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Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development – Relevance and Best Practices in Central Asia

Online Meeting
20 May 2021

OSCE/ODIHR Meeting Report

OSCE **ODIHR**

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BACKGROUND TO THE MEETING

The adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the target of Goal 16.9, "Legal identity for all",[1] reignited the interest of international actors in national systems for keeping records of identity data for their nationals and resident non-nationals. Access to identification documents was recognized as a means to unlock development potential and for the inclusion of otherwise invisible populations.

Without identification documents, people can be excluded from mainstream society and from participating in the formal economy and some legal processes. Lack of identification and evidence of legal identity also represents an obstacle to obtaining travel documents and therefore impacts the right to freedom of movement.

As civil registration and identification are not governed by international norms and standards, a group of organizations, led by the World Bank and including ODIHR, committed to support governments by defining principles which can be used to guide the development of inclusive, trusted and accountable identity management systems that contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The "Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development"[2] were firstly developed and published in 2017 but, due to the quick evolution of the identity management sector, were revised in 2020 through a consultative process. These revised Principles were issued in 2021 and reflect key developments, perspectives and lessons learnt.[3]

AIMS OF THE MEETING

The aim of the event was:

- to raise awareness of the importance of civil identification and registration in implementing the OSCE human dimension commitments, especially those relevant to the rule of law, non-discrimination, gender equality and freedom of movement.
- to contribute to improved civil identification and registration practice in Central Asia, and thereby the enhanced implementation of a range of OSCE human dimension

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[1] SDG Indicators, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/?Text=&Goal=16&Target=16.9
[2] Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development: Toward the Digital Age (2017) https://www.osce.org/odihr/principles-onidentification-for-sustainable-development-towards-the-digital-age
[3] Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development: Toward the Digital Age (2021) https://id4d.worldbank.org/principles

commitments, through promotion of the Principles, international good practices, and peer exchange and discussion.

MEETING SUMMARY

The event was held online on 20 May 2021 with three sessions, outlining the Principles as well as covering specific aspects of civil registration and inclusivity.

Session I "The Principles and how they can be operationalized" featured a presentation from the World Bank to provide an overview of the Principles.

Session II "Universal civil registration" featured a presentation by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) on "Moving towards universal registration in the context of the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Decade (2015 – 2024)".

Session III "Inclusive registration and identification processes" included two presentations. The IDRC (International Development Research Centre) Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System gave a presentation on "Promoting gender equity in the design of civil registration and identification systems" and the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) spoke about "Reaching out and registering persons at risk of statelessness".

The 36 participants (18 men and 18 women) included state representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as representatives of OSCE field operations and representatives from UNHCR, the World Bank, IDRC Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System, UNESCAP and UNHCR.

Opening

Ms. **Meaghan Fitzgerald**, Acting Head of the Democratization Department at ODIHR, opened the event outlining the role of the different organizations including ODIHR in finalizing the Principles through an extensive consultation process. She highlighted how the lack of identification documents can lead to people being excluded from mainstream society and can exaggerate existing marginalisation. She welcomed the participants and thanked the OSCE field operations for their assistance in organising the online event and thanked the panellists from the World Bank Group's Identification for Development (ID4D) programme, UN ESCAP and IDRC Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics and UNHCR.

Mr. **Zoran Djokovic**, an independent expert working with ODIHR, moderated the event and ran the first online poll. The question was, 'Before this meeting, had you heard of the Principles of Identification for Development?'. Eighty-two per cent responded that they had previous knowledge and 18 per cent did not.

SESSION I – The Principles and how they can be operationalized

Mr. **Jonathan Marskell**, Senior Program Officer with the **World Bank** ID4D Initiative, spoke on how the Principles can provide a guiding framework for designing ID systems.

He outlined how the World Bank's ID4D programme is a cross-sectoral initiative to help countries realize the transformational potential of digital ID and civil registration, built on three different pillars. The first pillar is "thought leadership and analytics" which includes measuring ID coverage gaps, the quality of IDs as well as research and analysis on why ID systems matter and how to build good ID systems. The second pillar is "country and regional action" encompassing technical assistance and financing for over 40 countries on technical design, use cases, legal frameworks and regional interoperability of ID systems. The third pillar, "global platforms and convening", consists of supporting global public goods and peer-to-peer knowledge through exchanges and workshops.

