

## Inadequacies of the Civil Registration System

### What is the issue?

In response to the [WHO's estimate of excess Covid deaths](#), several State Health Ministers have asserted that India has a robust, legal and transparent system for data collection and COVID mortality surveillance.

### What is Civil Registration System?

- The history of CRS in India dates back to 1886 when a Central Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act was promulgated to provide for voluntary registration.
- The Registration of Births and Deaths Act (RBD Act) was enacted in 1969 to promote uniformity and comparability in the registration of births and deaths across the country.
- With the enactment of the Act, registration of births, deaths and still births has become mandatory in India.
- The Registrar General, India (RGI) at the Central Government level coordinates and unifies the activities of registration throughout the country.
- The implementation of the statute is vested with the State Governments.

### What are the actual levels of registration?

- The number of births and deaths registered in a year include those of earlier years as some births and deaths are registered only in the following year.
- To register a birth or death reported after a year of its occurrence requires an order of a First Class Magistrate issued after verifying the facts about the birth or death.
- In several States, this function has been given to the Sub-Divisional Magistrates.
- Based on a comparison with the vital rates obtained from the Sample Registration System (SRS), the RGI estimated that the country registered about 92.7% of births and 87.8% of deaths in 2019.
- Corresponding figures for 2020 are not available.

To know more about the death data in CRS, click [here](#)

### What is the impact of COVID-19 on registration?

- COVID-19 could have significantly affected the efficiency of the CRS.
- The registrars could not work during lockdowns in many areas.
- People could not travel to the registrar's office to report the births/deaths that had occurred at home within the prescribed time.
- In case of a delay of more than 30 days in reporting, the procedure of getting an affidavit or a Magistrate's order as required under Section 13 of the RBD Act is difficult.
- In some States, the functionaries handling registration were deployed on COVID-19-related duties and could not register the events.
- The impact of these would not have been uniform across the country as some areas had longer

periods of lockdowns or travel restrictions.

- It is likely that a reasonable number of deaths (among women and children) may not get registered because the family may not require the death certificates for settling inheritance, insurance claims, etc.
- Only about 20% of the deaths have a Medically Certified Cause of Death (MCCD) that conforms to the WHO standard.
- In other cases, the cause of death is provided by the attending medical practitioner in case of deaths in medical facilities and by the person reporting the death in domiciliary deaths.

## What lies ahead?

- The CRS is yet to mature into a robust and resilient system that can ensure that every birth and death is registered even in normal times.
- The State governments must put in more effort which would require coordinated action by several departments of the State that have a stake in the CRS.
- It is also necessary to publish data in a timely manner so that so that it can aid the formulation of policies and programs backed by evidence.

## Reference

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/inadequacies-of-the-civil-registration-system/article65456682.ece>

