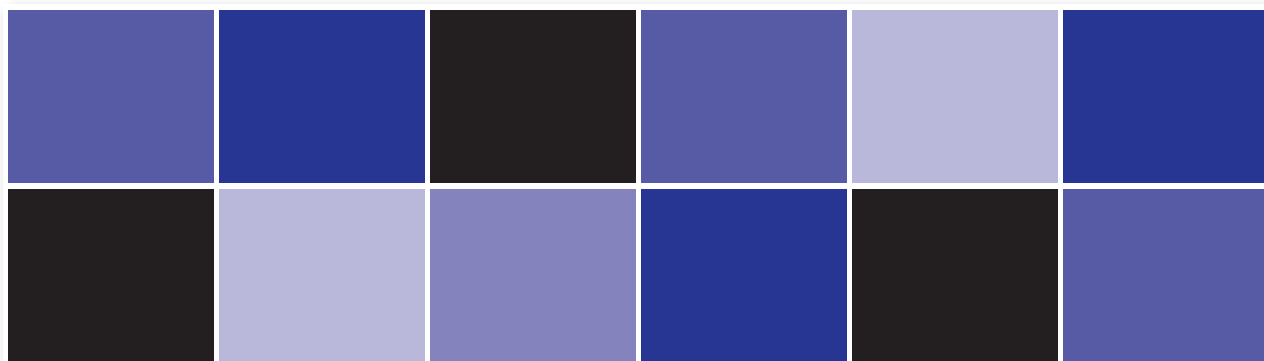


# Rapid assessment of national civil registration and vital statistics systems





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## Acronyms

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency virus
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
ICD-10	International statistical classification of diseases and related health problems, 10th revision
WHO	World Health Organization

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<sup>1</sup>*Improving the quality and use of birth, death and cause-of-death information: guidance for a standards-based review of country practices*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2010.

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## Background and rationale

In most countries, statistics on births, deaths, marriages, divorces and fetal deaths are recorded through the government's civil registration system, which creates a permanent record of each event. The records derived from civil registration systems have two main uses. First, they are personal legal documents, required by citizens as proof of facts (e.g. age, identity) surrounding events. These records are used, for example, to establish family relationships and inheritance rights, provide proof of age and establish rights based on age (e.g. school entry, driving privileges), provide proof of marriage or divorce and the right to marry, and provide evidence of death. Second, the data derived from these records form the basis of a country's vital statistics system.

Vital statistics are used to derive the fundamental demographic and epidemiological measures that are needed in national planning across multiple sectors such as education, labour and health. They are also critical for a wide range of government activities (e.g. population registers and other administrative registers) and commercial enterprises (e.g. life insurance, marketing of products). In the health sector, vital statistics form the core of a country's health information system; they:

- permit understanding of the prevalence and distribution of mortality due to diseases and injury, identification of health inequalities and priorities, monitoring of trends, and evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of health programmes;
- provide (when timely and complete) a reliable way to measure baseline levels and monitor progress towards global goals such as the Millennium Development Goals, and are important in understanding emerging health challenges due to, for example, noncommunicable diseases, injuries and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS);

- enable tracking of national processes such as health sector reform, poverty reduction strategies and development efforts overall; and
- support planning, monitoring and evaluation in decentralized health systems<sup>1</sup>, by providing information on health conditions at a local level.

Civil registration records are the best source of vital statistics. However, such systems are often weak or incomplete in developing countries. In countries where the civil registration system lacks complete coverage, or has major deficiencies due to issues of quality and timeliness, it may be necessary, on an interim basis, to use alternative sources to generate vital statistics. Sources for such interim data include population censuses, household sample surveys, demographic surveillance in sentinel sites and sample registration systems. Although these sources can and do generate measures of vital events, they do not provide individuals with the legal benefits of civil registration systems.

The World Health Organization (WHO), working with the University of Queensland in Australia, developed a comprehensive guide to support countries who wish to improve their civil registration and vital statistics systems. During the guide's development and field-testing phase, countries suggested that, before undertaking the detailed review, it would be useful to first carry out a rapid assessment to quickly evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the current system. The results of this rapid assessment could then be used to make the case for a more detailed assessment.

This rapid assessment tool has therefore been developed to accompany the comprehensive guide, and countries are advised to apply it before undertaking a full review of their systems. It is available as both text and a spreadsheet, for ease of compilation of data. Both tools have been extensively peer reviewed by technical experts, and field tested in three countries.

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<sup>1</sup>*Improving the quality and use of birth, death and cause-of-death information: Guidance for a standards-based review of country practices.* Geneva, World Health Organization, 2010.

## The rapid assessment tool and its application

The rapid assessment tool consists of 25 questions about how the civil registration and vital statistics systems function (see “Rapid assessment questions”, below). The questions are grouped into 11 areas:

- legal framework for civil registration and vital statistics;
- registration infrastructure and resources;
- organization and functioning of the vital statistics system;
- completeness of birth and death registration;
- data storage and transmission;
- *International statistical classification of diseases and related health problems* (ICD)<sup>2</sup>-compliant practices and certification within and outside hospitals;
- practices affecting the quality of cause-of-death data;
- ICD coding practices;
- coder qualification and training, and quality of coding;
- data quality and plausibility checks; and
- data access, dissemination and use.

Each question allows countries to select one of four scenarios (labelled A–D) describing a typical range of hypothetical situations. A numeric value (from 3 to 0) is attached to each scenario, allowing a total score to be obtained. The score has no scientific value and should only be taken as a rough indication of the functionality and quality of the civil registration and vital statistics systems. Some countries might find that the score can be used to help decide whether there is a need to carry out the

important. The rapid assessment is *not a questionnaire* that one person should attempt to find suitable replies to; rather, it is a *group exercise* and should therefore be undertaken by a group of individuals knowledgeable in civil registration and vital statistics. The questions in the tool are designed to incite a discussion among senior staff responsible for various aspects of the civil registration and vital statistics systems. The composition of the team completing the assessment will vary by country, but it should include staff from national agencies involved with the collection or production of vital statistics such as the national statistics office, ministry of health and office of the registrar general. In principle, this same group would lead and oversee the comprehensive assessment completed using the detailed assessment tool.

The rapid assessment can be carried out in different ways. The group can meet and discuss each question before reaching a consensus on the overall country score. Alternatively, individual group members can score each question after the group discussion and the scores can then be averaged to produce a final result. Based on pilot experiences, the time needed for discussion of the issues raised by the questions would be around two hours.

Table 1 shows how the letter denoting a particular scenario for a question relates to the score.

**Table 1** Scoring of scenarios for rapid assessment

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