

Civil Registration System

The Registration of Births and Death Act (RBD Act) was enacted in 1969 to promote uniformity and comparability in the registration of Births and Deaths across the country and compilation of vital statistics based thereon. 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. However, implementation of the statute is vested with the State Governments. The registration of births and deaths in the country is done by the functionaries appointed by the State Governments.

- Data on births, deaths, and stillbirths are recorded under a continuous, compulsory mechanism called the Civil Registration System.
- It serves as a foundational source of India's population data, informing accurate estimation of mortality, fertility, and sex ratio at birth.
- The CRS has been legally operational since 1970 under the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969, amended in 2023.
- Births and deaths must ordinarily be reported within 21 days. In hospitals, the medical officer in charge or an authorised official reports such events; for home-based events, the household head or a prescribed informant is responsible.

Objectives and Uses of Civil Registration

1. Legal and Protective Uses for Individuals

- Birth registration provides legal proof of the date and place of birth.
- Death registration is required for settlement of inheritance and insurance claims.
- Civil registration records have evidentiary value under the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.

2. Administrative Uses

- Provides a legal record of births and deaths in different localities.
- Provides important information on mortality and causes of death.
- Helps the government in health planning and administration.

3. Statistical Uses

- Provides demographic data for socio-economic planning.
- Helps in the development of health systems and population-control programmes.
- Data on fertility and mortality help in understanding trends in population growth.
- The data are also used for population projections.

Registration Authority in India

The Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 provides the legal framework for the registration of births and deaths in India. The registration system operates through authorities at the central, state and local levels.

1. At the Central Level:

The Office of the Registrar General, India (ORGI) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, is responsible for coordinating and implementing the system of registration of births and deaths throughout the country.

2. At the State Level:

The civil registration system is supervised by different departments in different States and Union Territories. In many States/UTs, the Health Department is responsible for supervising registration activities.

3. Department of Planning, Economics and Statistics:

In some States/UTs, the responsibility for supervising the civil registration system is assigned to the Department of Planning, Economics and Statistics.

4. Local Government Authorities:

In Kerala and Puducherry, registration of births and deaths is largely carried out through local government institutions such as municipalities and other local bodies.

Time Frame for Birth and Death Registration

1. Registration within 21 days:

Births and deaths should ordinarily be registered within 21 days from the date of occurrence. Registration of the event is generally free of charge, although a fee may be charged if a birth or death certificate is required, depending on the rules of the State. The registration period was earlier 7 days and later 14 days, and has now been extended to 21 days.

2. Registration between 21 and 30 days:

If a birth or death is not registered within 21 days but is reported within 30 days, it is treated as delayed registration. In such cases, the event can be registered by paying the prescribed late fee.

3. Registration between 30 days and one year:

If registration is delayed for more than 30 days but less than one year, additional formalities are required. The applicant may have to submit the necessary documents and an affidavit and pay the prescribed penalty or late fee before the registration is completed.

4. Registration after one year:

If a birth or death is reported after one year, registration can be made only on the basis of an order of the competent Magistrate, after verifying the correctness of the information relating to the birth or death. The prescribed fee must also be paid.

5. Addition of the newborn's name:

The name of a newborn child is not compulsory at the time of birth registration. The name can be added later to the birth register within the prescribed period. It may be added without a fee within the specified period and, thereafter, on payment of the prescribed fee, subject to the applicable rules.

6. Registration in case of adoption:

In the case of adoption of a child, the birth register can be updated to include the names of the adoptive parents. A new name given to the adopted child can also be entered in the birth register according to the prescribed procedure.

Vital Events among Indian Citizens Outside the Country

- **Birth of an Indian citizen outside India:**

If a child of Indian citizens is born outside the country, the birth may also be registered in India within 60 days of the parents' return to India, at the place where they intend to settle. If the birth is registered after this period, it will be treated as a delayed registration and will be subject to the provisions of the relevant Act.

- **Death of an Indian citizen outside India:**

There is no provision under the Registration of Births and Deaths system for registering in India the death of an Indian citizen that occurs outside the country.

The Journey to Near-Universal Registration

- Registration coverage has improved dramatically over the decades:
- Until 2000: Only 56% of births and 48% of deaths were registered.
- By 2014: Coverage rose to around 86.6% (births) and 72.5% (deaths).
- In 2024: Birth registration reached 99.1% and death registration reached 99.4%.
- Death registration, which historically lagged behind birth registration, has now caught up rapidly.
- In 2024, 18 states and Union Territories achieved 100% birth registration, while 21 states and UTs achieved 100% death registration.

- Coverage has historically varied by rural-urban location and across states, though states like Kerala, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Goa achieved universal birth registration as early as the 2000s.

Significance of Near-Universal Registration

- A complete CRS is one of the most important sources of vital statistics, crucial for:
- Administrative use and assessing the impact of health and social policies
- Understanding trends in fertility, mortality, and population change
- Real-time demographic information, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic, when timely death reporting helped identify high-risk areas
- Tracking seasonal mortality driven by high temperatures and pollution
- Decentralised governance, since district and sub-district level data are far more useful for local programme design than national or state estimates
- Legal identity proof for individuals
- India has traditionally relied on the Census (conducted once every 10 years), the Sample Registration System (SRS), and household surveys for demographic estimates, since these do not provide reliable annual, district-level data.
- A complete CRS fills this critical gap.