Mr. Marskell spoke about how identification is the foundation between the public and the private sector's interactions with people (e.g. it can help to access financial services, healthcare and social protection). The "official digital ID" unlocks a so-called 'Stack' of platforms that transform countries into inclusive and dynamic digital economies and societies. He explained that an "official ID" is issued by, on behalf of, or recognized by governments. A "digital ID" enables digital authentication for in-person and remote transactions and services. An "official digital ID", a combination of the two, is typically required for government and some private sector services that need high assurance (e.g. bank account opening).

He then shared global lessons on building ID systems that support digital transformation, highlighting that an inclusive society and digital economy require an ID that is accessible, verifiable, protective of people's rights and personal data, service-oriented and people-centric (i.e. easy to use). Furthermore, he emphasized that any ID must mitigate against serious risks, such as exclusion (that some people cannot get an ID and are left behind as a result), privacy violations (that the data is stolen or used for undue surveillance or profiling) or vendor-lock in (when high costs are involved to change a vendor or proprietary technology). The 10 *Principles of Identification* offer countries a way to meet these requirements and mitigate these risks by defining a blueprint for what a "good ID" looks like. In 2017, in the absence of a normative framework for ID systems, an initial group of over 20 organizations came together to create a shared set of Principles. The purpose was to provide an easy reference and advocacy tool to help countries maximize the development benefits of digital IDs, while mitigating risks. In 2020, the endorsing organizations updated the *Principles* to reflect emerging lessons through a series of public and civil society consultations. The 10 Principles, which were published in January 2021, cover three main aspects, inclusion, design and governance, and are applied in and by global and regional initiatives as and have been incorporated into the national Identity management strategies of several countries.

Mr. Marskell underlined that each country can have unique solutions for implementing the Principles, but there are emerging good practices, which he outlined:

(i) Making design choices based on desired outcomes and user cases, rather than particular technology,
(ii) Ensuring sustained coordination and commitment,
(iii) Taking a holistic approach to civil registration and ID including complementary reforms and linkages,
(iv) Incorporating a "privacy-by-design" approach from beginning rather than as an afterthought, and
(v) Engaging with the public and civil society at an early stage and frequently.

He concluded by explaining that the *Principles* can be put into practice by measuring how existing systems and plans fit with the Principles, adopting and integrating them into national and regional strategies, and raising awareness amongst stakeholders.

Discussions afterwards included points by the moderator regarding the close link between civil registration and civil identification as well as how one of the key take-aways from the Principles is preventing discrimination. In response to a question from a participant from **Uzbekistan** on how to provide citizens with individual registration numbers, Mr. Marskell outlined the main conditions that should be met for this, namely that the registration number should be generalized, should have a check-sum at the end[4] and that there should be a tokenization.[5]

SESSION 2 – Universal civil registration

Ms. Tanja B. Sejersen, Statistician at UN ESCAP, spoke about the initiative "get everyone in the picture" to ensure universal registration in the context of the Asian and Pacific CRSV Decade (2015 – 2024). CRSV are records of vital events that are continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal (i.e. birth, adoption, marriage, divorce, death certificates). She highlighted that well-functioning CRVS systems are essential for planning and implementing the UN SDGs[6] related to social inclusion, health, education, and good governance. Specifically, target 16.9 commits to achieving universal legal identity for all persons, including birth registration. Target 17.19 recognizes civil registration systems as a fundamental infrastructure for measurement. Countries are called upon to achieve universal birth registration and at least 80 per cent completeness for death registration. The data collected through CRVS systems (number of births and number of deaths for the numerator and total births and deaths for the denominators) are essential for measuring these targets.

Ms. Sejersen highlighted that the United Nations Statistics Division is mandated to develop the methodological framework for civil registration and vital statistics and that the framework is extended to cover guidelines for a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics and identity management. UN ESCAP is the United Nations' regional hub promoting cooperation among countries to achieve inclusive and sustainable development, consisting of 53 member states and 9 associate members.

She outlined that in 2014, in recognition of the role civil registration and vital statistics play in supporting development efforts, governments and their relevant civil society partners came together at the 2014 Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific to concentrate efforts on improving CRVS systems. Together, they articulated the shared vision for the region that "all people in Asia and the Pacific benefit from universal and responsive CRVS systems that facilitate the realization of their rights and support good governance, health and development", during the course of the decade 2015-2024. A second conference in November

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[4] A check-sum is one or two digits at the end of a number that are based on an algorithm of the previous numbers, which allow verification that the number is in fact a real registration number.
[5] Tokenization allows for substituting a permanent registration number with a non-sensitive equivalent to protect against the permanent number being stolen.
[6] Please see SDG targets at https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html

2021 will assess the progress that has been made and the additional steps needed. The Regional Action Framework on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific consists of three regional goals for the decade:

(i)   Universal registration of births, deaths and other vital events,

(ii)   All individuals are provided with legal documentation of civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events, as necessary, to claim identity, civil status and ensuing rights, and

(iii)   Accurate, complete and timely vital statistics (including on causes of death) are produced based on registration records and are disseminated.

