when shared for analysis.
 - A clear timeline should be established for the production and dissemination of vital statistics.
 - Data quality checks should be conducted regularly, with feedback mechanisms to highlight (and correct) incomplete data from registration offices.
- The Citizen Management Inter-ministerial Coordinating Committee should intensify efforts to:
 - Establish a sustainable data-sharing system and culture between government agencies.
 - Integrate Personal Identification Numbers (PIN) so that records can be linked across databases.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the CRVS system

- Continue implementing CRVS inequality assessments until targeted completeness is achieved:
 - Collect additional quantitative and qualitative data to understand why some population groups are not registered.
 - Improve availability and quality of cause of death data by making a medical certification of the cause of death mandatory for death registration and expanding the use of verbal autopsy.
 - To support interoperability, linkages between different agencies and ministries engaged in the CRVS system should be strengthened.
 - Inequality assessments should be conducted on an ongoing basis as part of regular monitoring and evaluation, to inform necessary improvements and strengthen the quality of civil registration data.