Towards a Robust Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System in Bihar

Findings and Policy Actions

2025

This document is based on the key findings and policy directions from the recently completed comprehensive assessment, analysis, and redesign of Bihar's Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system. It outlines critical areas for improvement and proposes actionable strategies to enhance the completeness, timeliness, and accuracy of vital event registration across the State. The insights are aimed at policymakers, CRVS functionaries, and technical partners committed to a robust CRVS system for effective governance and public health.



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Key Messages

Move Information, not people

Events occurring at home – particularly in rural areas – were being registered by informants at the block statistical office, often requiring long travel, and, in many cases, multiple trips. To reduce this burden and expand access, the Government of Bihar has decided to decentralize registration functions to the Gram Panchayat[1] level by designating the Panchayat Secretary as the local registrar.

1 A Gram Panchayat is the lowest tier of rural local self-government in India, mandated to administer local governance functions and public services at the village level.

Get every one in the picture

One Step Registration and Certification

Currently, certificates are not issued through downloadable links sent via SMS to beneficiaries' mobile phones. As a result, individuals must visit or revisit registration units to collect their certificates if an email address has not been provided. To improve accessibility and user convenience, the CRS portal[2] should be enhanced with a feature that enables immediate certificate download via SMS, upon completion of registration.

Register all events within 21 days

Although many families report home births and deaths within the required 21 days, delays persist due to limited staffing, inefficient workflows at registration units, and frequent disruptions caused by system errors in the ORG portal and unreliable internet connectivity.

2 The Civil Registration System (CRS) portal is the Government of India's online platform for recording vital events and issuing civil registration certificates, administered by the Office of the Registrar General of India (ORGI).

Strengthening human resource capacity and formally engaging Anganwadi Workers to support families in promptly reporting home events, combined with streamlined workflows, clear SOPs, targeted training, and improved technical support, will accelerate processing. Supported by routine performance monitoring through management dashboards, these measures will help ensure that all births and deaths are registered within the mandated timeframe.

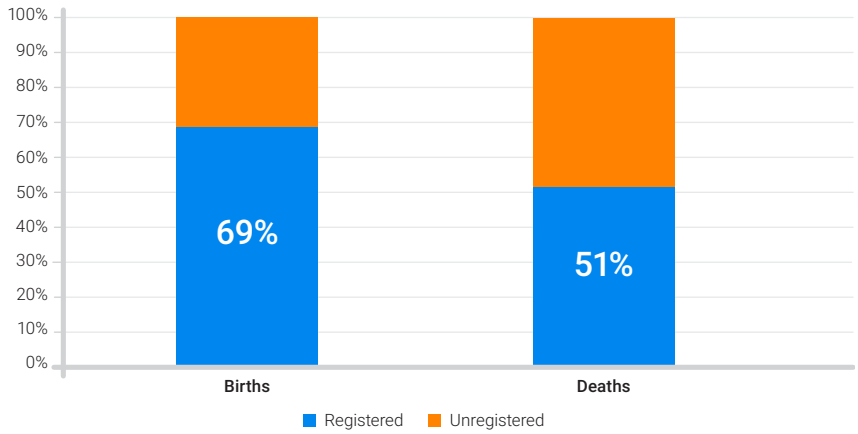
Problem Statement

Since 2018, Bihar has transitioned from a fully manual to an online system for registration of vital events. However, despite this progress in digitization, significant challenges remain in achieving complete, timely and accurate registration of births and deaths in 2022, registration completeness in Bihar was estimated at 69% for births and 51% for deaths (Figure 1). Among these registered events, only 71% of births and 68% of deaths were registered within the legally stipulated 21-day period. A substantial proportion of births occurring in health facilities – particularly private health facilities – remain unregistered due to unclear procedures, limited access to the CRS portal limited and lack of accountability mechanisms. For deaths, delays in registration are especially common in cases of home deaths in urban areas, where families face logistical hurdles and limited incentives to register. Recognizing the need for sustained institutional reform and strengthened operational performance, the Government of Bihar, with technical support from ESCAP and UNICEF, undertook a systematic, time-bound assessment of the CRVS system, to identify the bottlenecks and develop targeted strategies for improvement.

Methods

The Assessment, Analysis and Redesign (AAR) of the CRVS system in Bihar was guided by the CRVS Systems Improvement Framework, a process-centric, people-focused, and results-oriented approach. The Framework incorporates two core tools: Business Process Mapping (BPM) and the CRVS System Analysis and Redesign (CRVS-SAR) tool, to systematically identify operational challenges and systemic bottlenecks hindering complete, accurate and timely registration of vital events. The AAR was conducted through a participatory process, including two key stakeholder workshops: (1) the 'As-Is' workshop, which assessed current registration processes and; (2) the 'As-Desired' workshop, which envisioned improved future-state processes. Workshops engaged CRVS stakeholders including field-level functionaries of the Directorate of Economics and Statistics (DES), representing districts across the state. Field visits were also undertaken to capture real-world insights and conduct consultations with stakeholders in the field, including from registration offices and health facilities. A Core Team was established within DES to guide the assessment, review outcomes, and provide technical and institutional inputs throughout the process.

Figure 1: Percentage of births and deaths registered within 1 year of occurrence in Bihar (2022)



Note: *Expected total number of births and deaths have been estimated using crude birth rates (CBR) and crude death rates (CDR) reported in the India Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report 2022 (released in 2025).*

Key Findings and Recommendations

The key findings and recommendations summarized below, have been informed by the in-depth discussions between CRVS stakeholders during in-person workshops, and further verified by the Core Team.