Ms. Sejersen gave an update on the situation in Asia and the Pacific. Countries have fully taken advantage of the momentum created around CRVS to strengthen their own CRVS systems. The support of development partners was key in implementing these steps, however, she noted that few countries have conducted an inequality assessment. There have been rapid improvements in birth and death registration, but efforts need to be maintained or even accelerated if countries wish to reach their targets by 2024, especially for death registration.

Among specific examples, in her presentation it was noted that the Government of Kazakhstan recently amended the Code on Marriage and Family to ensure that "all children born in the country are registered at birth and issued birth certificates, regardless of the legal status of their parents."

Participants from Uzbekistan expressed a commitment to make efforts to respond to the questionnaire mentioned in the presentation, which was launched by ESCAP to assess the progress countries have made in strengthening their CVRS systems.

The Moderator, Mr. Djokovic, then asked the poll question "*Do you think all people are able to equally access civil registration and identification documents in your country?*". Fifty per cent responded 'yes', 10 per cent 'not sure' and 40 per cent said 'no'. On the follow-up question, "*If not, who do you think are the people mostly disadvantaged*", 40 per cent answered minorities, 30 per cent children, 20 per cent responded persons living in rural areas, 10 per cent responded Other, and 0 per cent responded women.

SESSION 3 – Inclusive registration and identification processes

In the first presentation of the third session, Ms. **Anette Bayer Forsingdal**, Senior Program Specialist for the **IDRC Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System** presented "Promoting gender equity in the design of civil registration and identification systems". She told the story of a Syrian refugee who was unable to register the birth of her child without the father being present, consequently facing impacts due to her gender. She also told the story of the "Where is my Name" Campaign from Afghanistan, where women campaigned for mothers' names to be included on children's birth certificates and identity cards, which has now been signed into law.

Ms. Bayer Forsingdal highlighted that birth registration is the foundation for a legal identity, which is a key SDG target, and is also critical for achieving gender equality and social inclusion. Gendered dimensions of CRVS systems must be addressed when work is done to strengthen

these systems. She provided the example that single or unmarried women are often legally or culturally excluded from registering the births of their children, rendering these children invisible and marginalized. In general, women and children, particularly girls, face a vicious cycle of exclusion due to lack of access to civil registration services. This leads to women and girls being unable to exercise their rights, and at risk of being denied access to essential services without proof of legal identity. Furthermore, without sex-disaggregated data, policymakers lack the evidence they need to design and implement health, financial, and social policies that positively impact women and girls.

She also drew attention to gender-based differences in death registration. Only 23 per cent of all deaths reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2017 had precise and meaningful information on their cause. When women die, their deaths are more likely to go unregistered than when men die. If registered, women's deaths are less likely to have a medically certified cause of death, a huge challenge during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Misclassification of cause of death is particularly prevalent in cases of unnatural death. This has real implications for understanding, calculating and preventing gender-based violence. If public health authorities do not have sex-disaggregated data – or if they are simply missing data on unregistered women – they do not have the evidence they need to support health related decision-making for half of their populations.

Ms. Bayer Forsingdal finished the presentation with bringing attention to the work of the IDRC Centre of Excellence in mobilizing partners for greater visibility and investment in the CRVS and gender field.

The moderator highlighted how the lack of registration can create very specific situations that lead to problems for women. The importance of proper marriage registration procedures was highlighted as part of efforts to prevent early child marriage. He ran the poll question: "In your opinion, in your country, what difficulties might women most likely face as a result of lack of registration of vital events? (birth, death, marriage, divorce)". Multiple answers were possible, and 29 per cent responded "child marriage", 57 per cent responded "proving ownership rights", 43 per cent answered "property inheritance" and 57 per cent answered "domestic violence".

Lastly, Mr. **Marin Roman, UNHCR Statelessness Officer**, gave a presentation on "Reaching out and registering persons at risk of statelessness". He outlined that the main causes of statelessness in Central Asia has been the dissolution of the USSR as well as legislative gaps in nationality and birth registration laws, migration ("cross-border brides") and poor demarcation of the border. Assessing remaining gaps and challenges in the region, he highlighted that only Turkmenistan is party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (since 2011 and 2012, respectively) and that the full extent of statelessness is unknown, which has led to inadequate safeguards against statelessness at birth and during change or loss of nationality. Furthermore, apart from Kazakhstan, there have been no statelessness determination procedures since 2020 and not all children are registered at birth or granted the right to a nationality in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Other areas of concern are that there is no facilitated naturalization of stateless persons, that citizenship deprivation based on national security and terrorist grounds can take place in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and that the definition of stateless persons is not in line with the 1954 Statelessness Convention, which means that many cannot obtain the official stateless status and remain in protracted situations and pass on statelessness to their children.