Key Findings	Recommendation
Client-centric challenges	
Registration units are frequently located far from rural households, requiring long travel and, in many cases, repeated visits—often resulting in income loss and reduced incentive to complete registration.	Decentralize registration units to the Gram Panchayat level by designating Panchayat Secretaries as Registrars. In addition, leverage the services of Anganwadi Workers, ASHAs or Jeevika Didis[3] as notifiers of vital events.
Limited public awareness about the need for civil registration and knowledge of procedures, especially among marginalised communities.	Strengthen communication and outreach strategies to raise public awareness of the importance of civil registration and to improve understanding of registration procedures, including how to use the online portal. Accessibility of this information should be carefully considered, for example, by providing information and forms in multiple languages. Implement targeted outreach campaigns to reach marginalized and hard-to-reach populations, leveraging local leaders and community networks to extend coverage and build trust.
Although families frequently report births and deaths within the 21-day legal timeframe, inconsistent procedures and internal inefficiencies at registration units continue to cause processing delays.	Streamline workflows by institutionalizing clear SOPs, removing unnecessary steps, and clearly defining roles and responsibilities across registration offices. Allocating adequate funding to expand staffing and fill vacant posts would strengthen overall capacity, ease workloads, and help reduce delays. Complement these efforts with continuous, structured training for all personnel, focusing on both technical competencies and client-centred service delivery. Finally, establish a robust monitoring and evaluation system, supported by regular supervision, to ensure consistent practices, uniform application of procedures, and full compliance with established standards.
Inconsistent practices at registration units, such as requests for additional documents, unavailability of standard registration forms (leading to out-of-pocket expenses to obtain them through unofficial channels), unwarranted penalties, and procedures not required by law, create barriers to timely and equitable registration.	

3 **Anganwadi Workers, ASHAs, and Jeevika Didis** are community-based frontline workers in India. *Anganwadi Workers* provide basic childcare, nutrition and preschool services under the ICDS programme. *Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs)* support community health outreach, including maternal and child health and linking households to health services. Jeevika Didis are women mobilized through Bihar's self-help group network who support community development, financial inclusion and social services at the village level.

Key Findings	Recommendation
Service provider challenges	
Absence of strong state-level coordination mechanisms, leading to fragmented efforts across departments. Lack of compliance with decisions taken at state level by the Inter-Departmental Coordination Committee (IDCC) and District Level Coordination Committees (DLCCs)	Foster stronger inter-departmental coordination through regular meetings and shared objectives. Establish a formal field supervision mechanism using standardized templates and a clear feedback loop to support continuous improvement and accountability. Introducing real-time performance dashboards will further enhance ongoing monitoring and timely decision-making.
A high proportion of institutional births are not registered due to unclear protocols, weak accountability, and lack of digital integration.	Strengthen institutional birth reporting by integrating birth registration into hospital discharge, clarifying protocols, and improving accountability.
Human resource shortages, uneven staffing, and skill gaps lead to delays and inefficiencies	Realign staffing based on workload and implement structured capacity-building programmes for all levels of staff.
Lack of an efficient monitoring and evaluation system which produces real-time analytics on service performance, data quality, operational efficiency or client satisfaction. Supervision tends to be ad hoc, with no structured mechanisms for routine feedback, accountability, or continuous improvement.	Develop and implement a real-time monitoring dashboard to support evidence-based management and planning, and complement this with continuous field supervision to ensure a consistent and standardized level of service across the state.
Limited budget and resources allocated to CRVS initiatives, resulting in inadequate resources for infrastructure, technology and human resource development.	Advocate for increased and regular budget allocations to ensure that registration facilities at all levels are client-friendly, providing comfort, privacy, and accessibility. Strengthen secure and well-organized storage systems for physical records, and improve supply chain reliability for transporting registration forms and other essential documents.
Compilation and dissemination of accurate and reliable vital statistics are significantly delayed due to limited technical capacity, restricted access to unit-level registration data, and the absence of regular, systematic data quality checks.	Implement rigorous and routine quality checks for all vital event data, and strengthen technical capacity in data analysis to support the regular production of high-quality vital statistics.
Cause of death certification is frequently incomplete or inaccurately coded in accordance with ICD standards, due to the absence of a standardized medical certification system and limited technical capacity. These constraints hinder the production of reliable mortality data, undermining its utility for public health planning and policy-making.	Conduct a system-wide assessment of medical certification of cause of death (MCCD) processes and, in coordination with the Health Department, develop a roadmap to improve coverage, standardization, and quality-control mechanisms for statewide production of reliable cause-of-death statistics.

Strategic Roadmap to continuous CRVS system strengthening

This strategic timeline outlines key milestones that will guide continuous CRVS system improvement, providing a clear and systematic pathway for policy approval, action planning, and sustained implementation and monitoring to strengthen the CRVS system in the Bihar.

2025: Policy and Approval	The Assessment Analysis and Redesign Report (AAR) and accompanying policy brief will be submitted for approval by the Inter-Departmental Coordination Committee (IDCC). This step is critical for securing high-level commitment and ensuring alignment across government agencies to advance CRVS reforms.
2026: Planning and Strategy Development	Following approval, a costed Strategic and Action Plan will be developed, outlining specific activities, responsibilities, timelines, and resource requirements. At the same time, a robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan will be established to track progress, assess performance, and measure the impact of the reforms.
2026–2030: Implementation and Monitoring	Focus on the full-scale implementation of the Strategic and Action Plan. Continuous monitoring, regular reviews, and adaptive adjustments will be carried out to ensure sustained improvements and the optimal functioning of Bihar's CRVS system.