Mr. Roman proceeded to outline that the Reduction and Prevention of Statelessness is a major part of UNHCR's Regional Strategy for Central Asia. Six out of ten actions that are part of the #IBelong Campaign are implemented in Central Asia, in addition to statelessness identification and reduction projects in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. UNHCR further conducts advocacy for the accession to the Statelessness Conventions and supports Central Asian states in reviewing nationality laws and practices in line with international standards. The mapping of the stateless population through the upcoming round of national population censuses in Central Asia (2020 – 2023) will be another key aspect.

He gave an example of Action 1 (Resolve existing major situations of statelessness) of the #IBelong Campaign. In 2014, actions were launched to identify and register stateless persons. In Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, this was done through registration and legal counselling in targeted locations and in Tajikistan through a registration campaign in pilot regions. In Kyrgyzstan, a countrywide registration campaign took place between 2014 to 2016 with 68 mobile functions teams, which were fully equipped to provide legal consultations and handle applications. The campaign resulted in the registration of 13,707 people who were either de jure stateless persons, persons with undetermined nationality, children at risk of statelessness or de facto stateless persons. Challenges that the campaign faced included poor knowledge of legislation, difficulty in mobilization of target groups, and material/geographical difficulties and within the target groups (e.g. illiteracy).

UNHCR managed to obtain data on statelessness, resolve individual protracted cases and successfully eradicate statelessness in Kyrgyzstan. Thirty per cent acquired citizenship, 50 per cent had their citizenship determined, 16 per cent registered their birth and 2 per cent established the fact of birth. Co-operation of the government, favourable legislation, implementing partners and mobilization are key factors to success. Mr. Roman finished the presentation by highlighting the successful efforts in Central Asian states, which have reached 88,117 people.

Afterwards, Ms. Aizhan Tolongutova from Kyrgyzstan stressed that the new law on civil registration, specifically birth registration, allows children to be registered based only on the medical certificate certifying the birth. So, if parents do not have documents, children can still be registered.

The moderator asked the poll question: "In your opinion, which stakeholders in your country can help identify individuals who are without legal identity or are at risk of statelessness?", of which 100 per cent responded "local community authorities", 67 per cent "local non-governmental organizations" 50 per cent "local health authorities and 17 per cent "local religious leaders".

Mr. Djokovic closed the event by highlighting that although the scope of lack of registration is relatively small in Central Asia, it must not be ignored. Special attention must be placed on combatting discrimination and exclusion, and the significant gender implications that arise from it. The Principles of Identification give useful and practical guidance on how discrimination can be prevented. He thanked the presenters and emphasized that ODIHR stands ready to support participating States in meeting their human dimension commitments in reforming their identity management systems.

ANNEX: AGENDA

Agenda for the Online Meeting
"Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development – Relevance and Best
Practices in Central Asia"

20 May 2021
10:00-12.40 (CET)

AGENDA

10.00 – 10.15	**OPENING REMARKS** - Welcome by ODIHR - Participants' introduction
10.15 – 11.00	**SESSION 1 – The *Principles* and how they can be operationalized** Presentation: **Overview of the *Principles*** World Bank ID4D programme/ Jonathan Marskell, ID4D Senior Program Officer - Optional short interventions on session topic - Moderator: ODIHR expert
11.00 – 11.30	**SESSION 2 – Universal civil registration** Presentation: **Moving towards universal registration in the context of the Asian and Pacific CRVS Decade (2015 – 2024)** UN ESCAP/ Tanja B. Sejersen, Statistician - Optional short interventions on session topic - Moderator: ODIHR expert

11.30 – 11.40	**Break**
11.40 – 12.35	**SESSION 3 – Inclusive registration and identification processes** Presentation: **Promoting gender equity in the design of civil registration and identification systems** IDRC Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System/ Anette Bayer Forsingdal, Senior Program Specialist Presentation: **Reaching out and registering persons at risk of statelessness** UNHCR/ Marin Roman, UNHCR Statelessness Officer - Optional short interventions on session topic - Moderator: ODIHR expert
12.35 – 12.40	**CLOSING REMARKS**